



THE FASHION REVOLUTION

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*la***Rinascence**
[prima della Rinascence]

1865 - 1915

In Paris, the undisputed capital of fashion from the 1700s onwards, visitors to the *Pavillon de l'Élégance*, set up as part of the 1900 International Exhibition did not see anything new as far as style was concerned. Women's garments continued to keep strictly to the silhouette of the 1800s consisting of corsets and crinoline and only the First World War was able to displace, thus introducing women from all social classes to a new elegance that was sober, natural and modern.

The real innovation was the class of people targeted by the offer of haute couture, that is to say the grand bourgeoisie of the nouveaux riches: businessmen that had accumulated their wealth by means of commerce, investors and industrialists linked to the technological innovations that led to a new acceleration in economic growth in Europe and the US.

Fashion was no longer the prerogative of the aristocracy linked to royal courts (the most authoritative testing ground for new models of elegance in the pre-industrial era), but rather the privilege of the new couturiers like Charles Frederick Worth (1825-1895) who, during the 1870s understood that the wealthier classes needed a form differentiation: he was the first to decide to organise fashion shows ahead of the season and to place labels with his logo inside garments; the first to employ fashion models to show his creations and to

regularly propose new styles continuously changing fabrics, trimmings and designs. Worth brought fashion into the modern age while turning it into a creative enterprise and publicity event.

The unification and the diffusion of fashion exceeded

the national boundaries: elegant women began to wear a single type of dress, with identical prerequisites all over Italy, in a style that was being defined between Europe and America. The issue of 'Margherita' of 17th July 1881 read as follows: "With communication made easy and the rapport we have with other countries, we could not create a fashion all of our own because there would be the risk of crossing the Alps and finding oneself dressed differently from the rest of the mortals and seen as someone coming from the moon... The styles, whether they come from Paris or Berlin, from London or Milan must always have a certain uniformity and similar main attributes,

at least. After that each country must seize one or the other and adapt it according to the weather and circumstances with some small variations to gratify the taste of its inhabitants".

An eloquent testimony of the diffusion of fashion vertically and not only horizontally within society between the 19th and 20th centuries is given by the explosion of magazines for women in the second half of the 1800s. These catered for every type of reader from



"Margherita" Italian women magazine, 1884

the wealthiest to the most modest, from the most sophisticated to the most specialised: 'Il Monitore della moda', 'La moda illustrata', 'La moda', 'Il giornale per le modiste', 'La fantasia' and 'La gran moda'.

The extraordinary success of female and fashion publications, as a result of the introduction of new printing techniques and the use of photography, turned them into a fundamental tool in expanding the clothing market and contributing to the creation of new buying habits and new consumers. We also must not forget to mention mail order catalogues that reached their customer base with their pages rich in pictures of the latest models, nor must we forget the glittering atmosphere of the new shopping places.

However, the real revolution occurred with the birth of department stores: the new retail formula was in many ways different from the specialised traditional retailer (the heir to the medieval urban specialised workshop). Some of the main differences were: fixed prices shown on tags, free entry, free returns and the breadth of choice. The shop windows, absent from the traditional shops, thanks to the use of new building techniques (reinforced concrete, iron and glass) were conceived as displays for merchandise and the inside spaces, always spectacularly set out, became places of entertainment for the customers.

The model for this type of store came from Paris as well. In 1852 Aristide Boucicaut purchased Bon Marché, an emporium for textiles and clothing that soon started selling ready-made garments for women, underwear, hats and shoes thus clearly on the path to

becoming the forerunner of a department store. In Italy, the social and economic conditions which saw the advent of the department store were very different: income, buying habits and urbanisation were of a much lower standard than north of the Alps; however that did not hinder the rise of major business initiatives, such as the department store Alle città d'Italia of the Bocconi brothers and the Grandi Magazzini Italiani owned by the Mele bothers of Naples that triggered the democratization of fashion, which, in turn, led to the advent of del prêt-à-porter.

In other words, the contribution of the Milanese department store to

the democratization of fashion and the establishment of a textile and clothing market of national stature resulted in the broadening of the aesthetic canons of haute couture, the consolidation of a certain amount of good taste among the emerging classes moving parallel to the modernisation of channels and techniques of communication in the field of clothing and accessories and to the setting up of a sales structure made up of branches opened in the main cities in Italy.



Mario Camerini, poster of the movie "Grandi Magazzini", 1939