The Transformation of Women's Roles in Fashion in Eighteenth-Century France: Femininity, Fashion, and Frivolity in Fiction

Christine M. Carter

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF WOMEN’S ROLES IN FASHION IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE:
FEMININITY, FASHION, AND FRIVOLITY IN FICTION

by

CHRISTINE CARTER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

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Christine Carter

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The Transformation of Women’s Roles in Fashion in Eighteenth-Century France: Femininity, Fashion, and Frivolity in Fiction

by

Christine Carter

Advisor: Dr. Maxime Blanchard

“The crime of luxury is that it makes us judge a man not according to what he is, but according to what surrounds him.”

There is a significant existing body of scholarship surrounding the establishment of France as the European epicenter for fashion and taste beginning in the seventeenth century and reaching its apogee during the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century was a period of extensive growth for France in terms of textile production, and an increase in particular professions. These were key factors in perpetuating economic growth. Women in particular were affected by these changes. Not only were they now able to participate more actively in the creation of clothing and fashion,

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1 André, Jean-François, *Le Tartare à Paris* (Paris: 1788)
but changes in what women wore and how heavily fashion impacted their lives also exposed them
to increased scrutiny and criticism. While numerous historical studies have examined the
expansion of women’s roles in fashion and the social discussion surrounding this expansion, this
dissertation will take pre-existing scholarship further by exploring how the literature of the period
portrayed these changes.

This dissertation demonstrates that an important body of eighteenth and early nineteenth-
century French literature reflects major shifts in women’s roles within the fashion industries, and
reveals apprehensions about these adjustments. I will also examine various beliefs regarding
women at the time, and what society thought their roles should be. The expansion of professions
available to women in the fashion industry, and a growing visibility of women in the production
and selling of objects of fashion, allowed for the creation of new personalities in various literary
works. These figures, who ranged from lowly shop girls to self-made businesswomen serving the
highest-ranking nobility, enabled authors to comment on and critique the expansion and
proliferation of fashion, women’s new roles in labor, and changing concepts of what it meant to
be female. Many authors who wrote about women’s obsession with fashion also described how its
recent availability to all classes would lead to an accumulation of debt, as well as tension between
the upper and lower classes, as distinctions between them decreased. Conversely, other authors
demonstrated the salutary effects that women’s involvement in labor and society in general could
have by portraying virtuous women in the fashion industries who could help young women to
become productive members of society while remaining modest and chaste. Proponents of
women’s involvement in fashion and the workforce in general commented on the positive effects
of their participation, which included increased stimulation of the economy, and preventing them
from engaging in illicit activities. Chapters two, three, and four of this dissertation will bring to light these positions as they appear in fiction.

While the appearance of figures such as the *marchande de modes* (fashion merchant) in novels and plays dates back to the seventeenth century, fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries suggest profound interest in this profession and its social significance. The various literary works examined in this dissertation generally adhere to a few stereotypes: a virtuous businesswoman who educates her chaste protégées (also demonstrating the pedagogical use of novels and plays to instruct young people); frivolous, spendthrift women who function as a source of comic relief in plays and novels; and the most dangerous figures of all, lower-class women who risk falling into prostitution because of the unstable nature of their professions, as well as women who bankrupt men by spending lavish amounts on clothes and accessories, and who often do so through seduction and deceit. These novels and plays confirm that fashion and public performance of femininity became more widespread in French society during the eighteenth-century, and that fashion, particularly in relation to women’s roles and adherence to proscribed ideas of morality and femininity, inspired both positive and negative commentary in novels, plays, and social critiques.
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Last but not least, I would like to thank my husband, Julien, and my family, especially my parents, as well as my friends, especially those who have also completed, or are in the process of completing, their doctoral degrees, for all of their support, encouragement, and patience in my endeavors.
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Introduction

Review of Existing Literature.

A considerable body of scholarship exists which provides historical context for my dissertation. The works that I refer to as a foundation for my dissertation focus on three major topics: the consumer revolution that took place in France during the eighteenth century, the new professions that emerged as a result of this revolution, and the impact that it had on ideas about women’s involvement in labor and, within this context, what women’s involvement in labor meant in relation to their sexuality and morally acceptable behavior.

A) The consumer revolution in France.

The mid- to- late eighteenth century was a transformative moment in time for France in terms of production, expenditure, and the creation of objects related to fashion. Works relevant to this topic include The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour by Joan DeJean, who analyzes the global image of Paris during the eighteenth century which came about as a result of its consumer revolution. DeJean claims that the changes that occurred in France throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries cemented France’s reputation as a dominating force of culture and style (DeJean 3). As evidenced in DeJean’s work, as well as by the work of other historians such as Daniel Roche,

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author of *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the "Ancien Régime,"* the eighteenth-century solidified France’s reputation as a paragon of elegance and taste. This is due to several factors, notably new accessibility to fashion by the middle classes, as well as new efforts by the French to distribute their fashions abroad. Other essential works to this component include *Revolution in Fashion: European Clothing, 1715-1815,* which focuses on the physical changes in style and variety of clothing, and *Modes Et Usages Au Temps De Marie-Antoinette...Livre-journal De Madame Éloffe,* compiled by Gustave-Armand Henri de Reiset, which details purchases made by aristocratic women, including cloth, differentiations in the cuts of clothing, varieties of color, and the amount spent on these purchases.

**B) Economic and demographic changes due to the consumer revolution.**

Owing to the greater prominence of fashion, eighteenth-century France experienced an unprecedented expansion in the numbers of people employed by the textile and fashion industries, as well as in the range of jobs available to them. Daniel Roche estimates in his work *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime* that the amount of people employed in this kind of work was roughly 20,000 people (278). Not only was the amount of workers employed by the fashion trades expanding, the influence that these workers held was growing as well. While the majority of workers were still considered laborers and wage-earners rather than entrepreneurs, some were able to ascend the ranks and establish themselves as sought-after shop owners, artisans and stylists. References include "Gender and the Guild Order: The Garment Trades in Eighteenth-

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Century Paris” and *The Politics of Women's Work: The Paris Garment Trades* by Judith G. Coffin\(^5\), as well as works by Clare Haru Crowston, Natacha Coquery, William M. Reddy, and Elizabeth Wallace. In her article “Luxury, Morality, and Social Change: Why There Was No Middle-Class Consciousness in Prerevolutionary France,” Sarah Maza discusses the impact of the changes occurring in the hierarchy of classes as a result of what some historians name the “consumer revolution” of eighteenth-century France. She explains that while most historians will acknowledge that eighteenth-century France was the site of much upheaval, social change, and an increase in production and consumption, scholars have continued to debate over whether or not a middle-class really existed in eighteenth-century France, and what sort of influence it had on the landscape of French society. Maza believes that there was a rising middle-class in the eighteenth-century, but it is often not acknowledged by scholars because it does not fit the modern definition of middle-class. As she puts it, it is difficult to even define what middle-class is because it “exists by definition only in relation to other social groups” (Maza 201). Several chapters of this dissertation will touch upon the impact that the emergence of a middle class had on the fashion industry, and the criticisms that writers leveled against the bourgeoisie.

William H. Sewell also discusses the expansion of the fashion industry and the consumer industry/the rise of capitalism in France. He deliberates upon the argument of scholars as to whether or not it is possible to discern a middle class in eighteenth-century France, but, in addition, he pays particular attention to the important role that fashion had in France’s changing economy. What Sewell establishes is that the glamour and finery of the French court served a dual purpose: to boost the reputation of the French court as the most stylish in all of Europe and possibly the

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world, and to stimulate the French economy as working-class citizens strove to mimic the new and ever-changing trends displayed by the highest levels of the French nobility. These claims are important to my scholarship because one result of the increased significance of fashion in the French economy was that clothing became more widely and easily produced, making traditionally more expensive fashions available to middle and even lower class Frenchmen and women. This trickling down of fashion from the upper classes to the lower classes was often criticized by moralists and authors, because it expanded the number of people affected by the corruptive influences of luxury.

C) **Changing public perception of women as a result of a newfound focus on fashion, beauty and femininity.**

Fashion became exceptionally important in France perhaps in large relation to the ascension of Marie-Antoinette as Dauphine and eventually Queen of France. Marie-Antoinette was the first French queen who made it her business to dictate trends in clothing. This change in attitude can be attributed, at least in part, to the influence of Rose Bertin, the *marchande de modes* who was eventually given a title created especially for her of “Ministre de la Mode” (Minister of Fashion). Not only did Bertin succeed in transforming Marie-Antoinette into France’s foremost fashion icon, she also contributed to the image of Marie-Antoinette as a frivolous and extravagant woman who was unconcerned about the people of France; an image which would haunt the queen during the Revolution and which remains even today. Although Marie-Antoinette is a key figure in the study of the significance of fashion in the Ancien Régime, there is already an extensive body of research surrounding her life, and she will therefore serve as a peripheral figure in this dissertation. The works pertinent to this topic demonstrate a changing public perception of
femininity and sexuality, and an increased apprehension about the consequences of women participating in the labor force. This body of scholarship lays the groundwork for many of the works of fiction analyzed in this dissertation, because many of the authors used figures such as Marie-Antoinette and Rose Bertin as inspiration for their material, which usually served to either criticize or approve of the changes that were occurring in fashion.

D) Gender Identity and Clothing

Another important aspect of the study of fashion is its effect on gender identity and traditionally prescribed gender roles. Several works related to this topic will be utilized in this dissertation. One such work is Ellen Rosenman’s article “Fear of Fashion: How the Coquette Got a Bad Name” which appeared in *ANQ* in 2002. While Rosenman focuses on the Victorian era, her observations can be applied to the changes that occurred in eighteenth-century France. Rosenman explains the male fear of feminine fashion, something that is often constructed behind closed doors, which men are not privy to and cannot fully understand. She also claims that men feared women’s involvement in fashion because it threatened traditional relationships. Men discovered that women’s interest in fashion was not only in order to attract and keep a mate, but it also possessed a self-contained quality of enjoyment. The danger of this self-contained enjoyment is that it detracted from the traditional ultimate goal of fashion and beauty: to please men, and, more specifically, husbands. Jean-Jacques Rousseau also advocated for a system in which women would

6 Two notable scholarly studies, *Rose Bertin the Creator of Fashion at the Court of Marie-Antoinette* by Émile Langlade, and *Un Ministre Des Modes Sous Louis XVI, Mademoiselle Bertin: Marchande De Modes De La Reine* by Pierre de Nouvion, discuss the rise of Rose Bertin to “Minister of Fashion” and her relationship with Marie-Antoinette, as well as *Queen of Fashion: What Marie-Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* by Caroline Weber, and *La reine Scélérée: Marie-Antoinette Dans Les Pamphlets* by Chantal Thomas, which both examine the criticisms leveled against Marie-Antoinette and the role her lavish lifestyle may have contributed to the hardships of the French people and the downfall of the Ancien Régime.
be allowed to enjoy fashion, but only insofar as it would serve as a way to please their husbands. Rosenman considers the powerlessness men felt as they noticed their wives making themselves attractive for themselves and for others, and the male fear that this end to reliance on men would lead to complete self-sufficiency by women.

Another work germane to the discourse of gender identity and the root of woman’s interest in fashion is *The Americanization of Narcissism* by Elizabeth Lunbeck. This work focuses on the emergence of self-love and narcissism in twentieth-century America, but her examination of fashion and the significance of clothing are relevant to the importance of clothing to women in eighteenth-century France as well. Lunbeck relies heavily on twentieth-century philosophers such as Freud and Flügel to investigate women’s investment in fashion. This discussion mirrors criticisms levelled against the explosion of women’s fashions in the eighteenth-century- that there was a difference between the production of women’s clothing and materials as a means to stimulate the economy, and the fanciful, self-indulgent wish to obtain fashions as a means of outdoing other women and vying for the title of most fashionable. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in particular uses these ideas in his criticisms against fashion- that it is acceptable, as long as it is used within the proper context, and does not descend into the sinful ranks of what he would consider “luxury.” Lunbeck discusses issues of vanity, narcissism, consumerism, etc., and suggests why women’s interest in clothing was and still is a subject of scrutiny. She also touches upon the divide between women’s and men’s fashions that occurred largely in the eighteenth century when men appeared to accede fashion to women as their domain- by the eighteenth century, men’s fashion, which had traditionally been more developed and ornate, became rather uniform and drab. In the eighteenth century, fashion not only became of intense interest to women, it also further divided gender identity as women found more and more ways to distinguish themselves and men reverted to more
classical, uniform ways of dressing. The emerging consumer society in eighteenth-century France posed a threat not only because of the possibility that it would upend the established social order and prescribed gender roles, but also because it enabled women to actively participate in the labor necessary to produce fashions. Both the women producing the fashions and the ladies wearing them threatened men in different ways, and therefore, men found themselves in some sense expendable as they realized that women did not lust after fashion for the sake of pleasing men, but for the sake of fashion itself and the pleasures it afforded them.

E) Luxury

Closely related to arguments about consumerism and narcissism are debates about luxury. Luxury is a term that is closely tied to eighteenth-century France, and images of “luxury” conjure up contrasting images of French revolutionaries and peasants starving due to the high cost of bread while members of the aristocracy and nobility wear the finest clothing and eat the richest food. Luxury is also linked to morality, and is scrutinized by philosophers such as Rousseau. In this sense, luxury was often associated with corruption and excess, and, according to critics, it took away attention from duty to God and to society. It upended the moral and social order and allowed for too much blurring of gender and societal roles. One of the major criticisms accompanying the consumer revolution was that, with the cheaper production of goods and the re-appropriation of clothing and accessories, it enabled men and women of lower classes to dress and therefore, presume to act, like men and women of the upper classes and aristocracy. Nowadays, we might refer to people who use new money and material goods to “buy” influence and acceptance in

society as “social climbers” or “new money.” The debate on luxury, and whether it exerted a positive or negative influence of eighteenth-century French society, will be further explored in this dissertation.

While the selection of works in this dissertation might appear arbitrary, they were mainly selected because there has not been exhaustive discussion of them. There are two works included which have been the subject of much discussion: Émile, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Manon Lescaut, by Abbé Prévost. These works serve to clarify larger ideas about the eighteenth-century and what was expected of women, particularly in relation to fashion. The other works are lesser known, and have therefore been included to demonstrate that there is a substantial amount of literature less recognizable than the works of great writers such as Rousseau and Prévost, but which is nonetheless able to highlight similar shared ideas.

I. Chapter Breakdown.

This dissertation is broken down into five chapters. Chapter one sets the scene for my analysis by describing how France had attained its reputation as a capital of fashion, elegance, taste, and luxury by the beginning of the eighteenth century, drawing from previously established scholarship to detail the changes in the role of fashion in society, and why this was a controversial topic. On the one hand, the fashion industry was seen as a positive force because it stimulated the economy and served as a means for breaking down barriers between classes. Many critics disliked the lessening of distinctions between classes, and also resented and criticized the middle and lower classes obtaining privileges that had traditionally been reserved for the nobility. Additionally, many believed that there was a risk that increased spending on luxuries would weaken the economy, drive a wedge between women and their families, and possibly also provoke women
into resorting to sinful means of obtaining the desired clothing and accessories if they did not have the honest means to purchase them. This first chapter thus introduces ideas and concerns about how women’s increased involvement in fashion could affect society.

The second chapter focuses on the positive portrayals of women in the literary works under examination. These include women who manage to escape drudgery by establishing their own careers in fashion, as well as women who provide jobs and even shelter for young ladies in need of moral instruction. These works include La Marchande De Modes: Parodie De La Vestale by Étienne de Jouy, which examines a shop owner’s instruction of her young protégées, as well as "Brevet D'apprentissage D'une Fille De Mode » by A. Amantonte, a poem which describes how businesswomen should train young female apprentices. This chapter also testifies to the pedagogical aspect of these works, further exploring the role of literature in society, in particular as evidenced by the play « La Marchande de Modes » by Stéphanie Félicité de Genlis, which appears in a compilation of works of theater whose intention is to instruct young people (Théâtre À L'usage Des Jeunes Personnes).

Chapter three shifts to the works of literature which display negative and critical points of view of women’s relationships to fashion. In these works, arguments are made that women’s focus should remain on their home and family, that professions in fashion are fronts for sin and even prostitution, and that women are willing to debase themselves in order to satisfy their desire to be fashionable. These works bring into discussion the debates and concerns about the association

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between morality and extravagance/luxury that were occurring at the time. The women featured in these works range from figures who waste their husbands’ money on clothing and accessories, as evidenced by works like *Le Voile D’Angleterre Ou, La Revendeuse à La Toilette* by Charles François Jean Baptiste Moreau11, to women who resort to trickery and seduction in order to obtain the most up to date clothing and accessories.

The fourth chapter focuses on a single novel, *Manon Lescaut*, which also serves a pedagogical purpose, although the novel can also be viewed as an indulgence of the declining morals of the time. However, unlike works such as the plays of Mme. de Genlis referenced in Chapter One, Prévost’s novel, although intended to be scandalizing and tantalizing, also demonstrates the dangers of luxury and fashion. In addition, Prévost’s novel makes commentaries about the nature of women in general, and what might occur if women are allowed to hold influence in areas other than the home.

The last chapter uses established historical data about the consumer revolution in France to reveal what is taking place in the selected literary texts. While historical data will be used throughout chapters two, three, and four to support authors’ interpretations of women in fashion, to conclude this dissertation I will examine what historians have previously claimed about women’s growing participation in active society, in the context of the realm of fashion, and establish what the body of literature I have selected confirms or denies about these claims. This is the question that I purport to answer in my dissertation: how did writers of fiction during the eighteenth century deal with women in fashion, and do their interpretations reflect what has been established as historical fact?

Chapter One:
The Establishment of France as an Epicenter of Fashion, Fashion’s Increasing Significance in the French Economy, and the Expansion of the French Economy and Establishment of Capitalism in France

Today, France remains a driving force in the circulation of luxury goods and a pillar of style and taste. Chic women all over the world carry bags labeled “Longchamp” and “Louis Vuitton.” Ladies pore over magazines advertising “French style.” Particularly in the United States, the impression is that the French come by their style and elegance naturally and effortlessly. However, this reputation has been hard-earned over more than three hundred years, and it does not show signs of stopping any time soon.

The perception of France as a country with the reputation of cultured, elegant citizens started developing long before the eighteenth century. Although it is difficult to precisely pinpoint when the concept of “fashion” emerged, “scholars, particularly in art and costume history, have argued and accepted that fashion was not really born before around 1350” (Heller 1). While this dissertation focuses on the transformations in the fashion and luxury trades that occurred in the eighteenth century, it is impossible to talk about the developments of the eighteenth century without reference to the people and practices that established France as a producer and consumer of luxury goods in previous centuries. Of particular significance to the eighteenth century is the differences that occurred in women’s fashion. “Men, it should be noted, were at the forefront of consumption and display through the Middle Ages (and arguably up to the late eighteenth century), having primary control of finances and selection” (Heller 4). It can therefore be argued that in addition to the shift in social classes that occurred during the eighteenth century, which enabled a
wider group of people to dress for pleasure and display rather than merely for function, another significant change in fashion during the eighteenth century is that it not only transitioned to include women, but actually transformed primarily into their domain.

Another important element of the changes occurring in fashion during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is that, from the seventeenth century on, due to economic reasons and perhaps the pure ego of its rulers, France sought to be an epicenter for fashion and taste for the first time. It can be suggested that Louis XIV, King of France for the majority of the seventeenth century, set out to make his court the most envied of all of Europe, and perhaps the entire world. He was able to accomplish this through a clever combination of “advertising,” intelligent economics, and aesthetic touches throughout the country. In The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour, Joan DeJean describes the overhaul that France underwent during the Sun King’s reign:

When his reign began, his nation in no way exercised dominion over the realm of fashion. By its end, his subjects had become accepted all over the Western world as the absolute arbiters in matters of style and taste, and his nation had found an economic mission: it ruled over the sectors of the luxury trade that have dominated that commerce ever since. (2)

While this description could plausibly serve to argue that the seventeenth, and not eighteenth, century was the most transformative period in France’s economic and creative history, I purport that this honor belongs to the eighteenth century, when new developments made it possible for the luxury trades to reach new corners of the world and to affect not just the nobility, but the middle and lower classes. However, it is still necessary to discuss how the beginning of these transformations was made possible by the efforts of Louis XIV and his advisors. It is important to
remember that the establishment of France as the epicenter of culture and taste was not merely an aesthetic endeavor, but an economic and political one as well. By dictating the clothing that would be required at court, Louis XIV was not only able to surround himself with the kind of luxury that he sought to represent the France, but he would also gain funds for the state treasury that would aid in financing the expenses of the court, recently relocated to Versailles. In attempting to transform France into a refined, respected country, Louis XIV also made it possible to control the economic markets that produced luxury goods. This was executed in part by his financial minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert. DeJean describes the accomplishments of Louis XIV and Colbert as follows:

Colbert’s bottom line was plain: first, to make sure that all the goods Louis XIV considered essential to the promotion of his image as the wealthiest, the most sophisticated, and the most powerful monarch in Europe would be produced in France and by French workers; and second, to make sure that as many people as possible would be slavishly following the Sun King’s dictates and buying only the same French-made luxury goods that the King featured at Versailles…The King created new standards for luxury that were accepted as inherently French, and Colbert saw to it that every product that could be linked to that look had been marketed as widely as possible. (8)

Through these actions and decrees, Louis XIV and his financial minister established the modern idea of the importance of domestically-made products. While traditionally products were often imported from other countries where labor was cheaper, or materials were more readily available, by making the most sought-after products in France ones that were actually produced in France, Louis and Colbert not only stimulated the economy, but they also opened up more jobs for French

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citizens. The boom in the luxury trades was significant not only because France became a larger producer of luxury goods, it also demanded the participation of more French citizens in the production of said goods. Once the luxury trade’s dominance had taken hold, new professions emerged everywhere in order to suit the ever-changing and increasing needs of fashionable people.

Although the new developments being made in the fashion and luxury trades helped to establish France’s chic reputation and stimulated the economy, the expenses required to transform Louis XIV into Europe’s most fashionable monarch, and France into its most fashionable country, were significant, and people were understandably worried that the Sun King would eventually lead France into financial ruin. In effect, Louis’ transformation of the court was, in many ways, a smokescreen for the financial decline of the French monarchy and a signal that the court was losing power and prestige as the bourgeoisie expanded and gained influence. In discussing Roberto Rossellini’s film La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV, James Roy Macbean explains how the film hints at the fallibility of Louis XIV’s image of extravagance and luxury: “Particularly the later sequences dealing with Versailles…suggest quite clearly that despite the flamboyance of Louis’s court, his reign is by no means a healthy, fruitful flowering of the French monarchy. Rather, it is simply the last flowering- dazzling in its sickly hues- of a dying plant artificially kept alive in a hothouse. And what a hothouse!” (Macbean 27). Macbean and Rossellini both convey that the appearance of success and prestige that Louis XIV was attempting to display may have led the people of France to falsely believe that the country was in a state of strong economic health and success, when in reality one might argue that the court of Louis XIV was the basis of the financial ruin that would eventually plague France and lead to the Revolution, and not the court of Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI as many have suggested, and as many French citizens were led to believe. Essentially, although Louis XIV’s court may have given France and the world the
impression that France was the model of luxury and refinement, and by that definition, success, Louis XIV was ultimately, albeit slowly, leading the country to ruin.

However, as the adage goes, one must spend money to make money, and in response to critics of Louis XIV’s finances and expenditures, DeJean queries “Was it all worth it? The King might have said that without his extravagant spending, the luxurious experiences for which his country is still celebrated would not have come into existence. The businessman might have added that without it, tourism would not be France’s number one industry today” (16). Certainly without the influence of Louis XIV, France might never have been established as a country of luxury and taste. Perhaps the extraordinary works of great French philosophers, writers, artists, and architects would still have attracted the millions of tourists that frequent France today, but the luxury trade might not still be dominated by French brands and names. This renown is not without a downside however, and as this dissertation will examine, the expenditures of the luxury trade during the eighteenth century could have ruined France. Many critics of the ancien régime and the luxury trades did believe that they would ruin France not only economically, but also morally. Some blamed the flamboyant and frivolous Queen Marie-Antoinette for these eventualities, but even if he was not the direct cause, one could certainly argue that Louis XIV was the person who set up the country for this ruin.

Another problematic aspect of the expansion of the fashion and luxury trades during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the moral, philosophical, and social questions it provoked. Daniel Roche writes in his work The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime “From the seventeenth century, especially after the great movement of religious reflection following the Catholic and Protestant Reformations, clothing was at the center of debates about wealth and poverty, excess and necessity, superfluity and sufficiency, luxury and adequacy”
The luxury and fashion industries had both critics and supporters, and they commented not only on whether the fashion and luxury trades had a positive or negative effect on the economy, but also on what increased investment in fashion and luxury could mean for social constructs, for questions of morality, and for issues of gender and sexuality.

In the modern world, “luxury” usually has a positive connotation. It tends to mean that a product is of high-quality and good taste, and that it will provide a pleasurable experience for its purchaser. However, as noted in Helena Rosenblatt’s encyclopedia article on luxury, it had a very different implication during the eighteenth century: “The eighteenth century inherited a notion of luxury that linked it closely with corruption, in both a republican and a Christian sense. Its basic association with disobedience, and in particular, with forgetting one’s place in the God-given order were established as far back as Genesis, where the abiding connection between luxury and the sin of woman was also confirmed” (440). This explanation is particularly relevant in regards to the relationship between women and luxury, because it targets the negative connotation luxury had in connection with women and desire; in this case not only sexual desire, but the desire for material goods. The eighteenth century is fascinating in particular in relation to women, because they were simultaneously becoming more autonomous and more influential at the same time that moral critics advocated for an increased awareness of women’s importance to the domestic sphere. Such critics cited feminine seduction and manipulation, enhanced by new means of adorning themselves, as factors that would lead to the decline of the French family and society as a whole.

It is also important to examine the effect that the changes in the textile and luxury industries had on social hierarchy and the organization of society. Dress had traditionally been one of the simplest, most visible ways of denoting rank and influence. With the increased availability of luxury materials such as lace and silk in the eighteenth century, and less strict sumptuary laws,
the lines between social classes became less clear and more permeable. Before this time, there were strict laws about who was allowed to wear what, but in the eighteenth-century, due to increased production and easier access, as well as the circulation of second-hand clothing and the possibility of appearing of a higher rank through strategic use of accessories, largely driven by the marchandes de modes, it was now much more difficult to visibly distinguish between members of different social classes. One could argue that the eighteenth century, through the fashion industry, established the notion of the “social climber.” Daniel Roche uses Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s Tableau de Paris to illustrate this phenomenon:

In his Tableau de Paris, Louis-Sébastien Mercier devoted himself to tracing the signs of these shifts and displacements, whose driving forces were imitation and social mobility and whose result was a society less easy to read and a more complex hierarchy of values. Fashion existed in a niche between mimetism and protectionism. We should remember that a whole economy and a whole society were dependent on it — manufacturers and merchants, the development of new patterns and fabrics, the new shapes and arrangements which were both cause and consequence of sartorial competitiveness. (7)

What both Roche and Mercier observe is that the phenomenon begun by Louis XIV in the seventeenth century of imitating the fashions displayed by the highest ranking nobility became a tangible possibility in the eighteenth century, and was compounded by the evolution of the bourgeoisie. William Sewell, quoting Cissie Fairchild,13 argues that “the ‘luxury’ trades catered not only for a wealthy clientele, but increasingly also found ways to make what she calls ‘populuxe’ goods — umbrellas, canes, snuff boxes, furniture, watches, fans, coffee pots and the like — available to a broad consuming public” (115). Not only were the groups who were able to access...

13 “The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France.”
luxury goods changing and increasing, the goods themselves were changing and increasing, and were now not limited to clothing, but expanded to toiletries, furniture, and household items. Joan DeJean also comments on how fashion and style became more available to the lower classes through the use of accessories and color if the expensive fabrics worn by the aristocracy were not available or affordable: “The lower classes might not have been able to own much, but accessories such as ribbons and stockings-and above all, the production of less expensive fabrics with patterns and bright colors, from which they could make clothing- began to transform the appearance of the French population” (40-41). The sheer number of items that one could now use to display his or her taste and social standing is astonishing, and one can pinpoint the eighteenth century, at least in France, as the moment when personal appearance and expression of taste became a form of art.

Facilitating all of these changes were the people involved in the fashion industries, both consumers and producers. In eighteenth-century France, both the numbers and demographics of people involved in consuming fashion changed greatly, while those producing fashion changed mainly in number and in the increased participation of women in these professions. Ladies of the nobility did not participate in the production of fashion; they were, however, crucial in stimulating this production. Fashion became a cutthroat industry, with the highest-ranking ladies of the court vying for the title of most fashionable, and the workers who produced clothing and accessories fighting to be the sought-after people for providing ladies of rank with the most up-to-date fashions and trends. Shopkeepers, merchants, tailors, and other laborers and skilled professionals took advantage of the ever-increasing urgency that high-ranking, and now even middle-class men and women experienced when trying to obtain the latest fashions. Natacha Coquery writes about the ways in which those involved in the production of luxury goods profited from this frenzy as
fashions became more extraordinary and dynamic:\footnote{\textit{The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-century Paris}}: “The uniqueness of Paris as a market rested on the strong influence of the court. Craftsmen and shopkeepers knowingly exploited the rule of distinction borne by their clients and invented novelties and launched fashions capable of enticing them…always on the lookout for novelty, aristocrats were the great suppliers of quality goods” (71). She also remarks on how it became possible for groups other than the nobility to obtain new fashions through clever advertising by shopkeepers and craftsmen: “High quality and imitation, new and old: shopkeepers used a wide qualitative vocabulary to attract customers. This is how the semi-luxury market developed also among the less affluent” (71). Along these lines, one can make several conclusions about the textile and fashion industries in eighteenth-century France: that the expansion of the textile industry had a significant effect on the social hierarchy of the period, that both those who consumed luxury goods and those who produced them contributed to this effect, and that the demand for new fashions encouraged the production of unique items, and in turn created a need for new professions whose purpose was to produce and sell these very specific items.

**Did a consumer revolution occur in eighteenth-century France?**

This question has provided speculation, particularly recently, for scholars of the eighteenth century. One of the main reasons that France might be excluded from works examining consumer revolutions is that this “revolution” took place quietly and did not occur due to any major technological developments, but rather to an increased demand for luxury and semi-luxury goods, and an increased availability of these goods to a wider range of consumers. Coquery outlines two
of the contributing factors to this expansion in the distribution and consumption of goods: “invention” and “imitation”:

Given the specific character of the Parisian market, which combined the sound beginnings of a flourishing luxury industry and the tenacious end of a ‘court society’, it is most likely that both attitudes prevailed in the French case: invention and imitation reigning equals. Semi-luxury goods were successful, first, because they were new and fashionable and, secondly, because in terms of price and function they were fitted to satisfy consumer taste for fancy goods. Privileged or unprivileged… consumers resembled one another more and more …Fashion traders invested in a new sector, a market for imitation and plated wares, which flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century. These imitations not only put within reach of the French bourgeoisie and working class cheap substitutes, fully acknowledged as such, for aristocratic luxuries; they simultaneously made available genuine inventions, imitations of such convincing illusion as to provoke dreams of acquisition. Shopkeepers were keen enough to offer such a wide diversity of quality or value in order to attract at one and the same time aristocratic, bourgeois and less privileged classes. (72)

What Coquery states here is that there were major changes in the amount and manner in which people in eighteenth-century France consumed goods, but these changes may have gone unnoticed or been dismissed as minimally significant because the changes were not as major as those happening in England, for example. Often the changes made to a product in order to resell it or market it as ‘luxury’ were small and subtle- some ribbons or lace were added, the color changed,
etc. As fashions became more and more flamboyant and constantly changed within the court, nobles strove to find new, quicker ways to either transform the clothing and goods they already possessed, or to find ways to replace these goods by selling the old ones. One way in which this could be accomplished was by selling clothing and goods to merchants who would then resell these to the lower classes. Shopkeepers had to do everything in their power to appeal to the largest clientele, and made efforts to entice both the higher and lower classes by stocking a wide variety of goods of various levels of quality and price. This observation reflects what was occurring in France not only in regard to clothing and goods, but in regard to the whole structure of power in France. France was caught between the old and the new. While members of the court set the trends and provided the inspiration for most of the new luxury goods, the emerging “middle class” was now able to enter a circle of consumption and possession that had previously been unavailable to them. As Daniel Roche phrases it, “Fashion ceased to be the prerogative of birth alone” (187).

If one attempts to answer whether or not there was a consumer revolution in France, and it is determined that this “consumer revolution” is largely dependent on the increased demand and availability of luxury and semi-luxury goods to the bourgeoisie and lower classes, it is also important to ask if it is possible to distinguish particular classes below the nobility. This is another question that has troubled scholars of eighteenth-century France. One often hears the terms “bourgeois” and “middle-class” inserted into conversations about this time period, but it is almost impossible for historians to agree on whether or not there actually was a middle class. Sarah Maza, in her article “Luxury, Morality, and Social Change: Why There Was No Middle-Class Consciousness in Prerevolutionary France,” gives a simple version of why scholars have such difficulty with this concept: “The reason why attempts to locate and describe a middle class ( in the twenty-first sense) or bourgeoisie in eighteenth-century France have failed is that such efforts
always amount to forcing nineteenth-and-twentieth-century categories onto a society that would not have recognized them” (208). Maza’s point is that modern historians and scholars are unable to label or define a particular group because they judge that group by modern standards, and also because the middle class (“le tiers état”) did not recognize itself as a class until the end of the eighteenth century. What further complicates the act of trying to locate a middle class is that it is “defined” by what it is not, rather than by what it is. “The middle class…is the most obviously artificial among familiar social groupings. The middle class exists by definition only in relation to other social groups” (201). While it is easy to locate the nobility within society, especially due to the use of titles, and the lower classes, usually due to their low income or the type of jobs they held, the amount of income and the type of job held by members of the “middle class” or “bourgeoisie” was not always evident, and it could be argued that a certain profession belonged in the lower classes, while another historian might argue that it could be considered middle-class.

Another reason why it is difficult to locate the middle class in eighteenth-century France is that the lines between the classes were becoming more and more confused by the increased availability of luxury goods to classes other than the nobility. While buying luxury goods certainly did not give members of the middle class a noble title, or allow them to circulate in the same social circles as the aristocracy, it did make it more difficult to distinguish class on an everyday basis. One of the major arguments against consumerism and luxury in the eighteenth century, often championed by moralists like Rousseau and Prévost, was that it undermined the system of power and rank that had existed for centuries in France. With the right clothing and accessories, it was now possible for bourgeois men and women to attend events without it being externally obvious what class they belonged to. While certain privileges were once limited to a specific rank or group, many of these privileges, especially the right to wear certain colors or fabrics, were increasingly
being conferred upon members of the “middle class.” It is this confusion of classes in part that contributed to moralists decrying the increased consumption of luxury goods. Indeed, luxury, or *le luxe*, became a sort of all-encompassing topic that could explain everything that was wrong with eighteenth-century French society. One of the reasons that luxury provided such scope for criticism was that it possessed a variety of meanings and traditionally had negative connotations. When one thinks of luxury, terms like debauchery, vice, and immorality often accompany it. A mistrust of luxury was and still is often rooted in Christian traditions, and it is one reason that moralists denounced the invasion of eighteenth-century society by *le luxe*:

Luxury, as commentators have pointed out, was a singularly protean concept. In eighteenth-century France it brought together such different concepts as the state of Christian values, worries about aristocratic profligacy, the effects of commerce and consumerism on society, and the condition of the countryside; in sum, it was a convenient code for all of society’s perceived problems. (Rosenblatt)

Luxury thus provided a convenient rationale for what many perceived to be the decline of society in France. Although the production and consumption of goods allowed for the stimulation of France’s economy and created more jobs, it also led to a diminished focus on family life and devotion to God, as well as increased amounts of debt, and perhaps even sexual licentiousness. Moralists and anti-luxury critics used the omnipresence of luxury as an easy way to explain why the centuries-old political and social systems of France were slowly working their way toward destruction. While consumption is certainly not the only cause of the French Revolution, it is possible that it was a contributing factor. For example, the French people found a convenient scapegoat for their problems in Queen Marie-Antoinette, who was nicknamed, among other, more vulgar monikers, “Queen of Debt.” Perhaps a reason for this is the visibility of expense and luxury
exhibited by the extravagant creations donned by the members of the highest-ranking nobility like Marie-Antoinette. While the lavish expenditures of the nobility on clothing and accessories were not entirely to blame for the decline of France’s economy, they provided physical evidence of the lines that divided the rich and the poor, and made it easier for lower classes to place blame on those who spent an inordinate amount of money on luxury goods.

Interestingly enough, although critics and moralists often blamed a decline in moral values and civilized society on the increased focus on consumption and luxury, it has been suggested that Christianity might have been one of the forces contributing to the increase in circulation of goods. If one stops thinking of “luxury” as something hedonistic and lavish, and rather thinks about it as anything that is not a necessity, it is possible that one could trace the origins of the increase in consumption in eighteenth-century France back to religious objects. In *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, Cissie Fairchilds contributes an interesting chapter entitled “Marketing the Counter-Reformation: Religious Objects and Consumerism in Early Modern France.” In this chapter, Fairchilds discusses the effect that the importance of religious objects in France might have had on the increase in consumption in France, especially by the lower classes. Fairchilds writes: “Historians and art historians are beginning to realize that the church’s promotion of objects and images as aids to devotion must have had a major impact on consumption habits and therefore on the European economy throughout its long history; indeed, Christianity may be one reason why modern capitalism developed in the West” (33). Fairchilds’ statement seems counterintuitive if one defines consumption as greedy or luxurious. However, if one thinks instead of consumption as merely anything that is not an absolute necessity, it is easy to see why religious objects could have been the forerunners of luxury goods.
Fairchilds supposes that the church, in its promotion of religious objects as necessary for the practice of Christianity, stimulated a demand for such objects, which in turn could have inspired the same people purchasing religious objects to purchase small luxury goods (again, luxury in this case referring to anything that was not a necessity). These observations are in reference to members of the middle and lower classes who traditionally would not have purchased non-necessity items. Fairchilds ventures that “once such people were lured into the market they might have purchased secular goods as well, goods produced and distributed through networks that had originated to cater to religious demands” (35). While this logic can perhaps not be applied to clothing or accessories, it could be relevant to household items or accessories. Although the connection between the purchase of religious goods and luxury goods might appear tenuous, Fairchilds attributes it to what she calls the “first purchase phenomenon”: “A rosary or a religious print may have represented a first step into the world of goods for poor or reluctant consumers who hitherto had bought only the basic necessities of life” (47). Essentially, religious objects could have provided a stepping-stone into the world of goods. For pious members of the lower classes, religious objects could be considered necessities rather than luxuries, but because they did not belong to the most basic necessities (food, water, shelter, etc.) their purchase still represented the “acquisitive impulse” that Fairchilds refers to. And this “acquisitive impulse” that inspired lower classes to purchase religious goods may have expanded into a desire for the luxury and semi-luxury goods which were eventually made available to the lower classes.

\[\text{15 P. 43}\]
Changes in Women’s Participation in Buying and Producing Luxury Goods

One of the most important effects of the expansion of the luxury industry in eighteenth-century France was the divide it created between male and female practices of buying and selling, and the way in which consumption and “shopping,” a relatively new concept at the time, became gendered. In her chapter of the book *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* entitled “‘Coquettes and Grisettes’: Women Buying and Selling in Ancien Régime Paris,” Jennifer Jones discusses a ‘troubling’ shift in how the buying and selling of goods was conducted. The shift from the more traditional practice of people selling clothing and accessories coming to the homes of noble men and women to these same noble men and women venturing out to the shops of dressmakers, *marchandes de modes*, etc., was problematic for two main reasons. The first was that, traditionally, any “shopping” that occurred was generally conducted by males, and “shopping” was less about the exchange of goods and money than it was about sexual interaction:

> When contemporaries imagined the act of retail buying, they imagined a male consumer and a female merchant. The model for shopping was courtship (although in the harsh light of its critics shopping might look more akin to prostitution), a decidedly heterosexual encounter between carefree but self-interested shop girls and desirous male customers. (Jones 32)

Although this description of shopping might seem scandalous, according to contemporaries, the real scandal was the idea that middle-class women, who up until this period of time generally remained in the home, might begin participating in the world of shopping, thereby disrupting the established system in a couple of ways. First, male shopping was considered acceptable because it was a mirror of heterosexual courtship: “The model of shopping as courtship worked to normalize,
rationalize, and naturalize male shopping” (Jones 32). If males were to enter the “demimonde” of shopping, they could purchase their goods and enjoy a flirtatious interaction without compromising their money or their integrity. However, the prevailing belief at the time was that it was inappropriate for women to enter the shopping areas, where genders and classes mixed. One of the other main issues of the expansion of the luxury industry and the increased availability of luxury goods to a wider range of social classes was that it blurred the distinction between ranks even further. Jones mentions writers such as Louis-Sébastien Mercier, who observed that it was becoming increasingly difficult to tell on the streets of Paris who was royalty and who was merely a well-dressed bourgeoise.

Changes in the Image and Functions of Women in Eighteenth-Century France

Another main concern regarding the effect that the “consumer revolution” had on women was that it made them more concerned with obtaining the latest fashions than with presiding over their household. This concern had not necessarily been relevant up until this point, since ladies of the court, who had ample help in taking care of their homes and children, could afford to spend their time and money on pastimes like shopping. Contemporaries were also concerned that women were beginning to want to dress and decorate themselves purely for enjoyment and the ability to compete with other women as sexual rivals, whereas it was often believed that women should be dressing and decorating themselves for the enjoyment of men: “For countess or shop girl, the pursuit of fashion was acceptable if it took place within the confines of pleasing a husband or attracting legitimate suitors” (Jones 38). Therefore, it was suitable for women to dress for men, but not for themselves or other women, a contrast perhaps to the modern environment in which it is often acknowledged that women dress for themselves and the approval of other women. The
general consensus at the time for critics of the luxury industry was that it was permissible for women to spend money on looking enticing and feminine, as long as their objective was to entice or please men, and not just because of selfish desires.

Another contemporary debate compounding the issues of shopping and acceptable behavior for women in the evolving society were the debates held by great thinkers of the day on what the nature of women was. In a society that was shifting its focus from a long-held tradition of patriarchal, monarchical rule to a more citizen-centric society, Enlightenment thinkers deliberated over what kind of involvement, if any, women should have in the new societal model, and what might be acceptable roles for them. As society became increasingly gendered, it became difficult to discern how society could best benefit from such changes.

One of the most prominent and important Enlightenment thinkers is of course the great philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who wrote about the roles and responsibilities of men and women in his works *Émile* and *Sophie*. A modern criticism of Rousseau is that his expectations for women and the roles he prescribed for them were misogynistic because they excluded them from participating in the new society in which men had a say in government and politics. In *Rousseau in Drag: Deconstructing Gender*, Rosanne Kennedy analyzes some of the arguments that have been made against the philosopher. Kennedy focuses on the contradictions of Rousseau’s pronouncements on women: “Rousseau was able both to be committed to the new values of democratic freedom and equality and to insist on the subordination of women and their exclusion from the public sphere and political life attests…to the persistence and entrenchment of patriarchy despite the progressivism of the politics” (Kennedy 6). While the structure of society was evolving in France, and the differences between men and women as well as the nature of women in general were being re-examined, these developments still maintained the inferiority of
the female sex. Furthermore, thinkers and moralists actually used the new models of difference between men and women to argue that because of these differences, women should not be involved in the public sphere: “The fear that women might gain access to the new public spaces opening up with reference to the egalitarian rhetoric of liberal and republican discourse engendered new justifications for the exclusion of women based on a model of rigid sexual difference” (Kennedy 7). Essentially, the new republic spouted ideals of equality and liberty, but this equality and liberty was reserved exclusively for male citizens.

While many critics and historians have argued that Rousseau was misogynistic and anti-woman, Kennedy’s analysis of Rousseau’s writings on gender demonstrates that this is an oversimplification, although she does acknowledge Rousseau’s stance as problematic. However, he is not misogynistic perhaps in the sometimes violent, hateful way in which misogyny is often conveyed in the twenty-first century. Rousseau does not advocate for the mistreatment of women or for violence against them. In fact, he rejects notions of extreme paternal authority and asserts that women play a very important role in society. Where his arguments become paternalistic is through their assertions that women must remain in the private sphere of the home, rather than inserting themselves into the new public spheres emerging as a result of the changing political climate in France.

Therein lies the contradiction Rosanne Kennedy discusses in *Rousseau in Drag*. Rousseau does not argue for any kind of mistreatment of women, nor does he argue that they are useless to society. However, he does contribute to the exclusion of women from public roles in society by advocating that women belong at home. In addition, he criticizes the idea of women deriving enjoyment from anything that is not directed towards pleasing a husband or raising children. Therefore, amusing themselves with choosing new clothing and being fashionable is detrimental
to the family and society in general. As evidenced in Lieselotte Steinbrügge’s work *The Moral Sex*, in a society where the concept of “usefulness” was being established for the first time, thinkers like Rousseau, who worried about the possibility of women attempting to become “useful” and therefore abandoning their duties as wives and mothers, attempted to demonstrate how women could be useful and contribute to society by being good wives and mothers. Unmarried women could become models for single young women through moral instruction, which would presumably aid in preventing them from becoming involved in immoral activities such as prostitution.

One of the most interesting observations that Steinbrügge makes is the concept of the “useful” member of society. The “useful” person is an idea mainly reserved for the bourgeois, as it was considered neither necessary nor appropriate for members of the aristocracy to be productive. This was especially true for female members of the aristocracy, for whom it was considered acceptable to attend the theater or go shopping as forms of diversion, whereas it was still considered inappropriate for bourgeois women to enter such circles, where sexes and classes mixed. Therein lies another important distinction between the women of the aristocracy and bourgeois women: women of the aristocracy were not expected to be particularly good mothers. While they were expected to produce children, particularly males so that titles could be passed down, the structure of the aristocracy was such that there were many women living within one palace or manor, accompanied by many servants. Aristocratic mothers were not expected to raise children alone, and had significant help in taking care of their children. In *The Reign of Women in Eighteenth-Century France*, Vera Lee describes how little noble mothers were involved in their children’s day-to-day lives: “Contact between mother and daughter is limited to only a few times a day” (Lee 6). Young girls briefly entered their mother’s chambers to update them on daily
progress and to be admired by their mother, who they in turn admired as she completed her morning toilette. The young girl would then be returned to the care of nurses, governesses, and tutors.

Even tasks like breastfeeding were considered inappropriate for noblewomen, and wet nurses were called upon for this reason. Instruction of children was also not reserved solely for their mothers within aristocratic circles. Young children, even girls, had tutors, and although the young female members of aristocratic society were not expected to exercise a profession or be well-educated, they were expected to know some basics of language and religion, as well as more practical, domestic occupations such as needlework, and forms of entertainment to make them more appealing for suitors- singing, dance, etc.

The fact that women of the aristocracy were not expected to be exemplary mothers was not necessarily considered a positive aspect of the nobility. For example, Mme. de Puisieux wrote about the decrease in birthrate and the high infant mortality rate, which were mainly evident among the nobility. Puisieux remarks in *Les Caractères* that “Only women in the provinces and the common women of Paris are having many children and producing them healthy and well-formed. Among noble families, one rarely sees healthy offspring” (Théré 553). Furthermore, she “blames the weak constitution of high-born women for the comparatively high infant mortality” (553). Breastfeeding advocates also criticized noblewomen for allowing lower-class women to nourish and nurture their offspring, although this was a common practice at the time, and it was generally considered inappropriate for noblewomen to breastfeed their own children. Writers who supported breastfeeding argued that these practices had ill effects on both mother and baby, and also that the practice of using wet nurses contributed to the decrease in population.
At this time, it was believed by many that breastfeeding would prevent a woman from conceiving another child. However, the use of wet nurses contributed to the population decrease rather than allowing it to increase by shortening the intervals between children for noblewomen. Mme. Le Rebours, in *Avis Aux Mères*, explains the contradictory effect of allowing noblewomen to entrust their children to wet nurses: “Women in the cities, who, refusing to nurse, give birth every year, are far from contributing to population growth. In fact, they harm it doubly as, having been entrusted to mercenary breasts, “many of these children do not grow up,” and moreover, “they cause many wet nurses to perish as well” (Théré 554-5). Therefore, both the mothers of the nobility and the wet nurses they charged their children with were implicated in the population decrease and in the weak physical condition of children of the higher classes. Women of the lower classes, who not only breastfed their children but who also possessed better general health, were more likely to have healthy children who would reach adulthood.

Therefore, according to many thinkers of the time, it was of the utmost importance for bourgeois and lower-class women that they focus on being good wives and mothers, both by producing strong, healthy children who would reach adulthood, and by raising these children to positively contribute to society. Having strong family units at the bourgeois level was important for multiple reasons. First of all, it meant that future generations would be raised with good morals and would thus become productive members of society. Second, it would free men from most domestic obligations, allowing them to participate in the re-imagining of society. Third of all, it occupied women and therefore prevented them from attempting to insert themselves into the public, political spheres. In general, marriage was highly valued because it was intended to produce healthy, robust children and contribute to population growth and the solidification of French society. The family was the starting point for France’s success. If mothers and children remained
at home, completing lessons or domestic tasks, it allowed men, the heads of household, to focus on their work, or, at higher levels of society, on political matters: “Political, social, and economic order in the kingdom depended on the reproduction and solidification of the natural lines of authority within the conjugal family” (Tuttle 8). In order for France to function correctly, the family had to function first.

Philosophers and writers alike argued over what rights women might have in the changing society. By the mid-eighteenth century, many professions allowed for women to continue their husband’s work if he died, or to inherit their father’s work if he died and left no male heir. More and more opportunities became available to single women and to young girls, especially as the luxury and textile trades expanded. Aristocrats were not expected to work, but even in the “bourgeois” classes, almost everyone, including women, participated somehow in the “working world.” Vera Lee opens her study of women in eighteenth-century France with a shrewd observation on the effect that the eighteenth-century had on what women could do and how they were viewed. No matter her rank, no matter how important and influential she may one day grow to be, she always started her life off as less desired, less important, simply because of her sex. “Although she could eventually achieve enormous prestige and power she started her life as a disappointment. A girl baby? But only a boy could preserve the family name and patrimony” (Lee 5). This observation recalls a moment in the 2006 Sofia Coppola film Marie Antoinette, based on Antonia Fraser’s Marie-Antoinette: The Journey, in which the young queen observes that her firstborn child, Marie-Thérèse, was “not what was desired…a boy would have been the Son of France” (Coppola). Marie-Thérèse, while celebrated, did not bring the joy and relief that the royal family and the country would have felt upon acquiring a dauphin- a crown prince- due to Salic law, which prevented female members of royal families from inheriting the throne.
But the importance and influence of women grew exponentially during the eighteenth century, and the nature of women was analyzed and scrutinized as never before. Furthermore, perceptions and portrayals of women varied drastically during the eighteenth-century. Women were portrayed as virtuous mothers, as harlots, as hardworking, robust women, as silly spinsters, as ninnies, etc. No one seemed to agree on what a woman should be, or what kind of role she should play in society: “If eighteenth-century writers discussed the what-is-woman problem at all, it was in order to tackle a more immediate question, that is: what should she be?” (Lee 47). Of course, there was no concrete answer to this question. While the eighteenth century began with more traditional views on femininity, beauty, and female duty, women gained more visibility and more influence as the century progressed.

At the highest levels, sexual influence and intrigue could have a profound effect on society: “Let us remember… that generals, cardinals and ministers were made or undone in the privacy of the royal boudoir and that milady’s approval or disapproval could even mean the difference between war and peace” (Lee 115). Royal mistresses, notably Madame Du Barry, impacted royal decisions. But this kind of influence began to wane as the eighteenth century progressed. For one, due to Louis XVI’s lack of a mistress, the queen herself rather than the king’s mistress began to hold more sway and became more visible, whereas before she had often remained relatively inconspicuous, focusing on her faith and family. In the eighteenth century, Marie-Antoinette, though young, made it a goal for young ladies to be fashionable and charming. More importantly, it was now common, if not necessarily acceptable, to be fashionable and charming not only for the enjoyment of men, but for one’s own enjoyment.
The influence of Marie-Antoinette on fashion during the eighteenth century and her role in the development of new styles and professions

In attempting to pinpoint a single person who has had the most influence on fashion throughout the course of history, Marie-Antoinette, if not the singular person who has had the most influence, would certainly figure among the most significant. This is a surprising fact given that so few of her actual clothes and accessories survived the French Revolution; however, through art and records, including purchase records kept by her fashion merchants, particularly Mlle. Bertin and Mme. Éloffé, it is clear that Marie-Antoinette possessed an unprecedented amount of clothing and accessories, and that she encouraged her “peers” and subjects to do the same. Several factors directly related to Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI’s reign prompted expansion in the amount of clothing people purchased and what kind of clothing they wore. First of all, the sumptuary laws which had been so strict under the reign of Louis XIV were no longer strictly enforced, even though they technically remained in effect:

Historically, dress had corresponded with status; people were what they wore. Anyone could tell a duchess from a dairymaid at a glance. The aristocratic, professional, and working classes each had their own strict dress codes, reinforced…by sumptuary laws. After the death of Louis XIV in 1715, these laws—never very effective—quietly fell into disuse. For the first time, people of all classes could wear fashionable, luxurious dress; that is, if they could afford to. (Chrisman-Campbell 8)

This first effect of Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI’s reign in relation to fashion was problematic in many ways, as conservative critics believed that status by birth, not acquired money, should allow people to dress in a certain way. These changes were criticized by men like Rousseau and
Mercier, who thought it ridiculous and insulting that bourgeois and even working-class women were attempting to dress like princesses. But with the introduction of new technologies, more affordable materials, and more people involved in the production of fashion, making it more available to a wider public, it seemed inevitable that dressing well would eventually reach the lower classes.

Two other major changes in fashion occurred as a direct result of the growth in numbers and influence of the figures known as the marchandes de modes who are the focus of this dissertation. The important thing to note about the marchande de modes, which is directly related to the influence they held, is that they did not actually make much clothing, but focused on accessorizing and embellishing clothing already made by couturières (seamstresses): “In practice, marchandes de modes did make some types of garments, including cloaks and the grand habit, the elaborate formal gown worn at court. But they were best known for providing ‘all the little objects used in dress, of women particularly’” (Chrisman-Campbell 52). Kimberley Chrisman-Campbell, author of Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, points out the importance of the details and ornamentation of women’s gowns. The gowns themselves might not be spectacular, though they often were, but they could be decorated with so many ornaments that the outfit would appear unique. This was often the work of the marchandes de modes who concerned themselves with these details:

Fashion was in the details. Often, a woman’s gown was barely visible under the profusion of feathers, ribbons, tassels, lace, artificial flowers, and other ornaments with which it was adorned. And no ensemble was complete without a headdress, fan, gloves, and jewels. These trimmings and accessories were often even more expensive than the textiles onto which they were sewn. (Chrisman-Campbell 52)
The *marchandes de modes’ influence lay more within her ability to enhance than to create.

Similarly, because the *marchandes de modes* focused on ribbons, artificial flowers, trimmings, etcetera, one of their biggest assets in influencing fashion was that they were able to update things quickly and thus monopolize trendsetting. In fact, we conceivably owe the modern concept of being “trendy” to the eighteenth century, when fashions truly started to become temporary and up-to-the-minute: “The reign of Louis XVI witnessed the perfection of what is called planned obsolescence; *marchandes de modes* brought fashion up to the very minute, with the cooperation…of the malleable young queen and the emerging fashion press” (Chrisman-Campbell 7). The fashions created by the *marchandes de modes* were not intended to be long-lasting, and this is perhaps one of the more minor reasons that the *marchandes de modes* all but disappeared in the nineteenth century, the major reason being that many of them were forced to leave France because of the Revolution, in favor of more durable, classic fashions created by department stores and couturiers. At the time, however, the temporality of the fashions created by the *marchandes de modes* increased their influence, as clients were constantly coming to them for the newest fashion updates.

The influence of the *marchandes de modes* is connected to another reason why lower classes could now be fashionable; since being fashionable no longer solely meant wearing certain colors or cloths, but being able to correctly accent clothing, it was more likely that a bourgeois or working-class woman could appear stylish if that meant choosing the right hat or hairstyle, or being able to afford a ribbon or trim that might make an otherwise plain gown more elegant. Bourgeois and lower class women were also able to access more stylish clothing through repurposing and reselling of clothing. Even the queen herself, who was generally restricted by rules allowing her to wear a gown only a certain number of times during a season, would often
refurbish her clothing: “Marie-Antoinette frequently went to the trouble of having her gowns altered or re-trimmed before their second appearance- another example of how etiquette rather than personal preference dictated many of her fashion choices” (Chrisman-Campbell 24). While the queen updated her clothing in order to enhance her status, bourgeois and lower-class women could benefit from the modifications made by the *marchandes de modes* by making their less-than-royal clothing appear luxurious and stylish.

Thus far I have given an overview of some of the ways in which fashion expanded and changed during the eighteenth century, particularly in relation to those who brought about these changes. While there are many figures who made fashion more visible and accessible throughout the eighteenth century, aside from the queen herself, no figure was more influential or controversial than the *marchande de modes*. In the following chapter this figure will be examined more thoroughly. Who were the *marchandes de modes*, and what did their contemporaries think of them?
Chapter Two:

The Virtuous Marchande de Modes and Arguments in Favor of

Developments in Fashion and Luxury Items

There was widespread concern during the eighteenth-century regarding how an increased focus on fashion might affect society. Women, already objects of scrutiny, were regarded more suspiciously than ever. This included not only those working in fashion industries, but also the women who purchased the frivolities and fripperies that were becoming all the rage. Critics of fashion’s protean nature would eventually go so far as to propose a national costume for both men and women; for example, “Monsieur” in Suard’s *Sur la Mode*. “Monsieur,” who corresponds with a female advocate for fashion and women’s ability to choose their clothing from a wide variety of options, declares « Je veux un costume national qui ne varie point au gré des modistes » (Suard 210).\(^{16}\) The woman in this exchange reminds “Monsieur” that if women’s interest in fashion and the ability to pursue different trends as a kind of hobby were taken away, women would have to be involved in more serious endeavors: « D’ailleurs, si vous nous ôtez la faculté de varier les modes, vous ferez donc des académies des femmes; vous nous donnerez des places au tribunal; au conseil; vous nous permettrez l’ambition, l’amour de la gloire; etc; car il faut bien nous amuser à quelque chose » (Suard 214).\(^{17}\) “Madame” points out that women must be able to occupy their time somehow, and argues that if women are discouraged from amusing themselves with fashion and beauty, the natural progression of things is that eventually they will want to be more involved in society. It seems that “Madame” is claiming that fashion is a relatively harmless pursuit for

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\(^{16}\) “I want a national costume that does not change at the discretion of the *modistes*.”

\(^{17}\) “Anyway, if you take from us the ability to vary fashions, you will therefore create academies of women; you will give us places at court; at the council; you will permit us ambition, love of glory; etc; because we must be able to amuse ourselves with something.”
women. Furthermore, although “Monsieur” believes that fashion is frivolous and even dangerous, there are many examples of literary works during this time period which indicate that women involved in the creation and expansion of fashion could not only be upstanding, ethical women, but they might even use their positions in the fashion industry to influence young women and mold them into virtuous, productive members of society. In turn, such occupation might prevent young women with no other means to support themselves from engaging in illicit activities. The women portrayed in works of literature include those who have managed to escape drudgery by establishing their own careers in fashion, as well as women who provide jobs and even shelter for young ladies. These works include *La Marchande De Modes: Parodie De La Vestale* by Étienne de Jouy, which examines a shop owner’s instruction of her young protégées, as well as "Brevet d’Apprentissage d’une Fille de Mode » by A. Amantonte, a poem that describes how businesswomen should train female apprentices. Some of these works are even pedagogical, aimed at shaping young women into honest members of society, and instructing the older women who are charged with assisting them. This is particularly evidenced by the plays « La Marchande de Modes» and « La Lingère » by Stéphanie Félicité de Genlis, which appear in a compilation of pedagogical works of theater that attempt to instruct young people (*Théâtre à l’Usage des Jeunes Personnes*).

If critics of the increased focus on material goods, shopping, and women’s participation in both the buying and selling of goods argued that women had no business earning a living outside of the home, and that the desire to purchase luxury goods was borne of feminine weakness and

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sinfulness, it could also be argued that the increasing demand for luxury goods and the consequent proliferation of jobs available to women would prevent them from resorting to the ever-present danger of prostitution: “Most enlightened thinkers…realized that work was in fact a necessity for many women. The task, then, was to find jobs appropriate for women” (Jones 41). Jobs in the clothing industry were appropriate in many ways because they were linked with more traditional discipline. While some viewed boutiques and ateliers as fronts for prostitution, one could also argue that in the appropriate setting under the watchful eye of a marchande de mode, young girls could learn to practice skills that could be useful in the case of a future marriage, such as needlework and even the handling of money. Furthermore, if girls and young women were occupied making clothing, and had some form of income, they would be less likely to turn to prostitution. The fear was that unmarried women with no means of supporting themselves would resort to prostitution. There are literary examples of this exact fear occurring; Fantine in Les Misérables comes to mind. Having been fired from her job at a factory, and needing to send money to support her daughter, she resorts to prostitution. However, there are many literary examples of working women who were not only able to support themselves, but to instruct the young women under their supervision to lead respectable, virtuous lives. In fact, in many of the examples that follow, more focus is placed on the young girls in their care learning to be virtuous, sensible, and chaste than on actually learning a skill or trade.

In order to examine literary examples of virtuous women in fashion professions, it is necessary to more distinctly define the professions that were influential at the time. Doing so, however, has proven difficult in the past with regard to professions such as the marchandes de modes, which seem to both appear and disappear within the eighteenth century. The marchande de modes emerges during the eighteenth century, and although she is extensively referenced during
the nineteenth century, actual practicing *marchandes de modes* had essentially vanished by that time, both in favor of what eventually became department stores, and because the French Revolution forced many of those who had served the aristocracy to emigrate. One of the most significant obstacles in studying the influence and legacy of the *marchande de modes* is that her occupation is so difficult to define:

The *marchande de modes* (or milliner in English) was a child of the eighteenth century. She was first noticed in France, but soon had counterparts in England, Sweden, Italy, and other European countries. Previously, *marchandes de modes* had been indistinguishable from *merciers* (mercers) and *couturières* (seamstresses); this was owing to the shifting demands of fashion as well as strict labor laws, which lumped the clothing trades together. Indeed, “marchande de modes” was such a new occupation that contemporaries struggled to define it…An important distinction was beginning to be made between fabric and fashion, between the technical process of cutting and sewing to the more creative realm of trimming and accessorizing. (Chrisman-Campbell 50)

Essentially, the *marchande de modes* was a stylist. She did not design or sew gowns herself; she rendered them more unique by adding a special feather or ribbon, and she also embellished hats and hairstyles. It is difficult to comprehend how a profession with such a puzzling definition could become so prominent. While the actual profession of the *marchande de modes* would eventually become more or less defunct, her influence throughout the eighteenth century in particular is undeniable.
Although eventually the *marchande de modes* would become a symbol of frivolity and excess, largely due to the prominence of Rose Bertin and her influence over Marie-Antoinette, in the early eighteenth century, by contrast, many people asserted that employment in a relatively honest profession would keep young women away from prostitution. They also argued that it was more appropriate for women and girls to be dressed by other women rather than by male tailors. In addition, at the outset of the appearance of the *marchande de modes*, employment in the clothing trades was initially seen as a way to keep women off the streets. Furthermore, honest employment could prove an opportunity to show young girls the merit of hard work. If the circumstances were correct, a young girl of the lower classes, usually a *grisette* who was not subject to an arranged marriage, might even succeed in making an acceptable match with one of the shop’s customers. Facilitating this devotion to hard work and virtue were the older, often widowed or never married *marchande de modes* or *couturière* figures who appear in a number of plays and novels throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Several such pedagogical plays are authored by the Comtesse de Genlis, who used these plays as a means of pedagogy for young women.

Stéphanie Félicité, comtesse de Genlis, full name Stéphanie Félicité du Crest de Saint-Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis, became a countess through marriage at a young age. She continued with her education even after her marriage, and was very interested in the instruction of young people. Genlis was raised with a strong commitment to religion and morals, and to disseminating these values to young people, especially young women. Her most well-known works were the “morality plays” that she wrote, several of which appear in *Théâtre À L'usage des Jeunes Personnes*. The two works most pertinent to this dissertation are « La Marchande de Modes » and « La Lingère ». Both center on women who have managed to establish themselves as respected figures in the fashion industries, and who are the mistresses of a shop or business. These women
use their influence to train young women not only in the production of fashion, but also in proper behavior. They instruct their young charges on the importance of piety, modesty, and the value of honest work.

In the preface of *Théâtre À L'usage des Jeunes Personnes*, Genlis explains the purpose of the plays which are to follow:

Ce volume est uniquement destiné à l’éducation des enfans de marchands, d’artisans ; et même les personnes au-dessous de cette classe pourront y trouver encore des leçons ; les femmes-de-chambre, les jeunes filles de boutique, y verront le détail de leurs obligations et de leurs devoirs. Elles y verront en action une vérité dont on désire qu’elles soient frappées ; c’est que le moyen le plus certain de réussir, c’est d’être honnête, et que l’intérêt personnel bien entendu nous conseille de suivre le même plan de conduite que la vertu prescrit et sait chérir. (Genlis Marchande 1)

In reading this introduction, one can assume that Genlis, in referring to the “enfans” of merchants and artisans, etc., does not only mean the actual children of these professions, but also their young apprentices. Genlis makes a more specific note about what the audience/readers should take from the characters who appear in these works: « On trouve en général, dans cette classe, de la piété, des mœurs pures, et l’union la plus touchante dans les familles; et l’auteur peut ajouter avec vérité, que les personnes vertueux de ces petites pièces ne sont point des caractères chimériques, mais

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21 “This volume is uniquely destined for the education of the children of merchants, artisans, and even people above this class can find lessons in it; chambermaids, young shop girls, will find within the detail of their obligations and their duties. They will see in action a truth with which we desire they should be struck; it is that the surest way to succeed, is to be honest, and that well-understood personal interest advises us to follow the same plan of conduct that virtue prescribes and knows to cherish.”
Genlis appears to be making a point about the assumptions society made at the time regarding the members of this class and the tasks that they performed. By emphasizing that the virtuous characters who appear in these plays are not “fanciful” but real, she is confirming for critics that not only are the young women employed in these professions neither immoral nor depraved, but they can even be virtuous and honorable. Furthermore, Genlis uses this description of the working class to highlight an important criticism of the nobility. While these young women are occupied in a productive manner and are overseen by a kind of “mother” figure, the young members of the ruling class are separated from their mothers, raised by a governess, and will presumably perpetuate the vicious cycle of laziness and idleness begun by their mothers. In his article about Genlis’ theatrical works, Lester Krakeur remarks upon the superficiality of the ruling class depicted in these pedagogical plays: « On la voit dans leur éducation, qui ne vise qu’à les préparer à briller dans les salons, qui étouffe les instincts enfantins naturels, et à laquelle Mme de Genlis, disciple de Rousseau, s’oppose vigoureusement » (190). In contrast to the arguments made that the clothing trades are immoral and dangerous, Genlis’ plays seek to show the opposite: that it is better to be a member of the bourgeois or lower class occupied in a respectable craft, than a member of the aristocracy who squanders time and money, and who will not grow up to do anything productive, including raising one’s own children.

The first of Genlis’ plays is « La Marchande de Modes, » which portrays Madame Dupré, a fashion merchant, and the young girls who work in her shop in Paris: Justine, Annette, Marthe, Joséphine, and Isabelle. The young girls are first introduced while working in the shop and

22 “One finds in general, in this class, piety, pure morals, and the most touching union within families; and the author may add with truth, that the virtuous people of these small plays are not fanciful characters, but that they exist, and are represented here without any kind of exaggeration.”
laughing among themselves, and their benefactress chastises them by asking if she must always keep an eye on them, reminding the girls of the importance of hard work (Genlis Marchande 99). Later, she reminds them what she expects of them while they are working: « Je ne trouve point mauvais que vous vous divertissiez ; mais ce que je vous demande expressément, c’est de ne me point faire des cachoteries...vous devez toutes me regarder comme votre mère, et vous auriez tort d’avoir des secrets pour moi » (Genlis Marchande 100-101).

From the very beginning of the play, Genlis depicts the marchande not as a woman who exploits her clients and takes advantage of them, but as a woman who wants to raise her apprentices to be hardworking and devoted to their clients. Madame Dupré’s strict instructions for her young charges reflect the moral code that Genlis is trying to convey to « les jeunes personnes » referenced in the title of her collection of plays.

Throughout the play there are various examples of Madame Dupré instructing her apprentices on how to conduct themselves. Justine, the “first apprentice” of the shop, serves as the moral compass when Madame Dupré is absent. For example, when the girls are mocking a client who dresses in a ridiculously youthful manner, Justine chastens them : « Est-il joli de se moquer comme cela de son prochain, et surtout des personnes à qui on doit du respect ? » (Genlis Marchande 111).

These passages are significant because they indicate that to Genlis, being virtuous and moral includes being respectful of one’s elders and superiors. The other girls agree with Justine, and they discuss how Madame Dupré has taught them to be “reasonable” and “prudent” (112). Throughout the play, there are various references to how the apprentices should act, and also the rules that govern the marchande’s business: « Il y a des bornes que la conscience

23 “I do not find it bad that you amuse yourselves; but what I expressly ask you, is to not hide things from me…you should all regard me as your mother, and you would be wrong to have secrets from me.”
24 “Is it kind to make fun in such a way of others, and especially those to whom one owes respect.”
25 The girls discuss how Justine has become “raisonnable” and “prudente” as a result of being Madame Dupré’s apprentice.
ne permet pas de passer ; et comme dit Madame Dupré, jamais rien ne peut autoriser un marchand à devenir usurier » (Genlis Marchande 137).  

This description of the moral code that the marchande de modes follows varies greatly from the marchandes de modes who are portrayed in later works depicting them as conniving and greedy.

The end result of this particular play is that Madame Dupré is asked by one of her clients, a marquess, if she can take her apprentice, Justine, as a chambermaid. Upon Justine’s departure, Madame Dupré instructs her as to how she can remain in her mistress’s good graces: « Conserve ces honnêtes sentiments, ma chère fille ; sois toujours pieuse, vertueuse ; préfère l’honneur à tout, et dans ton humble condition tu seras respectable, honorée, et la fortune même viendra te chercher et previendra tes vœux » (Genlis Marchande 147). Once again, Genlis’ own values are inserted into her plays in order that they might influence the young people reading and viewing them. Krakeur remarks : « Il serait inutile de faire la liste de toutes les vertus que prêche Mme de Genlis-la charité, l’amour de la vie rurale par opposition à la vie corrompue…de la Cour, la modestie, le sérieux, la moderation au lieu du luxe- tout cela basé sur la religion » (188). The purpose of Madame Dupré’s instruction has been to prepare her young charges to be humble, upstanding members of society, and to contribute something by helping members of the higher class. Madame Dupré emphasizes the exact opposite of what critics of fashion merchants argue at this time- that they, and all women working under their instruction, are immoral and greedy. In fact, Madame Dupré even hints at a possibility that Justine could be called to a convent, or might enter into a

26 “There are lines that conscience cannot permit one to cross; and as Madame Dupré says, nothing can authorize a merchant to become a usurer.”
27 “Preserve these honest sentiments, my dear girl; always be pious, virtuous; prefer honor to all else, and in your humble condition you will be respectable, honored, and fortune itself will come for you and prevail your wishes.”
28 It would be useless to make a list of all of the virtues Mme. De Genlis preaches – charity, love of rural life as opposes to the corrupt life…of the Court, modesty, seriousness, moderation instead of luxury- all of this based on religion.”
suitable marriage. She ambiguously states « la fortune même viendra te chercher et previendra tes vœux » (147). There is no distinction as to whether Madame Dupré means marriage or religious vows, and therefore, one could make the argument that she is preparing Justine for the possibility of entering a convent, which was a common path for young women who did not find husbands.

The next play in this collection, « La Lingère », focuses less on hard work and dedication, and more on honesty and modesty. « La Lingère » centers on Madame Durocher, marchande lingère, and the young ladies who work in her boutique, as well as her own daughter, Silvie. The play opens with a monologue from Aline, the apprentice in Madame Durocher’s shop, who has just learned of a problem with her father, whom she has never met. Another apprentice, Catherine, sees Aline crying, and Aline claims that she is crying because she received a letter from her elderly aunt who is in trouble. Aline claims that she wants to sell her clothing so she can send money to help this aunt. Catherine suspects that it is actually a love letter, and tells Aline that at fifteen years old, she is too young for a romantic relationship. Catherine is still suspicious, but admits that Aline has never lied before. When she wonders why Aline doesn’t want to confide in Madame Durocher, Aline explains that she is worried Madame Durocher won’t approve of selling her clothing, and might offer her the money, which would embarrass her. Catherine agrees that she won’t say anything to Madame Durocher until the next day, when Aline will explain the situation to Madame Durocher.

However, Madame Durocher notices that something is wrong with Aline and confronts her. Aline denies that anything is wrong, to which Madame Durocher replies « Vous m’êtes confiée, je dois répondre de votre conduite ; ainsi, puisque vous ne voulez pas me parler à cœur ouvert, je vous préviens que je vous veillerai de si près, que je découvrirai le mystère que vous me

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29 “Fortune itself will come looking for you and will inform you of your vows.”
cachez. Est-ce qu’une fille à votre âge doit avoir des secrets ? » (Genlis Lingère 166).  
30 Aline continues to deny that there is any mystery to hide, and Madame Durocher wonders what Aline could be hiding, saying, « Elle n’a que quinze ans, et elle paroit avoir tant de sagesse et de modestie » (Genlis Lingère 166).  
31 In the next scene, Madame Durocher’s daughter, Silvie, appears wearing a robe à la polonaise, which is the latest fashion in court, and an elegant hat. Presumably these are items being held for a customer, and Silvie is playing dress-up. Madame Durocher chastises her, saying that she looks ridiculous. Silvie reminds her mother that the ladies at court wear this style exclusively, perhaps attempting to convince her mother that by wearing this clothing she is elevating herself to the status of courtier. Madame Durocher is unimpressed, and responds:

> Mais les dames font faire leurs polonaises par des bonnes couturières, et paient douze francs de façon. Les dames prennent leurs chapeaux chez les meilleures marchandes ; êtes-vous en état de faire toute cette dépense ? Non ; vous n’avez donc pas l’air d’une dame, et vous ne passerez que pour une petite bourgeoise ridiculement habillée ; ou bien, si vous joignez à toutes ces fanfreluches-là... ce n’est pas pour une dame qu’on vous prendra, ni pour la fille d’une honnête marchande, mais pour ce qu’il y a de pis…Fi donc…voilà tout ce qu’on peut gagner à vouloir sortir de son état. (Genlis Lingère 169)

32 Once again, the female merchant, who has managed to establish herself as a respectable businesswoman, points out to her protégées the dangers that are associated with their professions.

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30 “You are entrusted to me; I have to answer for your conduct; therefore, because you do not want to speak to me with an open heart, I must warn you that I will watch over you so closely, that I will discover the mystery that you are hiding from me. Should a girl of your age have secrets?”

31 “She is only fifteen years old, and she appears to have such wisdom and modesty.”

32 “But ladies have their polonaises made by good seamstresses, and pay twelve francs per yard. The ladies take their hats from the best fashion merchants; are you in a state to spend all of this? No, therefore you don’t appear to be a lady, and you will only pass for a little bourgeoise who is ridiculously dressed; or better yet, if you add all of these silly embellishments …one won’t take you for a lady, or for the daughter of an honest merchant, but for the worst thing there is…that is all that one can win from wanting to leave one’s station.”
First of all, because they come into contact with the materials, clothing, and accessories worn by noblewomen, there is a temptation to don this clothing and act above their class. This is one of the concerns that critics at the time held regarding the increasing circulation of clothing between classes that threatened class distinction. One of the most important results of the “fashion revolution” that took place during the eighteenth century is that, due to secondhand clothing merchants and the increasingly lax enforcement of sumptuary laws, people of lower classes could imitate noblemen and women through their dress. Madame Durocher, in her speech to Silvie, criticizes the idea of women trying to act like like women of higher classes, and warns her against it, not only because it makes Silvie seem ridiculous, but also because it undermines the relatively honest and reputable position that they occupy as merchant linen maids. By dressing up in a noblewoman’s clothing, but without the help of the best seamstresses and fashion merchants, Silvie risks making herself appear cheap. Madame Durocher’s concern is highlighted in the words « ce qu’il y a de pis ». Although it is not said explicitly, one can infer that the “ce qu’il y a de pis » refers to a prostitute. Genlis appears to be using this passage as a warning to the young ladies employed by merchants and artisans that they should remain humble and modest, and how easy it is for young women to become objects of ridicule and criticism if they do not behave appropriately.

Madame Durocher then questions Silvie about Aline’s recent odd behavior, and Silvie and Georgette confirm that they saw Aline being approached by a man. Madame Durocher believes her fears have been confirmed that Aline is in fact involved with a man, and has thus been lying to her. Madame Durocher’s niece, Madame Bertrand, arrives with her daughter, who has recently had her hair done and has received new shoes and is showing them off to her aunt. Madame Durocher speaks privately with her niece and criticizes her indulgence of her daughter, allowing her to play dress up and treating her as a peer: « Dans toutes les conditions une jeune personne
coquette sera méprisée, mais dans notre état surtout, celle à qui l’on n’a pas inspiré la plus grande
modestie, peut d’un moment à l’autre, déshonorer ses parens, puisqu’elle est exposée à des dangers
et à des séductions qui n’existent pas pour des filles de qualité » (Genlis Lingère 185). Once
again, Madame Durocher emphasizes the importance of modesty in their position, which is already
subject to scrutiny. Any attempt to appear coquettish makes them licentious and puts them in
danger of being seduced. Madame Durocher emphasizes to her niece the importance of correctly
instructing their daughters to be dutiful and modest.

An interesting aspect of this play is the notes included about why Madame Durocher
might teach her apprentices and children in this way. At this particular moment in the play there
is a note indicating what Madame Durocher should have added to her speech about how to instruct
young ladies:

Madame Durocher devoit ajouter qu’on peut aussi donner aux filles dont elle parle
quelques talens agréables…sans négliger de leur apprendre aussi tous les petits ouvrages
de femmes…au lieu de dépenser de l’argent inutilement en achetant les chiffons dont
elles ont besoin. Enfin, il faut surtout les accoutumer à se mêler des soins du ménage, les
instruire avec détail de la manière dont on doit conduire une maison, et leur donner
l’exemple de la piété, de l’économie et de l’activité. (Genlis Lingère 188)

This passage highlights the fact that this is a morality play and indicates that even when women
are employed, their biggest concern should be about eventually becoming a wife and mother and

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33 “In any circumstance young, coquettish lady will be despised, but in our state especially, which has not been
instilled with the greatest modesty, can from one moment to another, dishonor her parents, because is exposed to the
dangers and the seductions that do not exist for ladies of quality.”

34 “Madame Durocher should add that one can also give to the girls of whom she speaks some agreeable
talents…without neglecting to also teach them all of the little works of women…rather than spending money
uselessly in buying the materials that they need. In conclusion, one must above all accustom them to managing the
cares of the household, to instruct them in the ways in which one must conduct the household, and giving them the
example of piety, economy, and activity.”
maintaining a household. Genlis appears to have two possible motives in including this passage. First of all, it could be seen as an attempt to alleviate her own fears that traditional values of marriage and motherhood are becoming obsolete in the increasingly hedonistic Parisian society. Although Genlis does advocate for the education and training of young women, she values being a good wife and properly raising one’s children above all else, and she herself abandoned societal obligations to focus on her children.\textsuperscript{35} The passage also appears to fight back against the concerns and criticisms leveled at women working in fashion professions by “reassuring” men that women can uphold traditional values while working. She is therefore also attempting to assuage fears about women working in fashion having loose morals.

The scene continues with the women discussing a play that they saw recently which they deemed inappropriate and depraved, and they again make comments about the declining morals of society. They discuss Aline’s odd behavior, commenting that up until this point she has been very modest and pious, and they don’t understand why she has become so secretive. They discuss her background- her mother died in childbirth and her father went into the military and apparently also died, but the circumstances of his death are rather mysterious. Madame de Solanges, a marquess, took her in and she was eventually lent to Madame Durocher as an apprentice.

In the second act, Aline disappears. Catherine claims that Aline told her it was because she needed to help her elderly aunt. Catherine mentions that the Marquis d’Olsey was in the boutique that morning, and she is convinced that he seduced Aline and they have run off together. Catherine did not inform Madame Durocher because Aline was worried Madame Durocher would want to help her by giving her money and she felt embarrassed. Aline returns, claiming that she received money and a letter from the Marquis d’Olsey, and that she went to return it to his mother.

\textsuperscript{35} Trouille p. 245
His mother, Comtesse d’Olsey, eventually arrives. The countess explains that Aline’s father, who had left for the islands when he was in the army, returned to Paris in order to see his daughter. While there, he was involved in a dispute with another officer and, thinking that he had killed his comrade, fled and hid. He then wrote a letter to Aline attempting to explain what had happened, which was the letter that Catherine assumed was a love letter. The Marquis d’Olsey was Aline’s father’s colonel, and Aline communicated with her father through him, leading the girls in the shop to believe that he was attempting to seduce Aline. The money that Aline needed was to help her father, who had not, in fact, killed his comrade.

After hearing the Countess’ explanation, Madame Durocher expresses her horror at the situation and what Aline has been through, and praises her character. « La pauvre petite...si jeune, se comporter avec tant de prudence et de sagesse » (Genlis Lingère 217). The Countess tells Madame Durocher that she is going to bring Aline to see her father. Aline leaves with the countess and Georgette remarks : « Ma foi, voilà un beau jour pour mademoiselle Aline ; il y a toujours à gagner à faire son devoir, je vois ben ça. Mademoiselle Georgette, vous êtes soucieuse ; vous avez du chagrin d’avoir tant médité de mademoiselle Aline, pas vrai ? Dame, y ne faut pas être si preste à mal penser de son prochain… » (Genlis Lingère 219-20). The play ends with the two leaving to see the Countess and Aline off.

This play emphasizes the importance of young women adhering to a moral code and being hardworking, and also underlines the value of honesty. Madame Durocher tells Aline that if she had explained the situation in the first place, Mme. Durocher could have helped her, and many of the issues that occurred throughout the play could have been avoided. This suggestion implies

36 “The poor little girl!...so young, to conduct herself with such prudence and wisdom.”
37 “My faith, what a beautiful day for Miss Aline; one always wins in doing one’s duty, I see that well. Miss Georgette, you are preoccupied; you are ashamed of having spoken poorly of Miss Aline, no? Lady, it does not do to be so quick to think poorly of others.”
that young ladies in the employ of a mistress seamstress or merchant should view her as a mother and obey her as such. Thus, in these two particular plays by Genlis, the marchande embodies a mother figure and serves as a force for shaping her charges’ lives and future situations. While the intention of the play might not have been to contradict critics claiming that the linen maids and fashion merchants were corrupting young women, certainly Genlis establishes that workers and apprentices in these professions could be upstanding women, and that the introduction of women into the labor force and the expansion of the fashion industry could be positive for society. While Genlis does not make any claims about women’s rights, nor does she advocate for their independence, she does indicate that the morals and education of young women need to be addressed. Furthermore, she seems to advocate that women can participate in the labor force without upheaving class structures and gender constructs, which were two significant fears that moralists and social critics had at the time. One persuasive argument for this line of thinking is that employing women in honest work would lessen their chances of being forced into prostitution, and also that if young women were kept occupied, they would have less time to dwell on improper subjects or activities; namely engaging in pre-martial sexual relations.

Genlis also seemed to understand that because of the limited opportunities available to women at the time, it was important to teach them not only to accept the kind of life they were destined to, but to thrive in it: “If women were to be happy…they must be trained to accept their lot in life, avoiding anything that might lead to frustration or discontent” (Trouille 284). Therefore, although Genlis does advocate young women being educated to a certain extent, and even advocates them being able to support themselves, she does not suggest that women should be striving for equality; she is simply acknowledging the unavoidable within society: that sometimes

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38 Trouille p. 284.
girls are required to work in order to survive, and if they must do so, they should do it under the
care of a respectable woman. In the most positive of outcomes, the young charges would keep out
of trouble and learn valuable skills that would prepare them to eventually be a wife and mother. In
this sense, Genlis was actually upholding traditional domestic values. Practically, it made sense
for young women not belonging to the aristocracy and upper-bourgeoisie to learn useful skills that
might enable them to contribute to supporting a future family. Although aristocratic and many
bourgeois women would never need to work, families in the poor and working classes often could
not rely solely on a husband’s income; therefore, the majority of the time, the wife would also have
to earn wages and it was preferable for her to do so through the less grueling work of the garment
industries.

Furthermore, having a useful skill that would aid in the support of a future family might
even benefit a woman in acquiring a husband in the first place: “If she could offer skill in some
branch of textile production, say as spinner, stocking knitter, or lacemaker, it could be a potential
source of income…thus an industrial skill might make her a doubly attractive proposition while
broadening her prospects” (Hufton 3). The reality was that, unless a young woman belonged to the
aristocracy or *bourgeoisie*, she was going to have to prepare herself for the fact that life would
probably be a constant struggle to provide for a family. Although Genlis supported a devotion to
motherhood and the family, she did not appear to idealize it as some did. She acknowledged that
being a wife and mother was the most important role a woman could hold, but did not encourage
women to attend to their children at the expense of being able to provide for them. Indeed, for the
poor and lower classes, “the rearing of children was a rather peripheral activity; a parent’s main
concern…was to maintain a regular supply of food” (Hufton 13). By possessing useful skills that
might have been acquired in the boutiques as described in Genlis’ works, working-class women
might have been able to avoid both falling into poverty in their younger years and resorting to prostitution, but also being unable to feed their children later on.

The mistress/apprentice relationship in the clothing industries also appeared in poetry and advocated similar values as Genlis’ plays. The 1769 poem addressed to “Amatonte” entitled « Brevet D’Agnès Pompon, Aprentisse Fille de Mode » describes the duties and moral responsibilities of Agnès Pompon, a girl of just under fourteen years of age, who has been apprenticed to her widowed aunt, a mistress fashion merchant in Paris. The poem describes the relationship between the two, and what each woman is morally bound to do for the other. Agnès is required to work for her aunt for six years. Her aunt, in return, must teach her the profession of linen maid and fashion merchant, and will also house and clothe her:

De plus elle promet aussi…
Lui donner tout le nécessaire,
Le lit, le feu et la lumière ;
S’oblige de l’entretenir
De jupe et de robe galante

This declaration reflects the relationships between mistress and apprentice that has been explored in Genlis’ plays. These relationships were mutually beneficial, with the mistresses receiving both labor and loyalty, and the apprentice receiving instruction, preparation for a future life as a wife and mother, and often shelter and clothing. In addition, the mistresses of the shops were able to uphold their reputations by training apprentices who would reflect positively upon them and their

09 Apr. 2015. “What’s more, she promises too…To give her all necessities, A bed, a fire, and light, And is obligated to provide her with clothing.”
businesses. At this point in time, it was still relatively new for women to manage their own business, and this was done out of necessity rather than a particular interest in mastering a trade. Women who were able to master a trade and have the right to run their own shop and hire apprentices did so in order to avoid the poverty that would likely come if they never found a husband or were widowed: “Female masters might be encouraged to hope that continuity in their own trade would help them avoid the economic deprivation that widowhood usually entailed” (Hafter Ribbonmaking 12). The establishment of a widow/apprentice relationship was therefore beneficial in alleviating both moral and economic concerns.

Since women involved in the fashion industries were not always viewed as trustworthy or respectable, people often believed that boutiques were fronts for prostitution or escort services, although these beliefs would become much more prevalent in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the plays and poems discussed here, virtue and hard work is still emphasized and valued by the mistresses of these boutiques. The instructions in this particular poem go a step further by also emphasizing religion. They state that Pompon should only follow her mistress’ instructions if they are compatible with her religion:

En outre, elle promet aussi
D’exécuter avec souplesse
Ce qui lui dira sa maîtresse,
Pourvu que la religion
Ne contredise sa leçon 40

Pompon’s apprenticeship and morality is therefore based not only on her behavior, but also contingent upon the orders given to her by her mistress. If it turns out her mistress is giving her

40 “What is more, she promises as well, To carry out with flexibility, What her mistress tells her, Provided that religion, Does not contradict her lesson.”
orders which are immoral or against her religion, she should not comply with them. Although there is no indication that the mistress of this poem would lead Agnès to act immorally, perhaps the instructions are making a wider assumption about the nature of the garment trades and insinuating that it is possible for women working in them to be led astray. On the other hand, it is also possible that the poem is trying to disprove beliefs that women in the garment trades are immoral by indicating that religion is the highest law a woman should follow.

The brevet changes tone slightly and begins to describe the decadent nature of clothing and accessories boutiques which is often criticized:

Enfin, la docile Pompon,
Pour faire en toute occasion,
L’avantage de sa maîtresse,
Se propose de consentir,
À satisfaire le désir
De voluptueuses pratiques
Qui soutiennent tant de boutiques
Qui brillent de cette façon

The contract is therefore admitting that boutiques like this are “upheld by voluptuous practices.” Whether that means prostitution or just satisfying the frivolous desires of women, the author appears to be implying that in spite of her mistress’s good reputation, this is still not work that is entirely without reproach. In addition, the author seems to imply that Pompon is agreeing to do whatever it takes to bring in business for her mistress. This portion of the contract is contradictory—the author has previously said that Pompon should only carry out her mistress’s wishes if they are

41 “The docile Pompon, In order to always gain favor with her mistress, Proposes to agree to satisfying the desires of the voluptuous practices that uphold so many boutiques, That glitter in such a way.”
consistent with morality and her religion, but now they appear to be suggesting that Pompon has agreed to work to her mistress’s advantage at any occasion. However, the poem does not suggest anything explicitly immoral, and perhaps it is merely emphasizing the need for Pompon to work hard.

The last paragraphs of the contract focus on the terms of Pompon breaking the contract for her apprenticeship and discuss the nature of hiring a young woman to be an apprentice:

Si par aventure,
La jeune apprentisse Pompon,
Pour suivre une fringate allure,
Ou chose de cette nature…
Et se retire à la sourdine
Avant que les six ans prescrits
Fussent tout à fait accomplis,
Dans ce cas que l’on imagine,
La susdite veuve Couvreur
Donne sa parole d’honneur
De faire chercher la coquine
Depuis Paris jusqu’à la Chine42

This passage emphasizes the importance of Pompon following the terms of her apprenticeship and the lengths her mistress will go to in order to uphold them. If Pompon decides that having fun and

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42 "If by some caprice, Pompon, the young apprentice, To follow a provocative allure, Or something of this nature…And goes away without a word, Before the prescribed six years, Have been fully accomplished, In this case which we imagine, The aforementioned widow Couvreur, Gives her words of honor, To go and look for the rascal, From Paris to China."
adventure is more important than her apprenticeship, her mistress will “go all the way to China” to find her. What’s more, the author indicates the consequences if Pompon does this:

Enfin de fureter partout
Jusqu’à ce qu’elle vienne à bout
De retrouver la libertine
Afin de la rendre aussitôt
À sa bonne et chère maîtresse
Non sans la punir comme il faut
De ce petit tour de jeunesse,
Pour ensuite plus sagement
Achever son apprentissage

If Pompon abandons her apprenticeship, her mistress will stop at nothing to retrieve her and make her fulfill the terms of her contract. This passage underlines the importance of Pompon’s education and moral upbringing, and highlights the widow’s investment in instructing her. The passage assumes that Pompon, being a young lady, especially one involved in the fashion industry, will want to leave her apprenticeship at some point to see the world and amuse herself. While this is a rather fair assumption, the author notes that if Pompon does do this, she will be punished, and will have to work even harder upon her return. This passage makes a contrast with the previous one, noting that while the nature of Pompon’s and the widow’s work is rather frivolous, it is important for Pompon to complete her apprenticeship in a dignified and productive manner.

43 “In the end to search out everywhere, Until she reaches the end, Of finding the libertine, To bring her back quickly, To her good and dear mistress, Not without punishing her as one must, For this little jaunt of youth, To even more wisely, Complete her apprenticeship.”
This poem, along with the plays of Mme de Genlis, offers several insights into the positive aspects of girls and women participating in the garment trades, and why one might have argued in favor of women being able to work in a limited set of occupations. First of all, with the expansion of the garment trades during the eighteenth century, it was undeniably necessary that more labor was needed. This labor was not going to be completed by men (as Rousseau says in *Émile*, “the same hand that holds the sword should not thread the needle”), nor by aristocratic women. Although this work did involve fabricating clothing and accessories worn by fashionable ladies, it was by no means glamorous. It was difficult, tiring, and sometimes even dangerous: “women and girls…were regularly exploited, underpaid, and, due to their working conditions, often prone to diseases such as tuberculosis” (Bellhouse 118). Although the scenes depicted in the works discussed in this chapter do not imply a dangerous environment, being a working girl or woman had dangers and disadvantages, and it is clear that even the young ladies in a well-established shop worked there out of necessity.

However, although there were dangers to be considered, working in the garment trades at this time also provided advantages. The mistress of the boutique often served as a mother figure and was able to keep an eye on her charges and instruct them in how to behave as good, modest young ladies. If these young ladies were employed in honest work, they would not have time to get themselves into trouble—perhaps engaging in prostitution or merely extramarital relations. In spite of being involved in the “frivolous” clothing industries, the writers of these works do not advocate idleness and excess, but usefulness and restraint. Genlis, although she herself was a member of the nobility, effectively withdrew herself from court circles in order to focus on her family, and she reportedly even went so far as to ignore protocol because she was focused on being a good mother and teacher. Apparently, Genlis created a conflict between herself and Queen
Marie-Antoinette because she did not pay the queen a customary visit after the birth of her child.\textsuperscript{44} Although this hardly confirms that Genlis disapproved of the nobility in general, it does perhaps hint that she did not agree with many of its rules and customs, or its excess.

Further supporting the argument for young girls being involved in the production of clothing, it is clear that their mistresses believed that the skills they learned might prepare them to become a wife and mother someday, enabling them to instruct their future children, especially female children, and helping them to provide for the family. In conclusion, these depictions of both the mistresses of boutiques and \textit{marchandes}, as well as their young charges, demonstrate that, at the outset of their introduction to society, such women participated in the fashion industries with good intentions, and made the best of difficult economic situations. While none of the characters in these works appear to be working toward wealth or notoriety, they are at least able to support themselves and prepare themselves for their future lives through honest, hard work.

\textsuperscript{44} Fauset 133
Chapter 3: The Fall from Grace of the Marchande de Modes

Although many marchandes de modes and other women involved in the clothing industries were merely attempting to make an honest living for themselves and pass on their knowledge and skills, these figures are more strongly remembered for the negative images and criticism they eventually inspired. This criticism likely stemmed, at least in part, from disapproval of the most famous marchande de modes, Rose Bertin. It is imperative to discuss Bertin if we link the evolution of the fashion and luxury industries with the marchandes de modes. She is significant for several reasons: she was a “social climber,” becoming well-known and successful not because of her birth but because of her talent; she was the first woman involved in the creation of fashion whose fame and success offered her a “celebrity status,” and she held previously unheard-of influence over the production and consumption of clothing and accessories thanks to her relationship with Queen Marie-Antoinette and other prominent women.

Mademoiselle Bertin held incredible sway over the fashionable women of France, and women were fascinated with her. This fascination was likely due to several factors. First of all, Bertin did not come from a wealthy background, and her success was almost entirely self-made, although she did depend on the patronage of wealthy and important women in order to get her start. Before becoming the most famous marchande de modes in France, Bertin was apprenticed to another marchande de modes. Eventually she was able to ascend the social ladder and open her own shop, Le Grand Mogol, in the fashionable Rue Saint-Honoré. A space such as Bertin’s magasin de modes was relatively new; previously, while bourgeois women might frequent shops in Paris, the highest members of the aristocracy ordered clothing to be brought to them at court, as it was not considered appropriate for them to mix with people of other classes. As such, one
consequence of Bertin’s notoriety was a new co-mingling of classes and a new set of issues regarding etiquette. Bertin’s shop inspired a frenzy in women of both high and low birth.

The *marchande de modes*’ shop, and that of Bertin in particular, was therefore problematic because of the near-hysterical attitudes it provoked in supposedly respectable women of the bourgeois and of the court mixing with those of the lower classes. Furthermore, the lavish displays of the *marchandes*’ boutiques posed a moral problem as well, sending their admirers into what were almost lustful hysterics:

Neither artist nor merchant, the *marchande de modes* acted as a bridge-or a buffer- between the working classes and the aristocracy, enjoying intimate access to the bedchambers and bodies of her social superiors, male and female; alternatively, the classes might mingle in her own luxurious *magasin*. As such, *marchandes de modes* were convenient (if problematic) symbols of class, consumption, and sexuality. By displaying themselves to public view in *magasins de modes* (fashion shops) and in the streets, *marchandes de modes* provoked controversy and curiosity. Furthermore, because they sold fashions to men as well as women, they were vulnerable to both moral attacks and physical importunities. (Chrisman-Campbell 54-5)

The *marchandes de modes*, while simultaneously enjoying great success and notoriety, were therefore also criticized as people who overstepped the boundaries of traditional etiquette and facilitated interaction between classes. Furthermore, because they sold to both men and women, their shops often fell under suspicion of being false fronts for prostitution. The sexual undertones of business transactions between shop girls and their male customers made for a compelling argument that these exchanges were not made with money alone. Eventually, the *marchandes de*
modes, who were once seen as decent and hardworking, were relegated to the ranks of prostitutes and madams.

Therefore, in sharp contrast to the benevolent, motherly figures described in the previous chapter, there were also many negative portrayals of women involved in fashion during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Long-held fears about fashion and luxury and how they could corrupt morals, notably those of women, were evidenced in works of literature at the time that featured marchandes de modes, lingères, etc. While in the early eighteenth century many contemporaries approved of marchandes de modes and agreed that it was better for women to dress other women, the marchandes’ positive reputation was short-lived. Kimberley Chrisman-Campbell explains how the marchandes gained this unfortunate reputation in the later eighteenth century:

Early eighteenth-century works of art and literature portray millinery as an honest and practical trade for a single woman, often in direct contrast to prostitution. By the late eighteenth century, however, “marchande de modes” was practically a code name for “whore.” The fact that Louis XV’s unpopular mistress Madame Du Barry had once been a marchande de modes may have contributed to the association. Racy novels like Nougaret’s Les Jolis Pechés d’une marchande de modes capitalized on the public’s eagerness to believe the worst, perpetuating false stereotypes in the process. (64)

While many of these literary works do not go to such extremes as characterizing the marchande de modes as “whores,” they were often portrayed as manipulative and self-serving, greedy, andimmoral. At the very least, even if the women themselves did not commit any wrongdoings in their boutiques, they often aided women in their deceptions by enabling them to
manipulate their husbands into spending money on clothing and accessories. The crime of these women was not only acting out of greed and vanity, but their actions also provided justification for men’s fears that fashion led women to be deceptive. As a result, men began to wonder if their wives might be deceiving them in other areas by being sexually unfaithful.

These kind of negative portrayals were also prevalent in works of theater at the time. One of the more practical reasons for an increase in these kinds of figures was that younger actresses wanted more roles which would allow them to play their own age as opposed to older women. Roles for women became more available in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the practice of having men perform women’s roles began to decline. One of the reasons that younger female characters began to appear in the theater, particularly in comedies, was that it was more difficult for a man to portray a young, beautiful woman than to play an older woman who could be caricaturized through heavy makeup and costumes.

Many of the plays that portrayed producers of fashion or their clients as manipulative or deceitful were not necessarily doing so in order to convey a moral warning, but rather to simply provide entertainment. The women in these plays were not particularly evil or immoral, but playwrights played upon women’s need for constant novelty and the effect these needs had on their husbands. This created comical situations in which there was often a misunderstanding between husband and wife. Such situations were especially evident in farcical plays, where marital disputes provided fodder for comic relief: “Important in the new comic vision were the manipulative femme d’intrigues, the demimondaine seeking respectability, and the rich widows on the hunt for titles of nobility” (Scott 208). In these farcical plays, male and female stereotypes played off one another in order to create a comical situation. The men were stingy and boring, and their shrewish wives fought against this by spending their husband’s money on frivolous pursuits.
such as fashion. Further complicating these matters, and adding to the irony of the plays, was the fact that the husbands were often penny-pinching because they were spending money on their mistresses, and often the wife’s desire to appear beautiful was to impress younger men.

Another issue demonstrated in these theatrical works was that the new system of fashion, taste, and consumption was upending traditional rules and order. It was often no longer possible to discern a person’s social status based on his or her clothing. This was due in large part to the increasing availability and fluidity of fashion, which disrupted long-established rules linked to class. Along with confusion about the rules governing what clothing people could wear came the blurring of rules governing who had access to the highest levels of the nobility, and who had influence on society. The middle and lower classes were gaining momentum and obtaining influence, and it was now possible for members of the bourgeoisie to purchase titles of nobility rather than obtaining them by birth or through marriage. While purchasing a noble title was not possible for a woman, it was possible for a woman to set her sights on a title by marrying a member of the nobility. As evidenced in many of the works in this chapter, some bourgeois were no longer satisfied with living a relatively comfortable “middle-class” lifestyle; they wanted to attain even higher levels of social status and wealth, and truly feel that they belonged in the highest elite. These issues are demonstrated in many theatrical works of the later eighteenth century, where it was no longer possible to rely on traditional orders and systems. The new and continuously evolving social situation in France forced new forms of literature and theater to appear, as old themes and structures longer made sense: “Classical comedy assumes a predictable world with known outcomes, but the late-century stage reflects a world in which appearance rules, class and rank are fluctuating and volatile, and that everything that that once was fixed is now unstable. According to Guy Spielmann, ‘the most significant dislocation was that of the family and
marriage” (Scott 208). While “dislocation” is perhaps an extreme term for the phenomenon occurring in the eighteenth century, many of the literary works of the time reflect a rejection of traditional family values. The breakdown of the traditional marriage and family portrayed in these plays could be perceived as criticism of the rejection of marriage and the family that had occurred in the early eighteenth century because by the end of the eighteenth century, France was returning to more traditional values. One major change was that by this point in time, even women of the aristocracy were being entreated to focus on their marriages and families in favor of the pursuit of pleasures and courtly distractions.

These farcical plays testify to the more problematic concerns that lurked behind criticism of fashion and luxury. While these works were comical, they also portrayed the serious problems occurring in male-female interactions, particularly within the realm of marriage. The first play analyzed in this chapter, *Les Bourgeoises à la Mode*, by Florent Dancourt, depicts two difficult situations that arose because of the new social order and changing values of the time: the dissolution of traditional marriage and family values, as well as the trend of *bourgeoise* women attempting to improve social standing with excessive luxury. The main characters in the play are M. Simon, a notary, his wife, Angélique, and their daughter, Mariane; M. Griffard, a commissioner, and his wife Araminte; Lisette, Angélique’s chambermaid; Mme Amelin, the fashion merchant; Le Chevalier (the Knight), who is in love with Mariane, and Frontin, the “schemer.” Frontin’s actual title is “Intriguant,” and he serves as a go-between for all of the intrigues occurring during the play.

The play opens with Frontin and Le Chevalier discussing Le Chevalier’s love interest, Mariane, and her mother, Angélique. Angélique is mocked for her excessive spending, which everyone is aware of except her, and she is used as a stereotypical representation of women who
spend money in excess in order to improve their social situation. Her character testifies to the fears
that once people in more social strati had access to luxury items, they would not be satisfied with
what was already available to them, but would be constantly craving more, sending themselves
into debt and upsetting the social and familial order.

Angélique is not a working woman, and therefore all of the money she spends and the
debts she creates belong to her husband. Although Angélique is mocked, her spending habits create
an advantage for Le Chevalier because he has convinced her to organize gambling games at her
home, allowing him more time around Mariane. When Frontin asks Le Chevalier what Angélique’s
husband thinks of all her spending and gambling, Le Chevalier reassures him that the notary takes
little notice of what his wife does because he is in love with Araminte, the Commissioner’s wife.
The audience learns that Le Chevalier also likes gambling and women, and that these propensities
have gained him a reputation. The implication is that in order to have a reputation as someone of
status, a certain kind of image is required; in this case, that of a playboy and gambler. In present
times, if someone is rich, they need to flaunt their wealth in order to be noticed by the right kind
of people. This attitude testifies to the current changing social climate which favors visible wealth
over rights and possessions obtained by birth.

Lisette, the chambermaid, further confirms that Angélique is the head of the household
and not her husband. When Frontin questions her about the notary and how much he knows about
Angélique’s gambling and spending, she answers that the notary is not really in charge, but this is
now typical of many bourgeois families. This situation also demonstrates the breakdown in
traditional marriage and family values where the husband would be in charge of most aspects of
family life, with the exception of raising children.
It becomes evident that Angélique only cares about her personal enjoyment in Scene V. When she finds out that her husband is in love with another woman, she is not heartbroken or betrayed, merely disappointed about her social status. Angélique serves as a symbol of the kind of woman many critics of the time feared would upend the traditional social and familial order; Jean-Jacques Rousseau being among them. Rousseau advocated for respect and restraint in women, and believed they should work hard to please their husbands and to raise their children well. Angélique embodies the opposite of these values. She has no desire to please her husband; rather, she delights in taking his money and complaining about him, and she has no real interest in her child other than attempting to make her a good marriage match in order to improve her own social situation. Angélique laments that she is not higher up in the social structure by asking Lisette « N’est-il pas vrai que j’étois née pour être tout au moins Marquise, Lisette? »45, and Lisette responds wisely, « Assurément. Mais aussi, Madame, ne faites-vous pas comme si vous l’étiez » (Dancourt 15)46. This exchange echoes the sentiments of Genlis, whose virtuous characters warn women not to act above their birth and their means, as well as Madame Ducostume. Angélique responds by complaining that she does not wish harm on anyone, she just wants to be able to enjoy herself, and she cannot do this as much as she would like because she is merely a notary’s wife.

The audience is then introduced to Mme Amelin, the marchande de modes, who arrives at Angelique’s home, asking to be paid what she is owed. As Angélique does not have any money, she asks Lisette to offer a diamond to Mme Amelin as payment. Angélique and Mme Amelin discuss the debts that are owed to Mme Amelin; many of her clients have borrowed from her or paid on credit, and she is sure that she will never be repaid all that she is owed. This exchange reflects another alarming trend at the time: many bourgeoise and aristocratic women paid

45 “Isn’t it true that I was born to be at least a marquise, Lisette?”
46 “Certainly. But also, Madame, do not act as though you were one.”
merchants exclusively through a system of credit; this is one of the reasons that many marchandes de modes, despite being successful at one time, ended up penniless, and perhaps helps to explain why their trade eventually essentially disappeared in favor of larger shops.

Furthermore, Mme Amelin confesses that she has a son who spends all of their money on women and gambling. She complains that the world has adopted an attitude of spending frivolously and pretending to be of higher social rank than one actually is: « C’est comme tout le monde aujourd’hui. On veut paraître ce qu’on n’est pas… » (Dancourt 23).\(^{47}\) Ironically, Madame Amelin is against someone pretending to have money when they do not, even though it is this kind of behavior that supports her business.

The audience then learns that Le Chevalier is Mme Amelin’s son, and his real name is Jannot. Mme Amelin confronts him, and asks him why he refuses to acknowledge her as his mother, and complains that he must be ashamed of her. Le Chevalier assures her that if he is recognized as her son, he will not be able to marry Mariane, because it would not be appropriate for the son of a fashion merchant to marry the daughter of a notary. When Le Chevalier encounters his mother at the notary’s home, he pretends to have no idea who she is. Mme Amelin, however, remarks that the Chevalier seems to be a good person, and Lisette reiterates that good people no longer exist and that good times are over. Mme Amelin also becomes aware that Angélique does not have the money to pay her; but she agrees to accept the diamond as collateral for the money that she is owed. Lisette confides in her Angélique’s problem with gambling, and that, although she has the diamond, she needs cash in order to play. The first act ends with Lisette complaining that she must serve as the go-between for everyone else.

\(^{47}\) “It is like everyone today. One wants to appear what one is not…”
In the second act, Angélique prepares to receive guests for gambling by spending money on furniture and items for playing, such as dice. She also receives a visit from Araminte, and the two ladies complain about their “stingy” husbands. In Scene VI, Lisette describes to the audience the plot Araminte and Angélique have created to “ruin” their husbands: « Elles vont tenir entre’elles un petit conseil contre leurs Maris, & sans cela que feroient-elles. Grace à l’avarice et la bizarrerie des hommes, c’est aujourd’hui la plus nécessaire occupation qu’ayent les Femmes » (Dancourt 43). This monologue reflects concerns about the breakdown of marriage and the family. Many members of the middle classes, particularly women, (although it is clear by the case of Jannot/Le Chevalier that this affected men as well) now thought that it was necessary to spend money in order to appear as someone who belonged in the right social circles. This being the case, obligations of marriage, family, and household were often cast aside, threatening the balance between genders and social classes.

The breakdown of marriage and the family in favor of appearance and social mobility is further confirmed by Lisette in Scene VIII. According to Lisette, it is now accepted as “natural” that husbands and wives are unhappy. M. Griffard, the Commissioner, arrives to question Lisette about her mistress and her husband. He asks about the state of their marriage and how they live together. Lisette responds: « Comme un Mari & une Femme. Ils sont toujours fâchez, se querellent souvent, se raccommodent peu, boudent sans cesse, se plaignent fort l’un de l’autre, & peut-être ont tous deux raison. C’est tout comme chez vous enfin, & n’est-ce pas par tout de même ? » (Dancourt 51).

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48 “They are going to keep a little counsel against their husbands, and without this what would they do. Thanks to the greed and bizarreness of men, today this is the most necessary occupation that women have.”

49 “Like a husband and wife. They are always angry, they quarrel often, they accommodate each other little, they pout constantly, they complain about one another, and they both might be right. It is just like at your home, and isn’t is the same everywhere?”
Lisette expresses that marriage equals misery, and the discord between her master and his wife is now commonplace. Rather than rejoicing in traditional domesticity, wives and husbands argue, complain, and live separate lives. The notary and his wife are perfect examples; the notary does not know what his wife is plotting behind his back, and he is unaware that she actually knows about his love for Araminte. Lisette senses that Griffard is also unhappy with his wife, and asks him if he might be in love with someone else (his “neighbor’s wife”). Here, the audience learns that Griffard is in love with Angélique, just as M. Simon is in love with his wife. Lisette warns Griffard to be careful, as it is impossible to trade wives, convenient as that would be. In the second act, Lisette makes more observations about the fragile state of M. and Mme Simon’s marriage, remarking that Simon seems to take care to avoid his wife: « La grande merveille! Vous dormez quand elle revient, vous voulez la voir quand elle dort, ou vous êtes sorti quand elle s’éveille, le moyen de vous rencontrer » (Dancourt 58). Even worse, Simon indicates to Lisette that his wife should be taking care of her household, and Lisette questions why Angélique, a notary’s wife, should lower herself to such levels. M. Simon responds that he only wishes her to remain in the household rather than going out constantly, and that he has no problem with her inviting people over, and he suggests Araminte as a good candidate for company. Of course, the audience knows that he suggests this in order that he might see more of Araminte. As this is what Angélique desires anyway, Lisette makes a final comment at the end of Act II: « Ah que les pauvres Maris sont bien nez pour être dupes! il va quereller sa Femme pour lui faire faire quelque chose qu’elle souhaite » (Dancourt 60).

50 “What a marvel! You sleep when she comes home, you want to sleep her when she is sleeping, or you have gone out when she wakes up, the way to meet one another.”
51 “Ah, how these poor husbands are born to be dupes! He is going to argue with his wife in order to make her do something that she wishes.”
The focus of the plot then shifts onto the relationship between the Chevalier and Mariane. Lisette and Mariane are still unaware of Le Chevalier’s true identity as Jannot. Mme Amelin comes to the notary’s home, asking about the diamond that Lisette supposedly brought to her, because she cannot find it. She complains to Lisette that her mischievous son must have taken it. She then asks Lisette if there are any young girls in the household who need to be married, and although she claims that she is just asking out of curiosity, Lisette suspects that she actually wants to try and make a match between her son and Mariane. Lisette is suspicious of this because Mme Amelin has consistently complained about her son being capricious and untrustworthy.

In a discussion between Lisette and Frontin, the two come to realize the irony of the situation concerning Araminte and Angélique and the fact that their husbands are in love with one another’s wives. In the next scene, rather than being angry that their husbands are in love with the wrong wives, Araminte and Angélique decide that the situation is a perfect way to enact revenge on their husbands for being greedy and cheap. The two women once again demonstrate that their personal enjoyment is more important than the love and happiness of their husbands, and the health of their marriage. Frontin and Lisette agree to help Angélique and Araminte enact their revenge. M. Griffard returns to the notary’s home, and Lisette confesses that she has told her mistress about his feelings. She also admits to him that Angélique has money problems, but she warns Griffard not to try and act the hero by helping her because it will only embarrass Angélique. She does, however, come up with a way in which he can help her. Lisettes confides to Griffard that Angélique likes to gamble, and that she does not always play with the most trustworthy people. She therefore encourages him to anonymously send Angélique money. Lisette explains that this is the most gallant way to help out Angélique; it will save her from embarrassment and also will avoid Griffard having any trouble with M. Simon, because he will never know who provided the money.
Although it has not been a focal point for the plot as of yet, the intrigue still remains of Jannot, who is posing as Le Chevalier. In the next scene, Lisette ironically points out to Le Chevalier that he might have a rival for Mariane’s affections: Jannot, the son of Mme Amelin, whom the audience knows to be one and the same. Another complication is added to the plot: Frontin threatens to reveal Le Chevalier as Jannot if he does not help him after his marriage is concluded. He asks for some materials in order to establish himself. One of the reasons for Frontin’s behavior is that he feels he should not be left behind by Jannot’s marriage, as they have grown up together and are essentially of the same social standing. Jannot, however, in pretending to be Le Chevalier and in securing a good marriage for himself, will move up the social strata, leaving Frontin in a tenuous situation. All that Frontin asks is for Jannot to help him, and, if he does so, Frontin promises « j’oublie l’égalité de nos naissances, & je vous regarde comme le Gentilhomme de France le moins roturier » (Dancourt 93).52 This exchange between Frontin and Janot emphasizes one of the key problems of the new society, which is based neither on birth nor on merit, but on wealth and image. Jannot is not noble by birth, and he is described several times as being roguish and sopp, so his character is not particularly admirable. However, because he looks and acts the part of someone wealthy and successful, he is accepted as so. One of the criticisms of the increased focus French society has on appearances and luxury at this time is that it allows people to be duped into believing that members of the common classes possess the same qualities as the aristocracy, and that birth and heritage are no longer the sole identifiers of class and birth.

The next scene again highlights the disintegration of marriage and family that often inspired farces such as Les Bourgeoises à la Mode. Le Chevalier finally makes his affections

52 “I will forget the equality of our births, and will look to you as the least common Gentleman of France.”
known to Mariane and proposes to her. Mariane is reticent because, having her mother and father as examples, she is under the impression that marriage means the end of love. Her desire for romantic love does not coincide with her understanding of marriage. The next scene between Angélique and M. Simon confirms this. Angélique claims that she has a headache, and M. Simon wonders how she is still alive after all the complaints that she has. They begin to exchange insults and list one another’s shortcomings, and a major part of their disagreement seems to be that each of them has a fundamental misunderstanding of the opposite sex. Angélique doesn’t understand men’s strange behavior, and Simon remarks that women complain too much. This passage demonstrates another contemporary issue: an increasing awareness of the differences between men and women and a difficulty bridging a gap between these differences. Previously, women were essentially viewed as weaker versions of men. They were expected to fulfill only the roles of wife and mother, and little thought was put into what might drive them and distinguish them from men. As perceptions of women changed, and women gained more independence, men were often left frustrated, not understanding why their wives were unhappy with the roles previously ascribed to them. In turn, many women did not understand why men wouldn’t go to any lengths to make their wives happy. Angélique and M. Simon’s marriage reflects an inherent lack of understanding between the sexes.

Lisette and Angélique then set into motion their plan to organize card games at home. M. Simon has already complained that Angélique is never home; Angélique calls their house her “prison,” but indicates that there might be a way to make it more bearable. She says that she should at least be able to enjoy herself at home, and Simon says that he has no problem with letting her entertain people, and suggests Araminte for company. Lisette points out that it could be to Simon’s benefit that Angélique holds a card game at home, since she could win a lot of money, and then he
would not have to give her any more: « Les femmes à qui leurs maris ne donnent point d’argent, ne sont pas toujours celles qui en dépensent le moins » (Dancourt 111). In reminding him that Angélique will find a way to spend money no matter what, Lisette manages to convince Simon to allow Angélique to hold a card game at their home, in spite of his concerns that the situation will make it seem as through he is putting on airs.

Frontin then tells M. Simon that Araminte is in debt and will be in trouble if her husband finds out, but that there is no way to help without embarrassing and upsetting her. Frontin therefore offers himself as a go-between: he will take the money and bring it to the people that Araminte owes. In the next scene, Le Chevalier complains that he is never going to convince Mariane to marry him without her father’s permission, and for this he needs money. Frontin reassures him that with the diamond he possesses they will find a way to obtain the necessary money, and suggests that they bring the diamond to a goldsmith to pawn. In Scene V of Act V, Lisette gives Angélique money and admits to her that the money was given to Frontin by M. Simon for Araminte- so the money that Simon intended for Araminte has been given directly back to his wife. The audience now knows that Frontin has been playing as a double agent. Angélique is angry that Simon gave Araminte so much when he refuses her, but Lisette reminds her that she is getting what she wants and taking revenge on M. Simon: « Nous nous vangeons assez bien de son avarice, il ne faut pas se plaindre » (Dancourt 212).

In the next scene, the goldsmith arrives at M. Simon’s, bringing with him the diamond that has caused so much trouble, and telling him that a young man brought it to him to sell. M. Simon tells him that this young man must be arrested. He discovers that it was Frontin who brought the diamond to the goldsmith, and naturally assumes that Frontin stole the diamond from

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53 “Women whose husbands do not give them money are not always those who spend the least.”
54 “We are avenging ourselves of his avarice rather well, it is not good to complain.”
him. Simon asks Frontin how he obtained the diamond, and Frontin tells him that his friend, Jannot, gave it to him, but Simon does not believe him. They argue: Simon demands his money, and Frontin demands the diamond. Lisette, Angélique, Mariane, Araminte and M. Griffard hear them arguing. In order to keep Frontin from being arrested and herself for being found out, Angélique pretends that Simon is mistaking the diamond for the one she owned and claims that it is not the same one.

Mme. Amelin arrives, and explains that Angélique gave the diamond to her in order to pay her debts while waiting for cash. M. Simon is shocked, but Angélique tells him that if he were not so stingy, she would not have had to resort to such drastic measures: « J’ai honte pour vous que l’excès de votre avarice me reduire à mettre en gage mes pierres, vous m’auriez épargné cette confusion, en me donnant ce Billet de mille écus, dont vous avez fait present à Madame » (Dancourt 228). M. Griffard now knows that Simon offered Araminte one thousand écus, and when he becomes angry, Araminte reassures him that she only accepted it in order to replace the two hundred louis that he gave to Angélique. Both men now realize that their wives have known about their misdirected affections all along. Mme. Amelin demands the money she is owed from M. Simon, and Angélique tells him that if he will give Mme. Amelin the money that is owed, she will forgive him for having given a thousand écus to Araminte. Upon hearing this, M. Simon claims « J’enrage : Je creve, & je renonce à toutes les femmes » (Dancourt 230). In the end, both Araminte and Angélique have paid their debts and gotten revenge on their husbands for being in love with another woman.

55 “I am embarrassed for you that the excess of your avarice reduces me to pawn my jewelry, you could have spared me this confusion, by giving me the bill of a thousand écus, of which you made a gift to Madam.”
56 “I’m furious: I die, & I renounce all women.”
In the final scene, Mme Amelin reveals that Le Chevalier is her son, Jannot. Mme. Amelin then tells Angélique that Jannot will inherit twenty thousand écus from her, and Angélique says that she will find a way to convince Simon to consent to Mariane and Jannot’s marriage, and also promises Araminte that she will find a way to fix things between her and Griffard. Lisette makes one final remark: « Par ma foi si les hommes donnaient à leurs femmes ce qu’ils dépensent pour leurs maîtresses, ils feroient mieux leurs comptes de toutes manières » (Dancourt 233).

Essentially, if men put in the same effort with their wives as they did with their “mistresses,” both husbands and wives would be much happier. Lisette confirms much of what has been said throughout the play: that the solidity of a couple depends on the wife’s happiness.

Several important themes can be observed throughout the play, and several components contribute to its farcical nature. First of all, the play reflects the “breakdown of marriage and family” that is often depicted in farces at this time. Both husbands and wives contribute to this breakdown. The husbands deceive their wives and are emotionally, if not sexually, unfaithful. On the other hand, the wives only care about money and appearances, and they are willing to ruin their husbands financially in order to obtain the luxuries they desire.

Furthermore, the play also demonstrates the relegation of maternal care to tutors and nurses that bourgeoise women took advantage once they had access to more wealth and a wider variety of activities, and which was a concern for many conservative, traditional critics. Although Mariane is not young and does not rely on her mother for care, she and Angélique do not share a strong mother-daughter bond. The two barely interact, and most of Mariane’s time is spent either with the chambermaid, Lisette, or her tutors, while her mother spends her time with her friends or out doing errands or shopping. Several comments throughout the play reflect that this has become

57 “By my faith, if men gave to their wives what they spent on their mistresses, they would be much more balanced in all senses.”
the norm: children remain at home in the care of nurses and tutors until they either begin a profession (in the case of males) or marry. Before, this behavior was mainly limited to aristocratic women, who were sometimes required to leave their children in the care of others as they fulfilled social duties. Now, with increased wealth circulating within the bourgeoisie, and increased pressure on members of the bourgeoisie to act and dress a certain way, bourgeois women have now fallen into similar patterns. The play therefore also demonstrates the breakdown of the home and domestic realm. The wives (Angélique and Araminte) do not take any pride in raising their children or running their home. They prefer to be outside, being seen and interacting with others. Angélique even goes as far as to call her home a prison. This demonstrates that society is becoming more open and more fluid: more people are allowed to interact with one another in a wider variety of settings than ever before, especially in the case of women.

The play also deals with the breakdown of traditional French society, and the role that the fashion and luxury industries have played in its restructuring. People can no longer rely on birth or even professions to distinguish who belongs to what class, as people often dress above their class and act above their means. For example, Jannot dresses and acts above his station, and is accepted as being Le Chevalier simply because he dresses and acts the part. Money apparently fixes everything in the new society, as evidenced by Angélique’s reaction when she finds out that Jannot is going to inherit twenty thousand écus, and is now willing to accept him as a viable suitor for her daughter. The women in the play are obsessed with fashion and appearances. The men are called stingy and greedy, but there is no actual indication that they are stingy and greedy apart from their wives’ complaints about not having sufficient funds for gambling or shopping; it is certainly not a case of the women going without basic needs. However, the women’s attitude implies that being able to purchase the latest luxury goods and accessories and having the means
to appear to be of a certain status are basic needs. All of these elements render this play a farce, and in doing so, the play puts into action concerns about the breakdown of family and marriage, and while the tone of the play might be comical, the content was a serious concern for critics at the time.

A similar play is Le Voile D'Angleterre Ou, La Revendeuse à La Toilette. Comédie-vaudeville En Un Acte by Charles François Moreau. This play centers on two couples, the De Sennevilles and the Bernards. M. de Senneville is a banker, and M. Bernard is a former merchant. The play opens with Madame de Senneville receiving letters asking her for money, but she already has many debts of her own. Madame Pichard, the marchande, arrives with a veil that she wants Mme de Senneville to buy. She attempts to convince Mme de Senneville to purchase the veil by describing its illustrious previous owners. Madame Pichard is not just a merchant, but is better categorized as a revendeuse à la toilette. Unlike marchandes de modes, who supplied the accoutrements for already-made gowns, and also provided accessories for hairstyles, a revendeuse would re-sell (“revendre” being the French word for “resell”) used items. She served as a kind of portable secondhand shop. By purchasing from and selling to revendeuses, women could update their wardrobes while spending less money. Even noblewomen often sold to revendeuses and then purchased new items, as under some circumstances they were only allowed to wear items a certain number of times in formal settings.

Madame Pichard tells Mme de Senneville that the veil was originally commissioned by an English nobleman, and that the previous owner was a young woman who wanted to resell it to pay her debts. Mme de Senneville confides to Pichard that not only can she not purchase the veil, but she already owes money. Mme Pichard has a clever idea: they will convince M. de Senneville to purchase the veil as a gift for Mme de Senneville, and then they will resell the veil and Mme de
Senneville can use the money to pay her debts. Mme Pichard claims to know the perfect person to resell the veil to: « Je connais...une grosse bourgeoise, qui demeure à deux pas d’ici, et qui paie tout comptant; elle achètera votre voile » (Moreau 6). However, Madame Pichard tells Mme de Senneville that they must be quick about selling the veil to this woman, as usually she debates over purchases with others, especially her husband, making sure that the item does not cost too much or make her look ridiculous. Mme Pichard claims that this makes her classless: « Cela a de l’ordre, des scrupules…Ce sont de petites gens » (Moreau 6). The implication here is that, by being frugal with money, this bourgeoise woman is not of the same class and good taste as Mme de Senneville.

Mme de Senneville does feel guilty about deceiving her husband, unlike the women in Les Bourgeoises à la Mode, but Mme Pichard reassures her that this kind of behavior from wives is normal now: « Toutes les femmes aiment la dépense; les maris ne prêchent que l’économie; il faut donc qu’un tiers intervienne pour assurer le paix du ménage » (Moreau 7). Contemporary gender stereotypes are reinforced here: wives want to spend money, and their husbands prevent them from doing so. Because of this conflict, there should be a way to keep both parties happy. In this case, “keeping the peace” involves the wife spending money without her husband finding out. The marchande serves as a manipulative outside influence who is willing to ruin marriages in order to earn money. By implying that it is low-class to have scruples about spending money and deceiving one’s husband, Mme Pichard gives the impression that she herself is without scruples, and reinforces negative stereotypes of marchandes. She is by no means evil, but certainly a bad influence and an enabler. In Scene IV, there is further implication that bourgeoise women are

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58 “I know...a wealthy bourgeois woman, who lives two steps from here, and who pays in cash; she will buy your veil.”
59 “They are law-abiding, scrupulous...They are people of modest means.”
60 “All women like spending; husbands talk only of economy; therefore, it is necessary for an outside party to intervene in order to assure the peace of the household.”
always seeking to improve their social status. M. de Senneville tells his wife that he has invited over M. Bernard and his wife, and Mme de Senneville protests, claiming that the couple are merely former merchants and that they should try and spend their time with people of a higher rank. Even amongst the bourgeoisie, there is competition, and “social climbers” like Mme de Senneville are always attempting to improve their social standing, be it through the right clothing or the right friends.

Mme de Senneville and Mme Pichard then put their plan into action. Mme Pichard arrives, and Mme de Senneville pretends that she has not already seen her, and complains to her husband that Mme Pichard is always pestering her to buy something. Mme Pichard apologizes by saying that she believed only M. de Senneville was at home, and she wanted to suggest the veil as a gift. In order to soften M. de Senneville, Mme. Pichard talks about how frugal Mme de Senneville is, and that she never wants to buy anything. This is, of course, merely part of the game she is playing to convince M. de Senneville to purchase the veil. M. de Senneville agrees to purchase the veil, despite his wife’s many protests that it is too expensive and that she does not need it. This provokes the question of why M. de Senneville agrees to buy the veil, which no one expects when Mme de Senneville and M. Pichard hatch their plan. There are two probable reasons: first of all, although M. de Senneville is likely frugal, he is not portrayed as being as stingy and strict as the husbands in *Les Bourgeoises à la Mode*. It almost appears as though M. de Senneville purchases the veil because he does not want to be thought of as stingy. Also, although there is clearly a disconnect between husband and wife in this play, M. de Senneville does appear to actually love his wife. He treats her kindly, and appears reasonable, so it is possible that he wanted to purchase the veil to make her happy.
The audience is then introduced to Madame de Saint-Hilaire, an actress who is an acquaintance of Mme de Senneville. Mme de Senneville tells her that she is expecting a visit from an annoying bourgeoise (Mme Bernard), and Mme de Saint-Hilaire agrees to stay so they may entertain themselves by making fun of Mme Bernard. M. and Mme Bernard arrive, and M. de Senneville, upon seeing Mme Bernard, asks « C’est donc la journée aux voiles? », noticing that Mme Bernard is wearing a veil extremely similar to the one he just purchased for his wife. Mme de Senneville realizes with horror that Mme Pichard was referring to Mme Bernard when talking about the scrupulous bourgeoise, and that Mme Pichard has resold the veil that M. de Senneville just purchased to Mme Bernard. The couples discuss how funny it is that Mme de Senneville and Mme Bernard have similar veils, and M. Bernard jokes about the situation that the two husbands are unknowingly in: « Le plus plaisant de l’aventure, c’est qu’on prétend que c’est un mari qui vient d’acheter ce voile et que sa femme le fait revendre, à son insçu, pour payer des dettes dont l’époux n’a pas connaissance » (Moreau 18). Mme de Senneville is horrified at the direction the conversation is taking, and steers them away from the discussion. M. de Senneville remarks that one of them is certainly being deceived. The discussion continues, with Mme de Senneville telling her husband that he is the one who “forced” her to buy the veil in the first place, and Mme Bernard complains that her husband never buys her anything, but bought her the veil. Mme de Senneville senses that her deception is going to be revealed, and laments « Ah! Je le vois bien, la ruse tourne presque toujours contre celui qui l’invente » (Moreau 23). She then admits her predicament to Mme de Saint-Hilaire, who understands and agrees to lend her the money she needs to pay her debts so that her husband will not find out about the money she owes: « Entre femmes il faut

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61 “Is today then the day of veils?”
62 “The most amusing adventure, is one claiming that it is a husband who has just bought a veil for his wife and whose wife resells it, without his knowledge, to pay debts that her husband is not aware of.”
63 “Ah! I see it well; the ruse almost always turns against the one who invented it.”
This exchange could be seen as a means of highlighting the fears that men are currently experiencing; that women’s desire for luxury is overtaking their affection for their husbands, and that women are conspiring against men, at the very least in order to mock them, but also potentially in order to live without them. At the time, there was also criticism against women having close friendships with other women. Women who spent too much time with other women were often accused of neglecting their husbands and children, and this occasionally led to accusations of unnatural relations between women. Marie-Antoinette, for example, fell prey to these kinds of accusations when she spent an extraordinary amount of time in the company of her closest friends, the Duchesse de Polignac and the Princesse de Lamballe, rather than spending time with her husband and children.

In the next scene between Mme Bernard and Mme Pichard, Mme Bernard asks Mme Pichard to sell her the cheaper version of the veil, insisting that her husband will never know the difference. Mme Pichard exclaims that she has never found herself in such a predicament: « Que j’ai été surprise tantôt, en voyant ici madame Bernard! Depuis que je vends à la toilette, jamais pareille chose m’était arrivée ; et cependant j’en ai bien vu ! » (Moreau 28). The following scene threatens to reveal the women’s deceit. M. de Senneville, who earlier has suggested that Mme de Senneville put on her veil, suspecting that what M. Bernard was joking about earlier is true, asks her again to put on the veil. Mme de Senneville refuses, saying that it would be pretentious and ridiculous to wear a veil in one’s own home, and M. de Senneville becomes angry, ordering her to put on the veil: « Ce n’est plus une prière que je vous adresse, c’est un ordre que je vous donne » (Moreau 32).

Mme de Senneville and Mme de Saint-Hilaire pretend to be shocked at his cruelty,

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64 “Between women it is necessary to oblige one another.”
65 “How surprised I was earlier, in seeing Madam Bernard here! Ever since I have been selling, never has such a thing happened to me, and yet I have seen a lot!”
66 “This is no longer a plea I address to you; it is an order that I give to you.”
and after it has been proven that the veil that Mme Bernard has is not the same as the one he purchased for his wife (Mme Bernard having switched her veil for the cheaper version), Mme de Saint-Hilaire rebukes M. de Senneville for accusing his wife and then attempting to apologize and remedy things straightaway:

Voilà bien les hommes ! …On a une femme charmante, fidèle, attaché à ses devoirs ; qui nous aime, nous chérit. Un caprice nous passe par la tête ; on injurie, on tourmente cette pauvre femme ; on l’accable de mauvais procédés. L’instant d’après, on reconnaît son erreur ; et l’on croit tout réparer en demandant pardon (Moreau 35-6)

M. de Senneville apologizes and offers to repurchase the veil, but Mme de Senneville says that it will remind her too much of the whole difficult situation. The play ends with Mme de Saint-Hilaire admonishing M. de Senneville, saying that he has ended up spending more money than originally needed as a result of not believing his wife about the veil in the first place: « Vous n’aviez d’abord payé ce voile que quinze cents francs; et maintenant il vous coute mille écus. Voilà ce qu’on gagne à soupçonner sa femme » (Moreau 37). M. de Senneville feels awful, Mme de Senneville is vindicated, and Mme Pichard receives her money. Once again the women succeed in tricking their husbands, and the marchande makes a profit. Although the play shares similar elements with Les Bourgeoises à la Mode, they are different in many ways. The main difference is that, while Le Voile d’Angleterre does employ the stereotype of the spendthrift wife who goes into debt behind her husband’s back, the marital discord within the couple is less obvious. While there is a conflict at the end with M. de Senneville “ordering” his wife to try on her veil, and Mme de Saint-Hilaire

67 “See how men are! One has a lovely wife, faithful, attached to her duties, who loves us, who cherishes us. A caprice comes into one’s head; one injures, one torments this poor woman; one weakens her with bad behavior. The moment after, one recognizes one’s error; and one thinks everything is fixed in asking for forgiveness.”

68 “You originally paid only fifteen hundred francs for this veil; and now it’s costing you one thousand écus. There you have what one gains for suspecting his wife.”
criticizing him for his attitude, overall, it does not appear as though the de Sennevilles have an unhappy marriage. M. de Senneville compliments his wife when Mme Pichard praises her frugality, and even though Mme Pichard is lying, there is a tender exchange between the De Sennevilles, as opposed to the Simons, who have only negative things to say about one another. Although both plays can be categorized as farces, *Le Voile d’Angleterre* is more light-hearted and comical, playing on the irony that Mme Bernard shows up in the veil that Mme de Senneville has just resold. On the contrary, *Les Bourgeoises à la Mode* portrays most of the characters as unpleasant and manipulative, and reinforces the idea that many people now see marriage as a miserable institution.

In a dissertation entitled *Defying domesticity: Prostitute-heroines of eighteenth-century French memoir novels and the public sphere*, Alistaire Tallent (of Vanderbilt University) writes about “erotic pseudo-memoirs” being one of the major categories of literary works during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries centered upon what he terms “prostitute-heroines.” For Tallent, the category is rather broad, and he defines a prostitute as “a female character who accepts some kind of financial support from a man in exchange for sexual favors outside marriage” (Tallent 82). While this definition seems obvious, it does allow for a certain amount of interpretation and imagination. Although Tallent does not discuss the following novel in his dissertation, one relatively well-known work which was popular at the time of its publication which combines the concept of prostitute-heroines with the declining morals of the *marchande de modes* is the “racy” novel *Les Jolis Péchés d’une Marchande de Modes, ou Ainsi Va le Monde* by Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret. While the novel is not written in the first-person narrative as are the memoirs that Tallent writes about, the main female character could be categorized as a prostitute-heroine.
The novel follows the lives of d’Ornival, a poor lawyer in Paris, and Rose, a marchande de modes. D’Ornival is an idealist who believes that hard work and talent will bring him fortune, whereas the narrator indicates that at the time in France, success and notoriety are not a result of hard work and personal merit; rather, one obtains them through connections and appearances, themes that echo the character of Jannot in Les Bourgeoises à la Mode. When the reader is introduced to d’Ornival, he is dying of hunger because he spends his time and money trying to become a member of high society: « Il ne songeait qu’à des titres, qu’à des places, qu’à des dignités; il ne s’occupait sans cesse que des moyens d’y parvenir; et, tandis qu’il se repaissait de ces brillantes chimères, il mourait de faim » (Nougaret 8-9).

D’Ornival senses the importance of good standing in society; however, his approach is rooted in a desire for self-improvement and the belief that hard work and talent can help one to reach his or her goals. While this can be true, the narrator emphasizes that talent and hard work are not always sufficient, especially when such a small group of members of society decide what is worthy of notice and what is not. It is clear from the beginning of the novel that d’Ornival is not going to reach his goals, and what is worse, as the reader soon learns, d’Ornival’s life is going to become even more difficult because he is going to fall in love: « Un malheur ne vient jamais seul…Nous venons de voir le héros de ce livre mourir de faim, ne pouvant percer dans le monde…rebuté des libraires et des comédiens; pour comble d’infortune, il va devenir amoureux » (Nougaret 26).

The object of d’Ornival’s affection is Rose, the marchande de mode of the novel’s title. This choice of name is interesting: perhaps it merely references the marchande’s youthful beauty,

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69 “He thought only of titles, of positions, of dignities; he worried constantly about ways to achieve this; and, while he thought over and over of these pipe dreams, he was dying of hunger.”

70 “Misfortune never arrives alone…we have just seen the hero of this book die of hunger, being unable to break into the world…rejected by publishers and comedians; to cap off his misfortune, he is going to fall in love.”
or perhaps it is a nod to the famous *marchande de modes*, Rose Bertin. The novel’s “heroine” comes from humble beginnings similar to those of Rose Bertin, being from a peasant family in a Provençal village who will eventually make a name for herself as a *marchande de modes*. Unlike Bertin, however, the novel’s Rose does not owe her success solely to her own ingenuity and the protection of powerful people, but to those people who wanted to benefit from her youth and beauty. Drawing from stereotypes about *marchandes de mode* and other women involved in the luxury trades, Rose becomes a courtesan/prostitute, and also a “fille entretenue,” or “kept woman.”

One of the main themes of the novel is the trajectory a woman’s life might take if she is attracted to luxury and high society, which is a concern many people had for women at the time if a marriage had not already been arranged, if the woman was not intending to become a nun, or if she was not employed in some kind of work deemed appropriate for women.

As previously mentioned, Rose came from humble beginnings but dreamed of having a better life. Throughout the novel she is courted by many men, but she deems none of them worthy of her. Eventually she is courted by a marquis, who whisks her away to Paris where she presumes that she will enjoy a life of luxury. However, the marquis abandons her, and she finds herself without protection or means. Fortunately, her landlady has a plan: she will introduce Rose to a magistrate who will have pity on her and take her under his protection. Rose agrees and is thankful for the landlady’s help; however, this help does not come without a price. The narrator describes the landlady and foreshadows what is to become of Rose: « L’hôtesse…aimait beaucoup à rendre service a son prochain, pourvu qu’elle y trouvât son compte. Elle était fertile en inventions, et n’était pas scrupuleuse sur les moyens d’amasser de l’argent » (Nougaret 36).\(^71\) The landlady introduces Rose to the magistrate, who claims that her situation has touched him and he feels

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\(^71\) “The hostess (landlady)...liked to help her fellow man, as long as she could find her reward in doing so. She had plenty of inventions, and she was not scrupulous about ways to accumulate money.”
obligated to help her, but as the reader can guess, the magistrate’s sole interest is not being of help to an orphan: «Ce n’était pas tout-à-fait les intentions du magistrat; il voulait que sa protégée le récompensât de ses bienfaits » (Nougaret 39).  

So begins Rose’s time spent as a “fille entretenue.” The landlady helps Rose by procuring her wealthy and willing suitors; in reality, the landlady is her madam, taking a share of Rose’s profits. The landlady promises Rose that she will take care of her if Rose shares part of her profits in exchange, and Rose abandons her virtue in order to benefit from the rewards bestowed upon her by her suitors: « L’argent faisait triompher les petits scrupules de la jeune innocente, qui profitait à merveille des leçons de sa rusée conductrice » (Nougaret 41). Rose continues to benefit from the many suitors she receives, until she eventually settles on one man as her benefactor.

Rondin is a financier who has become successful through his ambition and hard work, and mostly his tenacity. As evidence that Rondin actually cares for Rose, he encourages her to find a way to establish herself so that she will never again find herself in the state of ruin that occurred after the marquis left her. Rondin decides that the ideal “career” for Rose would be that of a marchande de modes. With the current emphasis on fashion and the desire for the new and novel, it is a lucrative trade. Furthermore, because this profession involves interacting with people of good taste and breeding, it is to Rose’s benefit that she is young and beautiful, because people will be more likely to buy from her. With the proper instruction, Rose can become successful in her own right as a marchande de modes. One of the most well-known marchande de modes becomes

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72 “This was not entirely the magistrate’s intention; he wanted the girl he protected to pay him back for his generosity.”
73 “Money triumphed over the scruples of the innocent young girl, who benefited marvelously from the lessons of her crafty conductress.”
74 Nougaret 93
Rose’s instructress, and Rose becomes learned in the profession. Everything seems to be in Rose’s favor until she meets a new lover.

This new lover turns out to be a cousin of Rondin’s who, finding himself in dire financial circumstances, becomes a beggar, and comes to Rondin looking for help. Rose takes pity on this cousin and vows to convince Rondin to help him, remarking that it is strange that Rondin gives her so much but is unwilling to help his relative. Of course, this is because Rondin and Rose’s “relationship” is mutually beneficial; Rose receives financial help and security, and Rondin benefits from their sexual relationship. Rondin refuses to help, however, and chastises Rose for daring to approach him with a request for help for his cousin. He leaves Rose, and his cousin, who has become Rose’s lover, is eventually arrested and sent to the colonies, where he is never heard from again. Rose is left alone once more.

However, this time, rather than falling into misery, Rose sells many of the things Rondin gave her, and uses the profits to establish a boutique in the fashionable rue Honoré. Eventually, Rose’s boutique becomes famous and sought-after. The parallels between the novel’s fictional Rose and Rose Bertin are clear. After receiving the patronage of Marie-Antoinette and other noblewomen and highly-placed bourgeoises, Bertin’s shop became the most fashionable and successful marchande de modes boutique. Although Rose of the novel’s patrons are not as illustrious as the queen herself, her shop is frequented by the fashionable elite of Paris, and « les dames ne voulaient être parées que des mains de la belle Rose, qui avait seule la vogue » (Nougaret 62). 75 This description of Rose’s boutique mirrors that of Rose Bertin’s boutique Le Grand Mogol. It, too, was located on rue Honoré, and it also became the only place for the truly fashionable to frequent once Marie-Antoinette had endorsed it.

75 “The ladies only wanted to be adorned by the beautiful Rose, who was the only one in vogue.”
After describing Rose’s background, the narrator returns to d’Ornival, who has the misfortune of being ambitious but poor and unknown, and furthermore, now that he has discovered the beautiful Rose, in love with someone he cannot hope to obtain. To make overtures to Rose, d’Ornival enters her boutique frequently, buying things that he cannot afford. Rose treats him kindly, but rejects his advances. D’Ornival becomes even more determined to become successful in order to become worthy of Rose’s love. The novel now introduces d’Ornival’s long-lost brother, an abbot who has become successful in Paris society through flattery and the right connections. The narrator highlights the difference between the abbot and d’Ornival on their quests for fortune: « l’abbé…ne prétendait percer dans le monde qu’à force des intrigues et de soupless; au lieu que d’Ornival s’imaginait bonnement que le mérite seul conduisait à la fortune » (Nougaret 71). The abbot describes to d’Ornival how he came to be successful through his connections with a duchess.

After regaling d’Ornival with the story of his success, the abbot promises to help his brother. He begins thinking about what he could do to help when he is approached by an English stranger. The Englishman explains that he is in possession of paperwork which apparently claim that he is the descendant of Portuguese royalty, making him a prince, but he cannot understand the documents. The Englishman feels in his heart that he is a great man, especially because he likes gambling and beautiful women as all successful, wealthy men do. Furthermore, he suggests, « Ce qui prouve encore mieux que je suis véritablement un grand seigneur, c’est que j’aime beaucoup à jouir de tout sans rien payer » (Nougaret 97-8). Nougaret appears to be making fun of the nobility who take advantage of the finer things in life without having to pay for them. The abbot agrees to translate the documents for the Englishman, but when the Englishman returns a few days

76 “The abbot…did not attempt to make his way in the world other than through intrigues and flexibility; while d’Ornival quite simply imagined that merit on its own would lead to fortune.”
77 “What proves even more that I am truly a great lord, is that I like rejoicing in everything without paying for it.”
later, the abbot tells him that, unfortunately, the papers are merely letters and other documents of little value, and have nothing to do with him being a prince.

The narrator shifts focus back to Rose, who has become increasingly successful. She has numerous clients and suitors, and sometimes the men who enter her shop serve as both. She also still sees d’Ornival often, and eventually she realizes her love for him, but she does not admit it. However, at one point, d’Ornival disappears from her view. His brusque departure causes Rose to realize how much she loved him, and she falls into despair. Meanwhile, although Rose has been successful and has managed to stock her boutique with the most current fashions, she eventually finds herself in financial trouble again because her wealthiest patrons have all been paying on credit, a common practice at the time which eventually ruined many marchandes de modes and other members of the fashion trades: « Elle faisait…tant de crédits, qu’insensiblement elle épuisa son fonds. Il n’y avait guère que les bourgeoises et les gens du commun qui payassent comptant chez elle » (Nougaret 109). Rose attempts to collect from those who owe her money, and is not repaid but rather rebuffed by all those who owe money to her. The people who sought her out to satisfy their needs for the latest fashions now refuse to even meet with her. In order to not end up completely destitute once again, she becomes a chambermaid for a countess. The countess is haughty and treats Rose cruelly, and even the Count dislikes his wife, which inspires him to seduce Rose: « On pretend que notre femme-de-chambre sut resister aux caresses, aux offres séduisantes du vieux comte: je laisse au lecteur la liberté d’en croire ce qu’il lui plaira » (Nougaret 118).

Rose lives miserably as a chambermaid for a while, until one day a beautiful carriage arranges at the home of the Count. A completely transformed d’Ornival arrives and claims he has

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78 “She took...so many credits, that imperceptibly she exhausted her funds. There were only the bourgeoises and the commoners that paid cash at her boutique.”
79 “We can claim that our chambermaid knew to resist the caresses and seductive offers of the old Count: I will give the reader the liberty to believe what would please him.”
come to take his princess away. He rescues Rose and explains to her why he disappeared for so long. He sought to become worthy of her, and sought help from his brother the abbot, who found a way to help by turning d’Ornival into a prince. The abbot explains about the documents that the Englishman gave him, which actually did indicate the possession of a royal title. The abbot decided to use these to turn d’Ornival into a foreign prince, himself being too recognizable to attempt this. The abbot and d’Ornival use the titles and some well-crafted stories to turn him into a wealthy and respected man. Upon establishing his fortune, d’Ornival seeks out Rose, who leaves with him to become a princess. She is then transformed into a spoiled noblewoman similar to the countess she worked for: she is always complaining and is constantly ill. She has also become vain and ridiculous: « On ne savait guère de quelle couleur était son teint ; le rouge et le blanc le couvraient d’un demi-pied. Ses oreilles, chargées des pendeloques, portaient un poids énorme, que la vanité lui rendait léger » (Nougaret 133). \(^80\) Rose has transformed into one of the vain, besotted women she used to serve, and d’Ornival has abandoned his principles about hard work and personal merit in order to be rich and have Rose as his wife.

Eventually, Rose and d’Ornival, listening to the abbot’s wise advice, decide that they need to be careful about flaunting their wealth, fearing that someone could discover their secret. Rose and d’Ornival leave the country with their fortune to establish themselves quietly in a country where nobody can recognize them. The narrator makes some final remarks about Rose’s trajectory:

Ainsi finit l’histoire du fameux d’Ornival et de mademoiselle Rose qui, de paysanne devint fille entretenue, ensuite marchande-de-modes, après cela femme-de-chambre, puis princesse, et de princesse rien du tout. Son amant et

\(^{80}\) “One hardly knew what color her complexion was; she was covered almost completely in rouge and white powder. Her ears, heavy with pendants, held an enormous weight, made light by her vanity.”
elle jugèrent à propos de se retirer prudemment, sans doute pour nous montrer que la grandeur ne doit pas durer toujours. (Nougaret 141-2)\textsuperscript{81}

The narrator makes a commentary about grandeur not lasting forever, especially when that grandeur has been achieved through false means, possibly indicating a stance that grandeur is only genuine when acquired at birth. He also makes an interesting commentary about the possible reception of this novel. While the novel takes place post-Revolution, it has been included in this dissertation because it demonstrates the aforementioned “fall” of the marchande de mode, who was once regarded as a benevolent figure, but who eventually attained the reputation of prostitute. However, although the novel was published after the Revolution, the narrator is clearly referring to the time before the fall of the ancien régime when marchandes de modes were prevalent. Therefore, he makes a commentary to those who might accuse him of being too concerned with the past: « Qu’on ne m’accuse pas de n’avoir tracé que les mœurs et les ridicules de l’ancien tems, dans cette esquisse fidelle des travers du monde. Il m’est facile de faire voir…que les républicains Français, malgré leurs graves prétentions, seront tout aussi peu raisonnables, aussi vicieux, que lorsqu’ils vivaient sous le régime corrupteur des rois » (Nougaret 143).\textsuperscript{82} The narrator boldly criticizes the new social order by stating that every new generation or new regime thinks themselves better, more enlightened, more intelligent than the previous one, but men’s nature will never change, and people will always be vying for a better place in society, and will always be willing to abandon their principles in order to improve their situation.

\textsuperscript{81} “Thus ends the story of the famous d’Ornival and Miss Rose who, from a peasant became a kept woman, then a fashion merchant, then a chambermaid, then princess, then from a princess nothing at all. She and her lover judged it prudent to excuse themselves, certainly in order to show us that grandeur cannot last forever.”

\textsuperscript{82} “So that one does not accuse me of only having traced the vices and ridicules of the ancient time, in this faithful sketch of the ways of the world. It is easy for me to make clear…that the French republicans, in spite of their pretentions, will be just as unreasonable, just as vicious, as when they lived under the corruptive regime of the kings.”
The narrator finishes with commentaries about people in high positions and those attempting to achieve higher positions: people will always try to become richer at the expense of others and will allow others to live in misery while they live in luxury; people will always look down at people in worse positions, even positions that they formerly occupied. In short, people are hypocrites and are unlikely to change. This commentary applies to Rose, a peasant who became a princess and who, in doing so, began to look down at those who had once looked down on her. For example, rather than remembering her own misery and treating her former mistress, the countess, with kindness, once Rose has become a princess, she treats the countess with disdain. In turn, the countess grovels before Rose, and the narrator indicates that the reader might find this strange. Why would a countess act this way toward her former chambermaid? The narrator responds, « L’on a de la hauteur que pour ceux qui sont moins que nous » (Nougaret 135). This phenomenon mirrors the narrator’s earlier comments that, in spite of the lofty and high-minded ideals of the new French republic, people will always be attempting to improve their situation, and they are willing to do so at the expense of others.

Lastly, the narrator makes a comment about women and their « jolis péchés », invoking the novel’s title : « Est-ce que la plupart des femmes ne seront pas toujours d’aimables trompeuses, qui ne connaîtront la constance, la fidelité, que dans les romans, et dont la vie ne sera qu’une suite des jolis péchés ? » (Nougaret 144). Once again, a comment is made about woman’s nature. The narrator implies that women will remain the same no matter how society changes. Certain women will always use their beauty and charm for trickery and deceit, and in doing so, they will never have stable lives. The narrator does not seem to begrudge women their actions, he simply accepts

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83 “One has haughtiness only for those who are less than us.”
84 “Won’t the majority of women always be likeable deceivers, who will know constancy and fidelity only in novels, and whose lives will only be a succession of pretty sins?”
that this is the way of the world. This is again reflected in the novel’s alternate title, « Ainsi va le monde », roughly translated as “Thus goes the world.” However, the narrator is possibly making a commentary that women would lead happier lives if they could learn to be content with what they have rather than constantly searching for the next luxury or new trend. What can be taken from this novel is that the nature of people will never change even as society does; in spite of the fact that the Revolution has abolished the nobility and there is a new focus on returning to classic values, people are still selfish and hypocritical at heart. The tone of Nougaret’s novel is not bitter; rather, the narrator appears amused at the hypocritical behaviors of high-minded men and women, and accepts that this is the way of the world and always will be. His perception of the world contradicts the political and social atmosphere at the time, which implies that change is important and necessary, and that people should always be attempting to improve themselves.

Rose could certainly be categorized as a “prostitute-heroine,” although she does not possess all of the same qualities of the characters discussed in Defying Domesticity, nor does she necessarily have the same experiences (for example, almost all of the women Tallent refers to die by the end of the novel). However, she does fit into the larger idea of what a prostitute-heroine is able to accomplish through her defiance of traditional female domestic roles. Tallent discusses the freedoms these prostitute-heroines achieve by “defying domesticity” and being able to support themselves: “these characters…transgress social boundaries through their careers and adventures…the general pattern is the rise of a woman of low class…to wealth, fame and status thanks to her sexual liaisons with nobler and wealthier men” (Tallent 128). While Rose is eventually able to support herself on her own through her marchande de modes business, her business was only made possible through the patronage of a wealthy man. And while it may seem that these prostitute-heroines are independent, Tallent cautions that male fantasy permeates the
novels, and therefore, the women are never truly independent. For example, in *Les Jolis Péchés*, one can think of d’Ornival’s gazing at Rose through her shop window, making her an object of male desire even as she is establishing her own business. The novels are also written by men, and these two elements prevents these novels from being interpreted as feminist works. Be that as it may, these novels do present an alternative to the virtuous model of womanhood and domesticity that philosophers and writers like Rousseau advocated for at the end of the eighteenth century, and, as Tallent points out, “It was a time when characters who did not normally fit into society were given a voice” (199). A novel such as *Les Jolis Péchés* thus embodies several important themes. It presents an alternative path of life for women, it demonstrates the fall of the *marchande de modes*, who is now associated with prostitution rather than virtue or social mobility, and it touches on questions of wealth, social status, and the social order of the New Republic.

One of the ways that *Les Jolis Péchés* can be distinguished from other novels depicting a descent into prostitution during the eighteenth century is that Rose is eventually able to extricate herself from her situation by establishing herself as a *marchande de modes*. However, at the outset, without a benefactor, Rose, who has no skills or marriage prospects, has few options for supporting herself. When she is first obligated to prostitute herself, “supporting herself” truly means being able to find lodging and food. By making an agreement with her landlady/madam, Rose can remain in her apartment, and still has a benefactor, although in this case their relationship is strictly business. This sequence of events seems to support critics’ arguments that women without skills or marriage prospects would fall into prostitution, and that a stable occupation might prevent this from occurring. In Rose’s case, her eventual job as a *marchande de modes* allows her to stop being a prostitute, although it is hinted that she does still “entertain” men, but perhaps that is for her own sexual enjoyment or desire for companionship.
The next play differs from the previous plays included in this study because it does not focus on household disputes and deceit, nor does it make commentaries on the state of marriage and the family. *La Lingère du Marais: Ou, La Nouvelle Manon Lescaut: Vaudeville En Trois Actes*, by Achilles Dartois, does, however, showcase women employed in the clothing trades using coquetry to achieve higher social standing and/or obtain material goods. In *La Lingère du Marais*, the central female character is not a *marchande de modes* but a *lingère*, a woman who made or sold linens; although a *marchande de modes* does appear as a secondary character; she is the cousin of Manon, the *lingère*. The play opens with Adolphe, an architect, and his friend, Saint-Gervais, walking in the Boulevard du Temple, in the area of Paris known as Le Marais. They are watching the various merchants and looking for Manon, a *lingère* whom Adolphe admires and wants to point out to Saint-Gervais. Adolphe mentions to Saint-Gervais that she is nicknamed “Manon Lescaut” because she comes from a town on the L’Escaut river, and Saint-Gervais remarks « C’est un nom qui promet », certainly referring to the anti-heroine of the novel *Manon Lescaut*, a central eighteenth-century novel which will be discussed in the next chapter (Dartois 6). The audience soon learns that Manon is already being courted by a man named Débineux, and Débineux’s father has just promised him the money to ask for Manon’s hand in marriage. In the following scene, Manon and her cousin Prudence, a *marchande de modes*, remark that it seems that fewer young people are getting married lately. Manon remarks « Les femmes sont peut-être trop coquettes » as a possible reason for the current attitude toward marriage, and Prudence replies « C’est le climat de Paris », indicating that Paris is becoming increasingly immoral and people are abandoning traditional values such as marriage (Dartois 11). As the women walk with Débineux, various

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85 “That is a promising name.”
86 Women are perhaps too coquettish.”
87 “That’s the atmosphere of Paris.”
merchants try to tempt them with finery, such as a necklace or some cashmere. Débineux remarks that it is sad that he cannot buy any of these things for Manon: « Ça me fend le cœur! ...ne pas pouvoir lui faire un petit cadeau! » (Dartois 14). Débineux has clearly recognized that Manon would like to have more money, judging by the delighted reaction she has while looking at the finery.

In Scene V, Adolphe and Saint-Gervais approach Manon and Prudence, and Saint-Gervais remarks to the audience how “charming” he finds their modesty. They ask the two women to attend the ballet with them, and although Manon is reluctant, Prudence reassures her that Débineux will never know. However, while attending the ballet, a fight breaks out between Adolphe and another patron, who turns out to be Débineux, who is subsequently arrested. Manon, upon recognizing Débineux, faints. Act II opens with Manon being revived, and Saint-Gervais explains to Manon that Débineux has been arrested because Saint-Gervais and Adolphe planted a watch on him and pretended that he stole it from them. However, Prudence arrives to explain that this is all an innocent mistake. Manon asks Adolphe if he can help Débineux because he was only trying to make her happy and there was nothing sinister behind his actions. In order to leave Adolphe alone with Manon, Saint-Gervais offers to accompany Prudence to her boutique.

The next scene implies the lengths women are willing to go to in order to acquire status and wealth. Adolphe agrees to help Débineux, but tells Manon that that Débineux is his rival, because he loves her, too. Manon, surprised, answers « Vous m’aimez ? Un homme riche comme vous, une petite lingère comme moi…c’est-il glorieux ! Mais, j’y pense, moi ! si vous m’aimez, vous devez m’obéir et faire Adolphe tout ce que je voudrai ! » (Dartois 29). Adolphe agrees to

88 “This breaks my heart…not being able to offer her a little gift.”
89 “You love me? A rich man like you, a little linen seller like me…how glorious this is! But, I think, myself! If you love me, you must obey me and do everything that I would like!”

this and says that the only thing he asks of her is that she accept an apartment and some jewels from him. However, he adds that she may no longer see Débineux, and although at first Manon claims that she cannot live without him, she quickly agrees to try and forget him, and she becomes the mistress of Adolphe’s apartment. It eventually becomes clear that Saint-Gervais also has designs on Manon, and he attempts to seduce her with champagne. While Saint-Gervais goes to look for the champagne, Manon describes the new luxury surrounding her: «Moi devenue maîtresse de maison, logée, parée comme une banquière» (Dartois 35). The use of the word “mistress” is interesting and significant. While “mistress” is intended by Manon to mean that she is in charge of the household, it also seems to imply that Manon is a mistress in the sexual sense, as she has no actual connection to Adolphe.

However, in the next scene Manon reveals that she has not yet engaged in relations with Adolphe. While she is admiring herself and talking to herself about her new status, Débineux has scaled the wall and climbed through the window. Débineux points out to Manon what his love for her has driven him to do, and asks her what she has exchanged for her new riches and status: «Et qu’as tu donné, toi, pour tout cela?», but surprisingly Manon replies «Je n’ai rien donné…encore» (Dartois 36-7). Although it is surprising that Manon has “given nothing” yet, the implication is that she owes Adolphe for all of the gifts and status he has given her, and that eventually she will repay him with sex. As such, although Manon is not being portrayed as a prostitute, once she has had relations with Adolphe, she can be considered a “fille entretenue.” Débineux reminds her that no amount of riches can replace what she is willing to give up:

90 “Me, become mistress of a house, lodged, dressed like a banker’s wife!”
91 “And what have you given, you, for all of this?”
92 “I have given nothing…yet.”
Tu n’auras pas tant d’élégance,
Tu n’auras pas diamans, et coetera…
Mais il t’rest’ra ton innocence,
Et rien ne vaut ce bijou-là !... 

The “bijou” that Débineux mentions is Manon’s virginity, which is an important theme throughout the play and an important moral and societal theme at the time. Questions of virginity, morality, modesty, and purity were all considered important factors in determining a woman’s character and worth. It is also implied earlier in the play that Manon’s purity and virginity are attractive factors, especially to Saint-Gervais, who exclaims that her modesty is charming. What is interesting in Manon’s case is that, unlike Rose in Les Jolis Péchés, Manon does not particularly need a male benefactor to support her. She supported herself as a lingère before she met any of the men pursuing her, and she was engaged to Débineux, who, although the reader never learns his profession, seems to be of good standing and was going to receive money from Manon’s father before asking for her hand in marriage. Therefore, Manon’s acceptance of Adolphe’s proposal appears to be entirely based on a desire to improve her social standing and have access to more luxuries. However, unlike many of the women portrayed in the literary works discussed here, Manon does not appear to orchestrate this out of greed or spite, and she seems to genuinely care for all of the male figures in the play. Rather than being portrayed as manipulative and acquisitive, she is portrayed as naïve, perhaps merely too dazzled by the riches bestowed upon her by Adolphe to realize what she is doing to her virtue and how she has abandoned Débineux.

In the following scene, Saint-Gervais and Adolphe enter. Débineux, having been drenched by the storm while climbing up to Manon’s room, is wearing Adolphe’s dressing gown and eating

93 You will not have as much elegance, You will not have diamonds, et cetera…But your innocence will remain, And nothing is worth as much as this jewel!...
the supper intended for Manon and Saint-Gervais. Calling him a thief, Adolphe and Saint-Gervais chase Débineux out of the house. Act III opens, and it is revealed that Manon has been put in the care of her uncle Lefort, an innkeeper. He is keeping her under lock and key in a room at his inn, in order to put a stop to the escapades in which she has participated. Lefort makes an important comment about Manon’s appearance even while under house arrest: « Ce que c’est que la coquetterie!...malgré le costume grossier que je lui ai fait prendre, elle a encore trouvé le moyen d’avoir un air requinqué ». This description of Manon once again reinforces her image of innocence, youth, and freshness: even in an ugly outfit she appears beautiful and young, and with the simplest adornments she remains charming and desirable. Lefort notices a few additions to Manon’s outfit, which she explains have all been given to her as gifts from various male members of his staff, and which include a rose and a scarf. She has used all of these gifts to embellish her outfit. This scene emphasizes that even under lock and key, Manon still receives male attention.

Since Lefort is preparing for a wedding at the inn, he hires a local lady named Madame Gervais to watch over Manon while he is busy. In reality, the woman is Saint-Gervais in disguise. While he is in disguise, Saint-Gervais attempts to discover Manon’s feelings for him. When “he” suggests Saint-Gervais as a worthy candidate of Manon’s affections, Manon exclaims « Si vous saviez, ma bonne, c’est qu’il est bien laid! » (Dartois 51). Saint-Gervais brushes Manon off, saying that men with looks like Saint-Gervais’ will always be in style. The wedding festivities begin, and in the next scene, it is revealed that Adolphe is also at the wedding, disguised as a sailor. Manon realizes that one of the members of the wedding band, a blind violinist, is also known as a kind of fortune teller, and asks “Madame Gervais” to take her to him so that she can ask what

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94 “This is what coquetry is! In spite of the coarse outfit I have made her take, she has again found a way to have a refreshed air.”

95 “If you only knew, my good lady, how ugly he is!”
awaits her in the future. Adolphe appears at Manon’s side, saying that he is willing to run away with her; meanwhile, Saint-Gervais tells the blind fortune-teller to mention him to Manon so that she will believe her future is with him. The blind man is revealed to be Débineux. After some dancing, Manon is returned to her room, but when “Madame Gervais” arrives to check on her, she is gone—the bars on her window have been broken, and her window looks out over the river. Saint-Gervais goes in search of Lefort, who laments having locked Manon up, believing that she must have drowned after escaping her room. Lefort clearly believes that Manon either escaped trying to rejoin her lover and drowned, or that she committed suicide out of despair.

In the next scene, however, the opposite is revealed: Manon appears wearing a wedding gown and is on Débineux’s arm; clearly they have just been married. Adolphe explains « C’est Prudence et moi qui avons arrangé tout cela pour ce petit nigaud de Débineux » (Dartois 67). Lefort asks how this was possible when the wedding was arranged and paid for by a bourgeois, and Adolphe explains « C’est moi le bourgeois…c’était pour le mariage de Manon » (Dartois 68). Saint-Gervais, still disguised as Madame Gervais, admonishes Manon, « Jeune fille, souffrez un petit grain de morale…Plus de coquetterie dorénavant » (Dartois 68). When Manon reassures “Madame Gervais” that she will no longer be a coquette, Saint-Gervais mutters under his breath, clearly bitter, and says to the audience « Votre penitence n’est pas finie! Elle commence! » (Dartois 68). This exclamation could be interpreted as Saint-Gervais intending to seek revenge for having been tricked and losing Manon, but more than likely it is a comment that Manon’s penance for all of her coquetry will be that she will be bored and lonely once she is married.

96 “It was Prudence and me who arranged all of this for the little sot Débineux.”
97 “I’m the bourgeois…it was for Manon’s wedding.”
98 “Young girl, suffer through a small lesson of morality…No more coquetry, from now on.”
99 “Your penance is not finished!…it is beginning!”
The ending of this particular play is quite confusing to the audience/reader. Of the other works discussed here, its ending most closely resembles that of *Les Jolis Pêchés*: it ends happily with a wedding, which was a common way to end a comedy (and remains so today). However, there is no resolution at the end as there is with many of the other works discussed. While it does end with what appears to be a moral lesson from “Madame Gervais,” there is no rational process leading up to this ending, and the audience is left with many questions and possible reasons as to how and why the surprise ending occurred. There is no explanation of why Adolphe and Prudence arranged for Manon and Débineux to have their surprise wedding, and why Adolphe appears to have given up on Manon. One possible explanation is that Adolphe preferred Prudence to Manon and they formed a couple, but in this case it makes little sense as to why they arranged a wedding for Manon and not themselves, and no actual indication of a romantic relationship is made. Another possible explanation is that Adolphe realized that Manon could never love him like she loved Débineux, and in an act of generosity and kindness, Adolphe decided to help them. Perhaps Adolphe did still love Manon, but decided her happiness was more important than his. Whatever the true reason, this particular play differs from other works discussed here because, while Manon is coquettish and perhaps a bit manipulative, she does preserve her innocence as far as the audience knows and presumably remains a virgin until her marriage. All the moral warnings about the dangers of coquetry seem to have affected her, and the truly “immoral” character in this particular play is Saint-Gervais, who attempts to seduce Manon and who has no scruples about doing so, even behind his best friend’s back. Perhaps, then, the moral lesson of this play is not a lesson against greed, materialism, and women’s sexual immorality, but a warning about male lust and the danger it poses to young girls.
The last play to be examined in this chapter is *Les Lanciers et Les Marchandes De Modes: Pièce en Un Acte, Mêlée de Couplets* by Benjamin Antier. At first, this play resembles the pedagogical works of La Comtesse de Genlis. Its main characters are Mme. Vesta, a *marchande de modes*, the young women who work in her shop, and the *lanciers* (lancers) in the French military who are stationed near them in a village on the Spanish border. The background indicates that Spain and France are at war. In the first scene, Madame Vesta warns the girls about the lancers, because she has seen the girls admiring them. She reminds the girls that although they are free and living in a foreign country, they should not abandon their morals and virtue: « Vous êtes majeures ou émancipées, vous êtes donc vos maîtresses, et je sais fort bien qu’on n’est pas venu jusqu’à notre âge sans savoir qu’on a des yeux pour voir et un cœur pour sentir » (Antier 5). Madame Vesta is sympathetic but stern, and reminds the girls that she has a certain amount of authority over them, and furthermore, a responsibility to oversee their reputation as well as hers: « Mais, j’ai le droit d’exiger…d’après ma qualité de seule marchande de modes française du lieu…qu’on se respecte pour le monde, et qu’on ait toujours l’air modeste » (Antier 5). Of course, Madame Vesta is implying that any inappropriate behavior on their behalf will reflect poorly on her and will be bad for business. This seems particularly relevant because the women are far from home and their country is involved in a war, so their situation is precarious. The young girls complain that Madame Vesta is getting old and doesn’t really understand them.

In the next scene, it is revealed that Thérésa, who is Spanish, is in love with one of the lancers, Loignon. Loignon visits her while the others are out, and Thérésa gives Loignon food and drink. Loignon recounts the stories of the women he has met on his various travels around the

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100 “You are of age or emancipated, so you are your mistresses, and I know well that we have not reached our age without knowing that we have eyes to see and hearts to feel.”

101 “But, I have the right to demand…that considering my quality of the only fashion merchant in this area…that we respect ourselves, and that we always have a modest air.”
world as a soldier, and when Thérèsa admonishes him, he explains that it is not his fault that women find him irresistible (Antier 11). Thérèsa reminds him of his promise to marry her. The other shop girls and lancers arrive, and they complain that they must remain at their posts while such beautiful girls are waiting for them nearby. The lancers invite the shop girls to join them for a revue organized by the French army. While the girls are explaining that Madame Vesta will never allow it, Madame Vesta herself arrives, and the shop girls find various hiding places for the lancers. Madame Vesta has errands for each of the girls, and when they complain, she scolds them, saying « Lorsqu’il faut sortir pour les affaires, on n’a jamais le temps…Mais si c’était pour votre plaisir… » (Antier 18).  

The girls leave for their errands, and Mme Vesta remains alone with the Captain, whom she has summoned. The audience knows that they are not really alone, as the lancers are all hidden in the shop. Mme. Vesta tells the Captain she worries what being alone with a man will do to her reputation, but the Captain reassures her « Madame, votre vertu est au-dessus de tout soupçon » (Antier 19). Although this could be interpreted as saying that Madame Vesta is so virtuous and respectable that no one would ever doubt her, the implication appears to be that because Mme Vesta is “old,” no one would suspect anything inappropriate to occur between her and the Captain. Mme. Vesta is revealed to be a widow, and although her age is never given, the comments about her reflect the idea that women of a certain age at the time were considered “spinsters,” and therefore they would be undesirable. Mme Vesta is most likely not particularly old; the lancers are all revealed to be around twenty, and more than likely Mme Vesta is in her thirties or forties. However, in this case her age does protect her from the kind of suspicion that would arise if the young shop girls and the lancers were revealed to be alone together. Mme Vesta explains her

102 “When you need to go out for work, you never have the time…But if it were for your enjoyment…”
103 “Madam, your virtue is above all suspicion.”
reasoning for having summoned the Captain: she is unhappy in Spain, and exclaims « Ah! capitaine, qu’une veuve, privée de tout, est malheureuse, dans un pays étranger!... » (Antier 19). She explains that she would like to return to France, and the Captain asks her what prevents her from doing so. Mme Vesta claims that she needs a protector if she is to return, because she fears being harmed during the journey. She begins hinting that the Captain would make the perfect protector: « Ah! si j’avais un protecteur comme vous, capitaine…j’irais au bout du monde… » (Antier 20). The captain, surprised by this proposition, accidentally hits the box in which Jules, one of his lancers, is hiding, and Jules, startled, comes out of the box. Jules becomes angry with Mme Vesta, whom he considers a hypocrite for trying to court the captain when she won’t allow the lancers to court her shop girls: « Vous ne voulez pas qu’on fasse la cour à ces demoiselles…vous voulez leur fermer les yeux sur notre mérite…et vous n’êtes pas insensible à celui du capitaine » (Antier 21). However, Mme Vesta retorts that she has much to offer the captain; not only her love, but her livelihood as well. The lancers attempt to explain what they have to offer the shop girls: one of them plans on going to America, one of them is going to receive an inheritance from his uncle, and so on. The lancers try to convince Mme Vesta to allow the girls to attend the revue with them, and although she declines at first, she changes her mind when the Captain agrees to accompany her. This exchange reflects a similar action by Prudence in *La lingère du Marais*, who rebuffs Saint-Gervais’ request to accompany her home until she realizes it will be in a tilbury. Again, the author appears to be making a commentary about the perceived morals of *marchandes de modes*.

104 “Ah! Captain, how a widow, deprived of everything, is unhappy, in a foreign country!”
105 “Ah! If I had a protector, like you, captain…I would go to the ends of the earth…”
106 “You don’t want us to court these young ladies…you want to close their eyes to our merit…but you are not indifferent to that of the captain.”
In the next scene. Thérésa arrives, panicking that all of the shops are closed and no one is outside, but Mme Vesta assures her that it is only because everyone is attending the revue. However, it is revealed that the guerrilla army is attacking. The girls wonder what they are to do, and Loignon proposes a solution of having the soldiers dress as women in order to trick the guerrillas and mount a surprise attack on them. The other lancers agree that this is a good plan, and joke about how they are going to look dressed as women. The women are to be dressed as soldiers, and Mme Vesta, very disturbed by all of this, exclaims « À quels dangers ne sont pas exposées les marchandes de modes! » (Antier 31). Although this is clearly a more dangerous situation than usual, Mme. Vesta does seem to imply that being a marchande de modes is not an easy, calm life.

The next scene departs from the lighter, comical tone of the majority of the play. The play is a comedy, but this scene includes an implied rape. Thérésa argues against dressing as a solider, and does not want Loignon to take away her clothes, but Loignon tells her what could happen if she doesn’t go along with the plan and the guerrillas win: « Les guérillas vous la gâteraient bien davantage, Catalan…parce que les vainquers, voyez-vous…j’ai l’habitude d’être vainquer et je sais ça » (Antier 33). Not only does Loignon warn Thérésa about the possibility of being raped by the soldiers, he essentially admits that in the past, while being a soldier, he has raped women as well, although it is possible that he is simply implying that he has seen other soldiers do this. Thérésa does not seem to realize what Loignon is implying, but she does agree to go along with the plan.

107 “To what dangers are fashion merchants not exposed!”
108 “The guerrillas will spoil it for you soon enough, Catalan…because the victors, you see…I am used to being the victor, and I know this.”
The guerrilla soldiers arrive, and seeing the lancers all dressed as women, remark that they are lucky because there are only women and no soldiers. They enter the magasin de mode and flirt with the “shop girls.” Loignon becomes angry that they don’t seem to be interested in him: « Il paraît que je n’ai pas eu le bonheur de leur plaire », and the others admonish him, saying that he was too aggressive (Antier 37). Rape is again mentioned, as one of the soldiers tells Loignon « Rends-toi de bonne grâce, ou je prends ton bouquet » (Antier 38). “Bouquet” here is clearly a euphemism for virginity, thus the soldier is telling Loignon that if “she” does not comply, he will take her virginity by force. Fortunately, at this point the captain ambushes them, and the guerrillas are forced to leave.

This particular play does not end happily, nor is the ending tragic. It does not end with a wedding or a death, but instead the lancers are called away from their posts. The women are all surprised, thinking that the lancers all planned to marry one of them. Loignon reminds the women, particularly Thérésa, of the nomadic nature of being a soldier: « Un soldat français n’a que sa parole et vous êtes vivandière du troisième lancier » (Antier 43). The men and women finish with a series of couplets, and Thérésa finishes the play by saying « Messieurs, n’oubliez pas d’y revenir » (Antier 43). Essentially, the play ends with the lancers abandoning the women. Nothing particularly harmful happens to them, but they are also not rewarded with a wedding or any kind of status. If one attempts to extract a moral from this play, it again seems to warn women of the nature of men. Although the male characters do not appear particularly manipulative or harmful, it does seem as though they were merely interested in flirting with the women and being taken care of. The manner in which Loignon reminds Thérésa of this seems to indicate that he was

109 “It seems that I do not have the pleasure of having pleased them.”
110 “Give yourself willingly, or I will take your bouquet.”
111 “A French soldier has only his word and you are the cook and provider for the third lancer.”
112 “Sirs, do not forget to come back here.”
aware of it all along, and was never sincere in talking to her about marriage. Madame Vesta’s admonitions from the beginning of the play seem to have come true: that the girls would be better off focusing on their work, and should guard their virtue and modesty closely.

While it is not possible to contain the works examined within a clearly defined category or to prove that they were all intended to reveal similar thoughts or ideas, there are themes and ideas that link them together. Most of the works mentioned are either farcical or allegorical. A couple of the works do not perfectly fit these molds— for example, Les Jolis Péchés more closely resembles the “prostitute-heroine” novel; however, even this work shares some common themes and ideas with the others. Each of these works features a woman involved in the fashion or clothing industry. Either she is a marchande de modes, a revendeuse, a lingère, or a shop girl. In several of the works, she is not the principal character, but a character used to drive the action and intrigue; for example, in Les Bourgeoises à la Mode, where Madame Amelin helps Mme Simon enact her “revenge” against her husband. Some of these characters appear at first glance to more closely resemble the motherly, virtuous figures discussed in chapter two, but they are often revealed later on to have ulterior motives. The most prominent example of this is Mme Vesta, who originally warns the shop girls against male attention, but who is later revealed to be seeking the same male attention from the Captain. Some of the figures, such as Manon in La Lingère du Marais, serve as a possible warning against being deceived by male attention, as well as by the glamorous lifestyle that a rich suitor might provide at the price of one’s innocence and purity.

Several of these works are relatively radical, as they touch upon serious subjects that might not appear to belong in a comical work. The most notable example of this is in Les Lanciers et les Marchandes de Modes, in which Loignon clearly acknowledges to Thérésa that one of the “spoils” of war are the women on the losing side, and he essentially admits to rape, saying that he knows
what victors of a war do. The purpose of this passage’s inclusion again appears to be a warning for innocent girls like Thérésa against the lust of men. It serves as a contrast for the earlier passages of the play in which Loignon and the other lancers defend themselves against Mme Vesta’s accusations that they have nothing to offer the young marchandes. An important theme in this work, among others, is the preservation of innocence. This is significant in La Lingère du Marais as well, when Manon is warned that nothing is of higher value than her innocence. Innocence and purity are extremely important themes in a time when morals seem to be deteriorating; even Prudence, in La Lingère du Marais, remarks that traditional values such as modesty and marriage have declined in Paris.

This highlights another major theme in the works discussed in this chapter. Not only is the occurrence of marriage in general declining, but the quality and strength of marriage is declining as well. Most of the farcical works analyzed here share common themes and concerns that the state of marriage was deteriorating at the end of the eighteenth century. The marriages portrayed in these works demonstrate a constant battle between husband and wife rather than matrimonial harmony. A large contributing factor to these battles is the woman’s desire to improve her social standing, aided by the acquisition of luxury goods, and her husband’s stinginess. It is possible that these situations were used in these plays to criticize women and their frivolity and greed, and to vilify the women who supported this: the marchandes de modes and revendeuses. Not only do these women promote greed and frivolity, they also use their positions to help wives deceive their husbands. The implication in some of the works, however, is that the husbands deserve it. In Les Bourgeoises à la Mode, for example, the husbands are being “unfaithful” to their wives, and rather than responding with unfaithfulness of their own, the women simply use this to their advantage when demanding more money from their husbands. These descriptions reflect a common
perception at the time: that men are lustful, and women are frivolous and greedy, which are essentially different kinds of lust. While neither party appears to be the clearly guilty one (it is not obvious whether the authors side with the women or the men), it is certain that a breakdown in traditional values has occurred. However, it seems that many of the authors simply accept this breakdown as the new state of society; Nougaret, for example, even subtitles his work *Ainsi Va le Monde* (Thus goes the world), indicating that this is the state of the world now, and because this is unlikely to change anytime soon, it may as well be accepted.

Although there is little information available about many of the authors of the works included in this chapter, it is evident that many of them focused on common themes of the time period. Two of the main themes were the preservation of innocence, and the breakdown of marriage and traditional family values. Another significant theme is the increasing desire for elevated social status, and the most notable example of this is *Les Bourgeoises à la Mode* by Florent Dancourt, who in fact wrote more than one work focusing on “the bourgeoisie infatuated with the desire to be an aristocrat” (Encyclopedia Larousse: Dancourt). Dancourt’s works focused on the new lifestyle that prevailed at the time, wherein many people of the lower and bourgeois classes strove to imitate the aristocracy and were willing to achieve this by any means necessary. The character of Angélique in *Les Bourgeoises à la Mode* even comments that she was clearly born to be at least a marquise, if not higher.

To this end, dissatisfaction also appears to be a major theme of eighteenth-century society and of the works of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In these literary works, the dissatisfaction mainly comes from the female characters. They are constantly striving for more material goods, a better marriage, a higher social status, more freedom, etc., and perhaps one of the points being made by the authors is that the more options women have, the more miserable
they are. Therefore, some of these authors appear to be warning women of the dangers of not adhering to traditionally prescribed female roles. For example, in *Les Lanciers et les Marchandes de Modes*, Mme Vesta warns her employees that just because they have their freedom, they should not abuse this freedom by neglecting their work and submitting to the advances of men. The theme of working women is also important here because the character of Mme Vesta, as well as the author, seem to imply that it is permissible to be a single, free woman, as long as one uses her freedom to be productive. In this way, traditional models of domesticity are upheld; although the women are not married and are considered “free,” they are still reliant on traditional domestic tasks to be considered respectable.

While Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell argued in *Fashion Victims* that *marchande de modes* was essentially code for “prostitute” by the end of the eighteenth century, many of the plots included in this chapter actually showcase a different kind of manipulation by the *marchandes de modes*. This manipulation is not sexual, as in the case of *marchandes de modes* involved in prostitution; rather, these women use their talents and their goods to help women manipulate their husbands. However, not all of these *marchandes* can be categorized as “good” or “bad.” Many of the seemingly manipulative *marchandes* actually hold traditional values, such as Mme. Vesta, who values hard work, traditional marriage, and longs for a male protector. It is only the way in which she attempts to reach these goals that she is manipulative; she tricks the Captain into being alone with her so she can propose marriage. If there is one thing that can be taken from all of these works, it is that eighteenth and early nineteenth-century society had become more divided between men and women, and that although traditional marriage was still seen viewed as the most proper situation for a woman, more and more options were opening for woman, and it was becoming easier for women to lead productive, satisfying lives without relying on men.
Chapter Four: *Manon Lescaut* and the Dangers of Luxury

The majority of works criticizing the fashion and luxury industries that have been examined thus far depict fashion and luxury as mild annoyances, or perhaps as dangers, but there are no extreme consequences to the characters’ indulgences. The *marchandes de modes* and other women involved in the fashion industries, as well as the women who purchase from them, may be viewed as exasperating and underhanded, but in all of the previous plays there is a resolution to the conflict, or at least consequences for the women involved are minimal. The plays portraying women engaging in prostitution in order to support themselves, such as *Les Jolis Pêchés d’une Marchande de Modes*, make it clear that the women are doing so because they have no other options. However, in other novels, prostitution is not portrayed as a last resort, but as a means for women to feed their desire for wealth and luxury. One of the most famous eighteenth-century examples of this is *Manon Lescaut* by L’Abbé Prévost. This novel discusses luxury and blurring class lines in a more direct way, and is more reflective of the increasing concerns about the influences of luxury during the eighteenth century, particularly in regard to new opportunities for people of the lower classes to corrupt themselves with luxury.

“Luxury” had many meanings during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and was a problematic term. Today, it evokes mainly positive qualities, such as sensuality and elegance. “Luxury” cars or cosmetics are promoted as ways to reward oneself and upheld as sought-after items. During the eighteenth century, especially for writers like Rousseau, “luxury” essentially meant anything that was not absolutely necessary to one’s survival and well-being. However, “One of the traditional meanings of luxury was the usurpation of the low-born of clothing or other commodities appropriate only to their betters” (Shovlin 132). This definition implies that, as many
critics and philosophers at the time believed, material goods and ostentatious wealth was only harmful in the hands of the wrong people. The nobility and aristocracy could and should demonstrate their wealth to cement their social status, their superiority, and reassure the country of the state of its economy. Furthermore, luxury was often considered a positive influence if it stimulated the economy and provided more products and jobs. It was only when luxury became excessive and associated with idleness that it was dangerous: “Many writers…distinguished between a benign luxury which they associated with convenience and comforts and a vicious luxury that was the fruit of economic privilege and the system of public finance” (Shovlin 122). Essentially, if luxury could advance society in some way by making products more readily available and better-made, it was acceptable, but destructive if it served mainly to make people vainer and more wasteful.

Conservative writers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, held a stricter view of luxury. For Rousseau, “Everything beyond what was absolutely necessary was ‘a source of evil’” (Jennings 81). Rousseau believed in simplicity and the cultivation of taste, which did not require excess or ruin. Prévost takes a similar stance in his novel *Manon Lescaut*, which follows a young, beautiful girl who was destined for a convent falling into prostitution, which eventually leads to her death, all due to her love of luxury: “For Prévost, pleasurable self-indulgence was the explanation of prostitution. Thus he took his seat among the conservative moralists who warned the aristocracy against giving their servants cast-off clothing and ornaments, because luxury instilled dependency, particularly among the poor” (Ringdal NP). Although Prévost is characterized as a “moralist” here, his objections to luxury were not as much rooted in its sinfulness as they were critical of low-born people mimicking the aristocracy and nobility. In regards to prostitution, although conservative writers and philosophers clearly decried its practice, it seemed somewhat acceptable if the
prostitution occurred out of absolute necessity, and many looked the other way regarding illicit sexual exchanges. However, *Manon Lescaut* serves as a moral warning about the dangers of luxury, particularly for members of social classes that were not accustomed to it.

*Manon Lescaut* tells a similar story to other eighteenth century moralist works. It begins with an honest and admirable character from a respectable family, the Chevalier des Grieux. Although the Chevalier des Grieux is the main character of the novel, it is M. de Renoncourt, “man of quality and author of the seven volumes of *Memoirs*, of which this story occupies the last” who frames des Grieux’s narrative (Prévost ix). The Chevalier des Grieux recounts the story of himself and Manon, a girl of humble birth, and how she destroyed his life, although the narrative itself focuses more on the Chevalier’s love for Manon. The Chevalier and Manon initially meet in Amiens, where Manon, like many other young women, is being sent to the convent against her will. The Chevalier manages to help Manon avoid being sent to the convent by absconding with her in Amiens, where the Chevalier intends to live off the allowance given to him by his father until he receives his inheritance. He soon realizes, however, that Manon is fond of luxury and is spending outside of their means:

I had entrusted to her the management of our purse and the task of settling our day-to-day expenses. I noticed, shortly afterwards, that our table was better supplied than before, and that she had allowed herself several new and expensive sets of clothes. Since I knew only too well that we could scarcely have more than twelve or fifteen pistoles left, I indicated my astonishment at this apparent increase in our means. She implored me, laughing, not to worry. Did I not promise you, she said, that I would find resources? I loved her with too much simplicity of heart to doubt her reassurances. (Prévost 19)
At this point, all that is known is that Manon has found some way to obtain new objects for the home and new clothing. There is no concrete proof of any wrongdoing on her part, although she is evasive when the Chevalier asks her about these new acquisitions. However, the Chevalier loves Manon so much (or appears to do so), and is so convinced of her love that it does not seem to cross his mind that she could be doing something inappropriate. If this does cross his mind, he ignores it.

The Chevalier soon discovers, however, that Manon has been keeping company with a man named M. de B…, and begins questioning Manon’s responses about her new luxury items:

I …remembered Manon’s little acquisitions, which had seemed to be to go beyond what our wealth would permit. They now seemed to hint at the liberality of some new lover. And then there was the confidence she had shown about finding sources of income unknown to me! It was very hard to give so many enigmas as favourable a meaning as my heart would have wished for. (Prévost 20)

The Chevalier does not want to admit that Manon has another lover, but he cannot seem to reconcile the inconsistencies in Manon’s behavior and what she has told him. Before he can confront Manon with his suspicions, the Chevalier is seized by men in his father’s service, who have come to take him home after his father has learned of his spending money on an unknown mistress. The Chevalier’s father then indicates that Monsieur de B…has indeed been pursuing Manon, and that it appears she has been returning his advances. He attempts to remedy this problem by finding a woman who would be more suitable for the Chevalier, but the Chevalier is not interested in anyone but Manon. However, his friend Tiberge suggests the idea of entering a seminary, and the Chevalier agrees, so convinced that he will never love anyone but Manon, and
he cannot be with her. Tiberge and the Chevalier depart for the seminary, where the Chevalier excels in his studies and seems to succeed in giving up worldly pleasures since Manon is unavailable to him.

However, Manon, hearing of the Chevalier’s success, comes to see him at one of his exams, and they are reunited. Manon explains why she betrayed him: M. de B… had promised her money: “He had made his declaration like a true tax-farmer, which is to say, by informing her in writing that payment would be in proportion to the favours received; she had immediately capitulated but without any intention beyond that of extracting from him a sum considerable enough to allow us to live comfortably” (Prévost 33). Essentially, M. de B… promised to give Manon wealth and luxury in proportion to what she was willing to give him. It is important to note that M. de B…, being a “tax-farmer,” would be considered a member of the “nouveau riche,” not coming from well-established family or background. Perhaps this also plays into why Manon abandoned him, but Manon convinces the Chevalier that the only reason she betrayed him was so that she could obtain more money for their life together, and reassures him that she never felt any real affection or love for Monsieur de B… The Chevalier agrees to take Manon back, and they decide that they can to live together as long as they are careful with their money. All goes well for awhile, but Manon’s love of luxury and enjoyment soon threatens their happiness once again: “New opportunities to purchase arose at every moment; and, far from lamenting the amount she spent, sometimes in profusion, I was the first to procure her anything I believed likely to give her pleasure” (Prévost 36).

Interestingly, although one of the driving forces of the plot and the cause of Manon and the Chevalier’s ruin is Manon’s love of luxury and enjoyment, there are no details of Manon’s purchases or the items that are leading them to ruin. The narrator does indicate that Manon and the
Chevalier enjoy going to the theater and occasionally play cards, but otherwise there is very little description of Manon’s luxury. Does she mainly buy objects for her home, or clothing, or accessories? This is never revealed, but it can nevertheless be concluded that the concept of money and luxury, and its corrupting nature, is central to the novel.

Prévost also describes how love of luxury often replaces real love and genuine connections between people. It is clear from the novel that the Chevalier truly loves Manon- or at least, that is what he tells the “Homme de Qualité” as he recounts his tale. However, he is fully aware that Manon will love him only as long as he can provide her with the kind of lifestyle she expects. When his house catches fire, the Chevalier is less concerned by the loss of his possessions than by the fact that these losses will cause him to lose Manon as well: “I knew Manon; I had already learned too well, through bitter experience, that however faithful and however fond of me she was in times of prosperity, there was no counting on her when times were bad. She was too fond of pleasure and luxury to sacrifice them for me. I will lose her” (Prévost 38). By detailing the Chevalier’s experience of love, and contrasting it with Manon’s experience, Prévost is able to demonstrate how luxury and lust for material possessions have broken moral codes and have made objects more valuable than people. As previously mentioned, one of the issues critics held with the concept of luxury was that it focused not on the person in possession of wealth, but on the wealth and materials that he or she possessed.

In the case of Manon and the Chevalier, it would appear that Manon is not in love with the individual, but with the material opportunities he might allow her. Although these descriptions of Manon do not paint a particularly flattering or sympathetic portrait of her, perhaps it is not so simple to blame Manon for her disloyalty. Manon is very young when she is to be sent to a convent,
and because she is of humble birth, does not have particularly promising options for marriage. Even regarding the Chevalier, if she were to be loyal to him and reasonable in her expenses, their marriage would seem impossible because of the Chevalier’s father’s disapproval of her. This disapproval would lead to a disinherition, and so Manon and the Chevalier’s relationship does not fail solely due to Manon’s unfaithfulness and love of luxury, but also due to circumstances somewhat beyond their control. The best option for Manon would probably be for her to marry a wealthy older man who would not need to justify his choice of a wife to relatives, but in this case Manon, who is young and beautiful, would be forced to marry someone she does not love and who may be repulsive to her. It is clear that what Manon really requires is not necessarily luxury but protection and security, but she is not willing to forfeit her desire for a relationship with someone she cares for in order to be guaranteed these things. Manon is, in many ways, a victim of circumstance. She has few options for legitimate marriage, and no skills which would enable her to support herself. Her situation highlights the few options women of modest means had at the time. Either they could enter a convent, attempt to make a marriage match with someone of better circumstances but whom they did not necessarily love, try to support themselves through some kind of modest work, or resort to prostitution.

Manon eventually abandons the Chevalier again, seeing that he clearly will not be able to provide for her correctly. In spite of her many faults, Manon is at least self-aware, and knows that if she is hungry and poor, she will resort to desperate measures, and thus she warns the Chevalier that she does not want to be reduced to such a state. Manon concocts a plan with her brother to meet a M. de G…M…., who possesses a considerable fortune, and claims that everyone will be able to benefit from this situation because Manon will pretend that the Chevalier is her younger brother whom she is caring for after their parents’ death. This sad story has motivated M.
de G…M… to provide Manon’s “brother” with an apartment and a stipend. Their plan is to obtain M. de G…M…’s money and to run away with it. M. de G…M… discovers the plan rather quickly, however, and Manon, her brother, and the Chevalier are all arrested. The Chevalier ends up in Saint-Lazare, and pretends to have seen the error of his ways while still secretly pining for Manon. When his friend Tiberge comes to visit, he is astounded by how little the Chevalier has reformed, and he cannot understand why the Chevalier continues to love Manon when he knows this will eventually lead to his ruin. Tiberge is particularly angry because the Chevalier is willingly choosing vice over virtue:

He replied…that it was common enough to see sinners so intoxicated with the illusory happiness that is born of vice as to openly prefer it to that of virtue; but such people were at least attached to images of happiness, and were duped by appearances; whereas to recognize, as I did, that the object of my attachment could bring me only guilt and misery, and yet to continue voluntarily to immerse myself in misfortune in crime, involved a contradiction between ideas and conduct that did little honour to my reason. (Prévost 63)

In contrast to Tiberge’s argument, the Chevalier rebuts that although it is true that up until now his relationship with Manon has brought him mostly suffering, his ultimate goal is to lead a peaceful, happy, and respectable life with Manon, and so he should not be criticized for continuing to love her. The Chevalier has even mentioned earlier on in the novel that his greatest regret is that he did not marry Manon in the beginning, because if he had just married her despite his family’s protests, surely his family would have eventually come around and learned to accept her. Although Tiberge and the Chevalier continue to disagree on this matter, the Chevalier explains that Tiberge eventually softens to his friend’s pain: “He saw that there was more weakness than wickedness in
my dissolute ways” (Prévost 65). This could be considered one of the main components of the Chevalier’s character. In reading the novel, one could hardly characterize the Chevalier as evil or diabolical, and it would even be far-reaching to categorize Manon as such. Both the Chevalier and Manon have been led into their situations by pursuing their “illusory happiness,” but at least for the Chevalier, his ultimate goal is merely to be happy with Manon. The reason this seems so unattainable is that Manon cannot be happy with the Chevalier if he does not have the means to provide for her.

The novel does take a surprising turn in the portrayal of the Chevalier’s character when he attempts to make his escape from prison with a pistol he was given by Manon’s brother, and although he does not intend to use it to harm anyone, he does threaten the Father Superior with it in order to escape. This scene contradicts the Chevalier’s claims that there is more weakness than wickedness in him, but it seems clear that the Chevalier has no actual intentions of harming the Father Superior. This moment does, however, demonstrate the lengths the Chevalier is willing to go to in order to rejoin Manon. The Chevalier recruits M. de T…, the son of one of the jail’s administrators, to help him free Manon from prison. M. de T…agrees, and Manon is freed from prison, but as the result of a conflict between the Chevalier and one of M. de T…’s coachmen, Manon’s brother is killed, causing the Chevalier and Manon to flee. The Chevalier borrows money from Tiberge, and is then aided by M. de T… in helping to furnish Manon with the things she needs. However, the Chevalier finds himself once again without the means to support Manon. The Chevalier also finds out that Manon has again been entertaining another man, an Italian prince, but Manon reassures the Chevalier that she feels nothing for him.

The Chevalier finally feels comfortable and happy, as he has become good friends with M. de T…, who is a generous benefactor, and Manon appears to have finally seen the error of her
ways. However, more misfortunes await the Chevalier. G...M..., the son of the Chevalier’s nemesis, who helped to put Manon and the Chevalier in jail, pays the Chevalier a visit, but reassures him that he is nothing like his father and merely wishes to get to know them. It is soon clear that he is attracted to Manon, and M. de T... confides to the Chevalier that G...M... has told him he intends to win Manon over, and that he has heard she enjoys luxury and pleasure, and is willing to give her a handsome sum of money. M. de T... feels conflicted, being the friend of both G...M... and the Chevalier. Although the Chevalier is worried that Manon might abandon him in favor of more riches, Manon reassures him that she has no intention of doing so, and that they should enact revenge on G...M...’s father by accepting G...M...’s generous offer and escaping with the money. Of course, once Manon sees how much wealth and luxury G...M... is actually willing to give her, she accepts his overtures and writes a letter to the Chevalier saying that she will have to postpone their running away together.

It appears at this moment that the Chevalier is finally ready to give up on Manon: “There was something so insulting and cruel about this letter that, after remaining for a while torn between anger and grief, I resolved to try and forget my false and ungrateful mistress forever” (Prévost 97). But the Chevalier goes to see Manon to tell her that he has finished with her, and they reconcile and begin to concoct a plan to benefit from all of the luxuries G...M. could offer them; not only his money, but his assets as well. They agree to send G...M... from the house by frightening his footman and obliging G...M... to follow him, and essentially kidnapping G...M...’s father comes to the house and has Manon and the Chevalier arrested once again.

While the Chevalier is in prison, his father comes to visit him and laments the current state of the Chevalier’s life. The Chevalier asks him for compassion, reassuring him that all that he has done has been out of love. The Chevalier’s father manages to have him released, but it is
decided that Manon must either remain in prison or be sent to America. Although the Chevalier makes several attempts to have Manon released, the decision is made that she will be sent to America, and the Chevalier, despondent at the thought of being separated from Manon, resolves to go with her, in the hopes that they may start a new life together there.

At first, the Chevalier and Manon appear to have finally found happiness in America. They are presented to the Governor, and they resolve to help their community: “We let no opportunity pass of doing some good turn or service to our neighbors. Our willingness to oblige, and our mild-mannered ways, won us the trust and affection of the entire colony. We were soon so well regarded that we were considered the foremost people in the town, after the Governor himself” (Prévost 135). Manon and the Chevalier seem to have finally learned their lessons, and focus now on their love and on being part of a community, rather than on pleasure and luxury. Manon and the Chevalier also turn back toward religion, and thus decide that it is now their duty to demonstrate virtue by becoming husband and wife.\footnote{Prévost 136} However, a problem arises with the Governor’s nephew. He is in love with Manon, but has believed the entire time that she and the Chevalier are already married. The Chevalier asks the Governor to marry himself and Manon, but the Governor refuses, deciding that she should instead be married to his nephew, whom he is very fond of, but who is apparently violent. The nephew encounters the Chevalier on his way back from the Governor’s, and they engage in a duel which ends in the nephew’s death. Manon and the Chevalier flee, and Manon dies as a result of the harsh conditions in the wilderness. Someone from the colony comes to look for the Chevalier after the nephew, who was not actually killed in the duel, tells the rest of the colony what happened. They find the Chevalier next to Manon’s grave,
and seeing his state, think that he has been robbed. The men bring the Chevalier back to the colony, where he is ill for a long time.

During the Chevalier’s illness, he has an epiphany and finally sees the error of his ways: The Chevalier resolves to lead a life that is worthy of God and himself: “But Heaven, after chastizing me so severely, intended that I should benefit from my punishments and misfortunes. It lightened my darkness, and reawakened in me ideas worthy of my birth and education” (Prévost 145). In the weeks that follow, Tiberge arrives to take the Chevalier back to France, and the novel ends with the Chevalier making his way back home.

Although there is little specific mention of fashionable items throughout the novel, luxury and lust are central themes. Manon’s love of luxury and men’s lust for her bring about Manon and the Chevalier’s eventual ruin. While there are no passages that explicitly indicate a sexual relationship between Manon and the Chevalier, the Chevalier makes it a point on several occasions that they are living together as husband and wife without being married, and in many ways, the fact that the two are not married is the source of most of their problems. The Chevalier also mentions several times that the practice of keeping a mistress is common in France, and even that having a mistress can be seen as a symbol of status: “Two-thirds of Frenchmen of rank make it a point of honour to have one” (Prévost 118). Essentially, although the Chevalier claims that he wants to marry Manon, and to live in peace with her, he excuses their situation by saying that it is impossible for them to marry, and that it is commonplace in France, and therefore acceptable. However, these excuses do not seem particularly legitimate. Although it would be preferable to have his father’s blessing, the lack of his father’s blessing certainly does not make it impossible for the Chevalier and Manon to marry. The Chevalier makes excuses for his and Manon’s poor behavior and decisionmaking throughout the novel.
If it is indeed the case that lust and luxury are central themes to the novel, and that Manon and the Chevalier are both victims of their love of lust and luxury, what redeeming qualities could the novel include? In an article written for the *Catholic Herald*, Alexander Lucie-Smith calls *Manon Lescaut* “a great Catholic novel.” Although many contemporary critics called *Manon Lescaut* a pornographic novel, Lucie-Smith argues that it is the exact opposite. The purpose of the novel is clearly to demonstrate the dangers of lust and luxury, and the merit of being honest and virtuous. Manon is the source of temptation for Des Grieux, and because of his passion for her, he is led to abandon his honor and principles and commit acts which he certainly would not otherwise. In this sense, it is true that Manon embodies the stereotype of the woman who lures man into sinning, mirroring the story of Adam and Eve and original sin. This being the case, Des Grieux’ ultimate decision to embrace religion and marry Manon at the end of the novel, and his return to France after Manon’s death, parallels the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son.\(^{115}\)

However, although Des Grieux admits at the end of the novel that he and Manon have returned to religion and have decided to make their relationship legitimate, his epiphany at the end of the novel is likely less due to a true religious conversion than a desire to return to his status of origin. In a footnote for the novel, it is noted that in an original version, it was much clearer that the awakening Des Grieux has after his illness following Manon’s death is religious in nature. Originally the text reads “Heaven shone the light of its grace upon me, and inspired in me the intention of returning to it by the path of penitence. I gave myself over entirely to the practice of piety” (Prévost 155). In the current version (Oxford University Press, 2004), however, the text reads, “But Heaven, after chastizing me so severely, intended that I should benefit from my punishments and misfortunes. It lightened my darkness, and reawakened in me ideas worthy of

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\(^{115}\) Alexander Lucie-Smith
my birth and education” (Prévost 144). Further along, Des Grieux also remarks that he was “Resolved in future to follow the dictates of honour alone” (Prévost 144).

The difference between the two texts is clear: in the first version, Des Grieux emphasizes a return to piety, and giving himself back to God. In the second version, he speaks not of piety, but of honour, and although he mentions Heaven, his focus is on his birth and education. Class and status, and his father not in Heaven but on Earth, are prioritized, indicating that, at the time, social status was more important than having faith. A footnote by the editor indicates why this was changed. Des Grieux is a contradictory character who defends his sinful actions and puts the blame on Heaven for punishing him rather than accepting his wickedness, and because of Des Grieux’ attitude, “Too sudden a conversion on the part of such a character would risk shocking the reader’s aesthetic sense and in doing so alienate the sympathy Des Grieux is bent on gaining” (Prévost 155). But if the point of a conversion is a return to religion and an atonement for one’s sins, it seems odd that readers would be “shocked” by a sudden conversion. By nature, a conversion is generally sudden; a “wake-up call” in which something is revealed to someone. It seems more likely that, in keeping with contemporary values, Des Grieux would want to reclaim his place in his family, and eventually inherit his father’s fortune. If Manon Lescaut can be categorized as a “great Catholic novel,” religion should clearly play a significant role in Des Grieux’ life. Instead, Des Grieux’ return to religion and his “conversion” is shunted aside in favor of the importance of class and rank, and the religious aspect of the novel is mainly focused on Manon.

Manon is depicted as a temptress, like Eve in the story of original sin, and although not entirely innocent himself, Des Grieux portrays himself as the victim of his mistress’ seduction and trickery. In this sense, Prévost is consistent with critics who believed that women who did not obey men and remain in traditional female roles were sinful and deviant. Manon is the one with the
power in the relationship, and this imbalance of power is unnatural: “Either the man dominates the woman, as is proper, or the woman dominates the man, which is monstrous” (Gossman 36). If this is the case, then Manon is unnatural and monstrous, and as a result, she must be punished and deported to America as a prostitute.

Oddly enough, Manon does not exactly fit into the traditional description of a prostitute, someone who exchanges money for sex. Although it appears throughout the novel that she is willing to exchange money for sex, this never actually occurs. Her admirers are willing to lavish her with money and gifts with the mere promise of sex, and in many cases it seems as though her suitors do not pursue her solely for the purpose of sex, but of making her their wife. This being the case, it seems as though Prévost is relegating Manon to a larger category of sinful women who would be considered undesirable members of society, which was another category of people who were often sent to America during the early eighteenth century. In doing so, Prévost appears to categorize all woman as sinful and lustful, because the only other female in the novel, who appears only briefly, is also depicted as a kind of prostitute. She is a young lady sent by Manon and G...M... to console Des Grieux after Manon has abandoned him again. There is no virtuous counterpart for Manon in the novel; no kind benefactress or caring mother; not even a religious figure such as a Mother Superior; a figure who, by contrast, does exist for Des Grieux in the form of the Father Superior. Prévost’s portrayal of Manon appears to agree with the idea that if a woman cannot be suitably married, she should enter a convent, as it is too risky for a woman, especially one of low birth, to attempt to make her own way in life. If she does not have a husband or a convent to protect her, she will inevitably be tempted by the weaknesses of her sex, namely a love of luxury, and will therefore fall into ruin.

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The novel also appears to criticize the excesses of the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie in general. One of the reasons that the novel was considered so shocking at the time was due to its portrayal of Des Grieux, someone who comes from a respectable family and holds a noble title, who abandons his honor and duty for the love of someone much lower in birth and rank than him: it portrayed ‘people of standing’ as acting unworthily; for Des Grieux is an aristocrat, a young man of the highest rank, character, and prospects who ruins himself for a courtesan and, worse still, justifies so blatant a betrayal of his class by asserting not only the irresistible power of sexual passion but the claims of sentiment over those of social convention. (Angela Scholar viii)

Although critics have considered that Prévost’s novel might be autobiographical, with Des Grieux serving as a representation of Prévost himself, it seems more likely that Manon and Des Grieux are Prévost’s indictments of the current social climate. Men of rank “behave” like members of the lower classes, and members of the lower classes are able to pretend as though they are members of the nobility (there are criticisms of the bourgeoisies throughout the novel as well). Women, rather than fulfilling the duties of being a wife and mother, or joining a convent if necessary, act as sexual sinners, and they encourage men to do so as well. Prévost also offers no alternative to these scenarios. One of the ways in which Des Grieux “behaves badly” is that he lives off of his father’s fortune, even at one point mentioning that his father will surely not live much longer, and then he will be able to obtain his inheritance. There seems to be a simple solution: Des Grieux or Manon could find some means of income. But this would defy the expectations of the nobility, and so one “bad behavior” is permitted in place of another. It is interesting that even in a society where it is becoming increasingly common for people to work, it still appears preferable for members of the nobility to live beyond their means and to use whatever means necessary to
maintain appearances. Prévost’s intention was to criticize the behaviors that he saw in contemporary society, but the novel was poorly received by members of the aristocracy because people did not want to admit that their own behavior mirrored that of the behavior depicted in the novel.

Manon Lescaut can therefore be considered a pedagogical novel, just as Mme de Genlis’ theater served pedagogical purposes, but Prévost focuses on the dangers of women having access to luxury, rather than on the potential benefits of allowing young women who do not have means of support to learn a trade. Genlis warns her young charges about becoming frivolous, and tells them not to act above their stations, but she also demonstrates the benefits of young women being educated and self-sufficient. She uses characters like Aline to show how young, unmarried women who are not of any particular status can be useful and productive as long as they are instructed in a manner that will prevent them from being tempted by sin and luxury. Aline is portrayed as modest, virtuous, and hardworking, so it would appear that writers like Genlis believed that it was possible for women who were not attached to husbands or convents to be respectable members of society. Genlis focuses on the positive contributions that women might bring to society even if they are not wives or mothers. But Prévost, by creating a character like Manon who has few redeeming qualities other than her beauty, and indeed, her beauty as a redeeming quality is questionable because it creates so many negative consequences, Prévost indicates that the only way in which a woman can be considered respectable is if she is either in a convent or in a marriage and fulfilling her duties as wife and mother. This opinion reflects a larger societal shift in which many people are realizing that the luxuries and excesses of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have led to a society in which people are frivolous, superficial, and wasteful. Manners, etiquette, and good breeding have been replaced by appearances and connections, and it is now
possible for people to behave as though they belong to higher echelons of society by purchasing noble titles or dressing in a way usually reserved for the nobility. Since the majority of these changes were most notable in women, they became the target of most of the criticism against luxury. One of the ways in which this luxury could be combatted was through a renewed effort to emphasize the merits of being a good wife and mother and the importance of creating a stable home and raising children properly. The next and final chapter will further examine how the end of the eighteenth century espoused a return to traditional, domestic female roles.
Chapter Five: Changing Concepts of Womanhood and Femininity, Visual Evidence of the Influence of the Marchande de Modes, and the Return to a Classical Model

France underwent a variety of important changes during the eighteenth century. These changes had been taking place throughout the seventeenth and early to mid-eighteenth centuries, and they began shifting the way people thought and acted in all major aspects of life, including how people dressed. One of the most significant changes in thought was the shift in perceptions about gender, and this shift is particularly relevant when applied to the discussions of fashion and luxury.

Significant attention was paid in the eighteenth century to the concept of the “ideal woman.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in particular, discussed the subject at length, and he attempted to craft an image of the ideal woman in many of his works, the most notable example being the character of Sophie in his novel Émile. One of the most noteworthy changes in how women were encouraged to act was a more pronounced separation of women from the public sphere. Whereas during the ancien régime, women of the middle and upper classes were expected and often required to appear in the public sphere at various important events, during and after the French Revolution, there was a renewed pressure on women to embrace a domestic lifestyle. These changes affected the luxury trades as well as France’s economy.

Concepts of womanhood, femininity, and beauty changed rapidly, and focus was largely redirected from previous ideas that a woman must possess a certain status which would enable her to obtain the latest fashions (the idea of being “trendy”) to the idea of taste (goût), which posited that any woman could be beautiful if she possessed the natural instinct of being able to dress and present herself correctly. It was also important to have a pleasing personality. Beauty
and fashion were now based on ideals in addition to materials and articles of clothing. Rousseau, for example, criticized *la mode*, but strongly emphasized the importance of good taste:

“Although Rousseau believed women’s interest in clothing, adornment, and pleasing men was an inevitable, even laudable, consequence of their femininity, he drew an important distinction between cultivating one’s beauty and pursuing *les modes*: ‘One can shine by one’s clothing, but one can only please with one’s person’” (Repackaging 944-5). Many critics of *la mode*, including Rousseau, believed that no amount of beautiful clothing and dazzling accessories could render a person likeable or even beautiful.

In tandem with the changing ideas of women becoming more removed from the public sphere and redirecting their focus toward taste and what might be referred to today as “style” came a renewed emphasis on the importance of women being good wives and mothers. These changes were mainly significant for the middle and upper classes, as the lower classes had always had to take care of their own children and support their families. In the lower classes it was common for the husband to be the breadwinner and for the wife to focus on domestic tasks, which included raising children, although these women might supplement their family’s income with “businesses” that could be done at home; for example, basket weaving or making soap. However, women of the nobility and upper bourgeoisie were expected to entertain and participate in social events, and women of the higher aristocracy were expected to support their husbands in social and political endeavors. Children were left to the care of wet nurses, governesses, and tutors, and young girls were often sent away to convents and married young, in many cases to a much older man who could help her family financially. Young girls spent little to no time with their mother, and there was minimal room for the growth of a strong mother-daughter bond. After the Revolution, however, many middle and upper class women were forced
to become more involved in their home and family due to political and economic reasons. These changes forced many noble and bourgeoise women to abandon their interest in fashion: “As funds dwindled and hopes of an early restoration waned, women gave up appearances and worked to support themselves and their families” (Darrow 49). This does not mean that women ceased to care about how they presented themselves, or that they no longer spent money on clothing, merely that the attention paid to clothing, as well as ideas about what clothing was appropriate, were changing.

Also changing were ideas about when it was appropriate for women to try and make their appearance pleasing. Rousseau had strong influence in this area as well. In her article “Rousseau and the New Domestic Art of Women's Taste,” Katharine Hamerton discusses Rousseau’s idea of taste and how it should be interpreted. Rousseau’s concept of “taste” is a more moderate version of fashion. The main difference between the eighteenth-century concept of “fashion” and Rousseau’s idea of “taste” is that the taste Rousseau refers to is intended to be reserved for a woman’s husband, to make his life more pleasant. “Taste” for Rousseau was not something women should pursue in order to please themselves. He disliked the idea of fashion and women ridiculously adorning themselves in order to attract men, or simply to impress others with their status. However, he was not opposed to women dressing well and attempting to be pleasing if these endeavors were directed toward husbands and not men in general. Rousseau realized that women were naturally inclined to decorate themselves, and since it would not be possible to completely eradicate this inclination, it could be put to use in a way that was appropriate to Rousseau’s perception of an ideal woman. According to Rousseau, this change in focus of why women should attempt to dress tastefully benefitted both men and women: “Only by channeling women’s taste within the domestic setting would French writers, musicians, and artists be freed
from corrupting feminine influence and would women be able to remain the discerning creatures they were naturally meant to be” (Hamerton n.p.) In short, for Rousseau, it was acceptable for women to be charming and beautiful, but their charms and beauty needed to be reserved for their husbands.

However, it should not be assumed that during the latter part of the eighteenth-century, extravagant clothing was altogether abandoned. Rather, the late eighteenth century exhibits a juxtaposition of both the extravagant, ornate clothing common during the ancien régime, with simpler clothing that was more appropriate to a society where the monarchy and class system were crumbling, and in which more and more women were being confined to the domestic sphere and devoting themselves to the more traditional tasks of being wives and mothers. This being the case, the number of choices available to women actually increased rather than decreased, because women were now presented with the option of dressing in the more traditional, elaborate styles, and the newer, simpler styles. This applied even to the highest ranks of the nobility, and perhaps even especially to the highest ranks of nobility, because they had the option of obtaining clothing made in the new, simpler styles, but which remained of the highest quality. A notable example of the contrast between the elaborate clothing of the ancien régime and the simpler styles seen preceding and during the Revolution can be seen in the official portraits of Marie-Antoinette during the earlier years of her reign, her portrait in 1783 by Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, and her last official portrait before her death in 1793, which also included her children. In describing these portraits, Jennifer Jones writes:

In many portraits…she wears the elaborate, ceremonial habit du cour designed by….Rose Bertin…The yards of silk, dozens of ruffles and bows, and costly jewels attest to her splendor and her position at the apex
of a hierarchy of aristocratic women...Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun’s 1783 portrait of the queen...depicted her without powdered hair and in the simplest of white cotton dresses, evoking not royal splendor and luxury but the modest taste and grace of a beautiful young mother, content in her domestic role. (Repackaging 946)

Figure 1: Vigée-Lebrun, Élisabeth Louise. *Archduchess Marie Antoinette, Queen of France*, 1778, oil on canvas, 273 x 193.5 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)
Figure 2 : Vigée-Lebrun, Élisabeth Louise. Marie-Antoinette. 1783. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.


This shift can also be remarked in film portrayals of Marie-Antoinette, most notably as seen in Sofia Coppola’s 2006 film. Throughout most of the film, which essentially ends with the very beginning of the French Revolution, Marie-Antoinette is depicted wearing bright, joyful, youthful colors such as bright pink and baby blue:

Figure 4: Kirsten Dunst as Marie-Antoinette. Marie Antoinette. Dir. Sofia Coppola. Perf. Kirsten Dunst. Sony pictures home entertainment, 2006. DVD.

However, as the film progresses, Marie-Antoinette’s wardrobe transforms from ostentatious and bright, to pastoral and clean, to somber, as fashions, as well as political and social situations, change. In the following photos, Marie-Antoinette is portrayed during the period in which a more
English, bucolic style was in vogue, and Marie-Antoinette enjoyed spending time in her hamlet at Versailles, which she had modeled after an English village. In the last photo, she is portrayed toward the end of her reign as queen. Not only is she somberly dressed in black, but her clothing appears to be in disarray. Her hair is arranged rather haphazardly, and she wears little makeup.

Figure 5: Kirsten Dunst as Marie-Antoinette. *Marie Antoinette.* Dir. Sofia Coppola. Perf. Kirsten Dunst. Sony pictures home entertainment, 2006. DVD.
This striking contrast in the depictions of Marie-Antoinette is important because it reflects several significant changes that occurred throughout the eighteenth century: a change in politics, a change in fashion, and a change in the perception of the ideal woman. During the earlier reign of Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI, the nobility needed to maintain appearances of wealth and strength by wearing the most luxurious, opulent clothing and accessories, which were reserved only for the highest nobility. However, as times changed and the public criticized the nobility’s excesses and the problems they caused France’s failing economy, the nobility’s wealth and opulence changed from symbols of France’s good taste and strong luxury trades, to symbols
of the nobility’s excess and oppression. It therefore became prudent for the nobility to appear more reasonable with its expenses.

Furthermore, in the case of Marie-Antoinette, she had long been criticized for being foolish and frivolous, and she had failed in many ways to fulfill the “mother role” her position required not only as the mother of her children, but symbolically as the “mother” of France. It had taken her many years to produce any children due to her husband’s problems with engaging in sexual intercourse, and, like many of her contemporaries, it appeared as though she was more interested in her own pleasure than in raising the future rulers of the country. This image was compounded by the influence of her noble friends, mainly the Duchesse de Polignac, who was extremely disliked by the public. By being portrayed in more conservative, simpler clothing, and by including her children in the portraits, Marie-Antoinette attempted to combat many of the criticisms leveled against her, which had intensified in the years preceding the Revolution. However, this painting likely failed in its attempt to portray Marie-Antoinette as a loving devoted mother, as it clearly indicated that she was not used to spending a lot of time in the company of her children: “Her children are orderly positioned for the painting which is symbolic of their distant relationship. The staged setting and forced interactions within this painting make it clear that Marie Antoinette spends very little time engaging with her own children” (History of Women Artists Chapter 5). Marie-Antoinette wears a stoic expression, and none of her children look directly at her in the painting. It is too austere and formal to be indicative of any true maternal affection.

Marie-Antoinette surely loved her children, and after the royal family’s exile to the Tuileries Palace, she perhaps grew closer to them as her usual amusements were stripped away, but this short amount of time in which she showed a devotion to her children likely did little to
make up for the years in which she had appeared selfish and immature. Furthermore, the public was likely not impressed with the fact that Marie-Antoinette attempted to use her children to gain sympathy. It is said that when she appeared on the balcony of Versailles as angry crowds stormed the palace, she brought her young child with her to gain sympathy. But by doing so, perhaps she also gave the impression that she was willing to put her child in harm’s way in order to save herself.

Another argument that affected the changes in perceptions of women’s roles preceding the Revolution was that involvement in fashion or other means of display debased the virtuous value of a woman. While Jean-Jacques Rousseau maintained that it was appropriate for women to be charming and beautiful within the realm of their home, he also disliked the amount of attention publicly paid to women in general. When discussing contemporary works of theater, Rousseau criticized the portrayal of women on the stage. He praised societies in which women remained mysterious and virtuous, and where they were not constantly being discussed and put on display. In contrast to these societies, Rousseau remarks that in France, the most discussed woman was the most highly regarded: “Among us…the most esteemed woman is the one who causes the most commotion; who is most spoken about; who is most seen in high society…and for whose favor the humble learned men beg most basely” (Kelly/Grace 218). Furthermore, Rousseau explains, women in contemporary plays always seemed to be the ones instructing, telling others what to do, etc.: “Leaf through the majority of modern plays, it is always a woman who knows everything, who teaches everything to men” (Kelly/Grace 219). It would seem that, according to Rousseau, these occurrences upended the natural order of the world.

Furthermore, this is also true of the relationship between the young and the elderly. Rousseau was aghast by the fact that, in the plays of the time, the central figures were young
lovers, and there was no place for the elderly, except perhaps to serve as obstacles for the young lovers. If any older people participated in the theater, they were resigned to being portrayed either as ridiculous and foolish, or as meddling. The same can be said for many of the female figures in the literary works examined in this dissertation. The women in many of these plays are not virtuous or loving, but shrewish and diabolical, and if they are not disagreeable, they are ridiculous in their pursuits of younger men or attempts to dupe their husbands.

If a conclusion it to be made about what people thought of women during the eighteenth century, perhaps the only one that can be made is that there were no concrete ideas about what women should be like and how they should act. In previous centuries, women’s’ roles appear to be much clearer. In the lower and middle classes, women were primarily wives and mothers, and in the upper classes, in addition, they sometimes aided husbands in their political and social endeavors. Women of the upper classes also put themselves on display in order to demonstrate their wealth and superiority. But during the eighteenth century, these clear-cut perceptions of women became blurred, because women of the lower and middle classes became eligible to make themselves beautiful and luxurious, whereas eventually women of the upper classes were encouraged to tone down their opulence and focus more on their domestic duties. The idea of what a woman’s “place” was became more and more problematic, and there were a variety of conflicting ideas about what kind of influence a woman should have.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the clothing and luxury industries posed major problems for men. Because women still did not contribute significantly in terms of literature and politics (although there are of course many examples of women writers at the time, as well as those who wrote under male pseudonyms), information about what women thought of these changes is not as readily available. But men had plenty to say about it. If we refer to the works in
this dissertation, those that appear to be in favor of women participating in the labor force and having more options are written by a woman, namely Mme de Genlis. And although Genlis is clearly in favor of women being able to support themselves and contribute something to society, she does so with the restraint that women should first and foremost be devoted to eventually becoming exemplary wives and mothers. Even when there is encouragement for women to have their own means of income, or at least their own means of support should something happen to their husband, etc., this encouragement is limited in that it does not support women being independent, it merely supports an alternative for women becoming destitute or resorting to prostitution if she loses her husband or has no marriage prospects.

The works examined in this dissertation also testify to the power of literature to influence society. In the first half of the eighteenth century, literary works appear to support women participating in the fashion industries, because this offered an alternative to unmarried women joining a convent or resorting to prostitution, and an increase in women’s participation in the “workforce” allowed for more economic stimulation. But by the end of the eighteenth century, public opinion of women such as the marchande de modes had completely reversed, and they were now viewed as the embodiment of what they were originally thought to prevent a woman from becoming: a prostitute. While this is largely due to the nature of the marchandes’ boutiques, which allowed men and women to interact freely without much supervision, it would also appear that public opinion supported these changes in perspective, and these changes were reflected in the literature of the time. In addition, many of the works included in this dissertation were intended to be pedagogical, attempting to either encourage young women to participate in the creation of clothing/the labor force if it were the only legitimate solution to avoid falling into prostitution, or, in the case of Manon Lescaut, to dissuade women from becoming involved with
luxury in any way. It is clear, for example, that the Abbé Prévost intended to show the readers of *Manon Lescaut* that Manon should have entered the convent as was originally intended for her.

Changes in clothing and in the ways in which women participated in the creation and dictation of fashion were only one of the ways in which French society shifted during the eighteenth century. Huge changes were of course occurring in the political, economic, and social systems of France. But fashion clearly played a part in these changes. The eighteenth century was the first moment in France’s history where fashion was not completely dictated by a person’s gender, social status, age, etc. Women’s clothing, which had always been relatively simple in comparison to that of men’s, became one of the most prominent ways in which a woman could amuse and even express herself. Clothing was given huge power in the sense that someone like Rose Bertin, who came from nothing, was elevated to the ranks of the nobility because she was able to produce items that were sought after by the most important woman in France, the queen. It seemed to be the first moment in which women could achieve any kind of independence, and for some, this independence was gained through the new developments in the fashion and luxury industries. At the same time, this opened up new possibilities for criticism of women, and many critics viewed the expansion of the textile and luxury industries as another way in which sinful women could betray their true nature as a woman- that of being an exemplary wife and mother. The eighteenth century was a polarizing period, and although the concept of women’s role in fashion was not the central conflict of the time, it certainly contributed to major arguments about women’s roles in society, as well as the place that luxury occupied, and changes in fashions and trends held significant influence over the lives of French people from all backgrounds and social classes for the first time in its history.
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