

ETHIC THREADS REVIEW

ISSUE 2

A vintage sewing machine, likely a Singer, is shown in a close-up shot. The machine is dark-colored with ornate, light-colored floral patterns. A person's hands are visible, guiding a piece of dark fabric through the machine. The background is a light, textured surface. The title 'BEHIND THE SEAMS' is overlaid in a large, white, handwritten-style font.

BEHIND THE SEAMS

EDITORS NOTE

Welcome to the second issue of Ethic Threads Review, “Behind The Seams”! With this issue, we hope to shine light on the backgrounds behind the clothes we wear, and how they go from cradle to grave. We often view our clothes’ lifespans as spanning between when we buy them to when we stop wearing them, when there is so much more that goes on behind the scenes.

This issue contains works that explore these facets of the fashion world, and we could not be more honored to spotlight such amazing writers.

A special thank you to everyone on the Ethic Threads Review team that contributed to our work this year. This would not be possible without you.

I truly hope the articles and stories you find in here bring as much creativity and joy to you as those who wrote them.

Bisous,

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A CORSET'S CHOKEHOLD

by Sadie Ann



It's no secret that the fashion industry cares about more than just the clothes on people's bodies; it cares deeply, and almost obsessively, about the bodies themselves. From the ideals of the 1990s "heroin-chic" era to the 2010s Instagrammable "slim thick", it's evident that trends are dependent on changing body types and beauty standards. Although silhouettes may constantly shift, the fundamentals of the fashion industry stands clear: the ideal body type is one that should be moldable and able to compliment current aesthetics.

So, where did this all begin? Fashion's manipulation of the body, specifically the female body, isn't anything new. It predates shiny magazines, runways, and social media influencers. In fact, it can be traced back centuries to a time when clothing was as much about control and conformity as it was about covering the body. Among these regulations, the most quintessential tactic was the corset.

The earliest iteration of the corset can be traced back to ancient civilizations, including Greece and Crete, where garments resembling corsets were used to achieve a cinched waist and elevated posture. In early societies, bodies were idealized for their beauty but also considered inherently provocative or shameful. Corsets then became a supplement to the sheer amount of physical labor women from this time and onward performed. Most corsets had shoulder straps that would pull the shoulders backward, creating a rigid posture and high chest, preserving a women's shape despite their taxing work.

As fashion transitioned into the 18th and 19th centuries, the expectations placed on the female body grew even more intense. The empire waistlines and light linens of earlier decades gave way to cinched waists, hoop skirts, and bustles that emphasized the hips. The hourglass figure became the standard, and a shape attainable through rigid corsetry and highly structured clothing. This shift wasn't only about aesthetics, however. It symbolized ideal femininity, wealth, and status. While the corset may no longer be a daily staple, at least not in the traditional sense, the fashion industry's control over the body has hardly faded.

For example, the 1990s popularized the ultra-thin "heroin chic" aesthetic. The narrow figures of this time were a stark contrast to the curvy silhouettes that were desired just a few years ago in the 80s. In the 2000s, the flip switched again, when the era of low-rise jeans and visible hip bones began. Then came the 2010s, where curves returned to the spotlight, thanks in part to social media influencers and celebrities who reshaped beauty norms. But these new ideals didn't represent liberation from the old ones; they simply replaced one impossible standard with another. The implications of fashion's obsession with body manipulation go far beyond the pages of Vogue or the runway shows of Paris. For everyday consumers, these standards influence self-image, mental health, and the ways we interact with clothing.

Clothing companies frequently design garments with a specific body type in mind. This results in sizing inconsistencies, limited options for shoppers, and exclusion for anyone who doesn't conform. Fashion has no longer become about celebrating one's true self, but rather, the ability to fit into an ideal.



THE DEVIL WEARS SHEIN

by Julia Kim





RED BOTTOMS, RED-HANDED

by Emily White

The year is 1722 and periwigs, hoop skirts and mercury permeated makeup is all the rage. Above the bustling streets and markets, extravagance is prioritized above all else so much so that it's frowned upon to leave your house without a perfect red lip and beauty mark adorning your face. But in what world did all these expectations apply to everyone, regardless of their gender or age? Believe it or not, there was a time in Western and European culture where silk, lace, and high heels were the idealistic visions for men's and women's fashion – a culture and style that flourished from France in the early 1700's. Unlike its latter revolution, the Regency Era, this era thrived through opulence and was nearly ostentatious on all fronts. Dresses grew wider and wigs piled higher, all the way through it was form over function. However, as the society of Europe changed through politics, so did its fashion.

But how did this happen? This is the history and horror behind the Rococo Fashion Era. The Rococo Era of fashion was a reflection of the convoluted political state of Europe. The French aristocracy valued their wealth and finery above all else, and Rococo fashion allowed them to do that. The Rococo Era also influenced many parts of the 17th to 18th century world, and created a picturesque and glamorous view of France and the Western nations. This era was so dominant that it inspired much of the art, fashion and architecture we see today. In this speech, I'll be discussing three key points: how the Rococo Era began, the exciting yet cruel society it created, and its inevitable downfall.

The Rococo Era began in the 1700s. It was a rather arbitrary period that was created by the aristocrats of France. The key term here is "bigger is better," where the more extravagant and nearly gaudy you presented, the more classy and rich you seemed. Rococo fashion often took inspiration from nature, displaying motifs of common nature sightings such as animals, plants, and stars. Due to the un-uniformity of nature and its natural quirks, Rococo fashion wasn't seamless. According to an article published by the My Modern Met, "the asymmetrical silhouettes are inherently naturalistic yet undoubtedly exaggerated, and are found in a range of objects."

The common outfit for men consisted of linen and cotton fabrics. Using a simple undergarment shirt, they would be tucked into a pair of breeches overtop a waistcoat. On top of it all, they would typically finish with a thick velvet coat adorned with decorative patterns as mentioned before. For women, corsets and hoop skirts formed the iconic dress silhouette. The main dresses were heavy velvet gowns similar to the men's waistcoats, and had ornate and intricate sleeves that were added to the dresses at the end of the process. The entire ordeal was a form of rebellion if you will. A form of art that existed without constricts or rules. Yet, it only existed for some.

During this time, the economic and social disparities between social classes were strikingly obvious, and impossible to ignore. To combat this, the rich pursued their form of escapism through mainly their fashion. It was a chance to ignore the filthy outside streets of France that barged in on their daily lives, and to create a space of regality and pureness. We can look back on prominent figures or examples in history that reflect this change and resoluteness. For instance, King Louis XIV of France was infamous for his recorded usage of red heels that he wore constantly— dare I say, the original Christian Louboutins. At the time, deep red dyes were made by crushing the shells of beetles, an expensive practice. To ensure his monopoly over the product, King Louis deemed in 1673 that only nobility and the elite could wear the color.

An article from Getty.com states, “He didn’t really need the heels for height, but he wore them because it was a sign of prestige and expense,” says Kimberly Chrisman–Campbell, an art historian. The shoes were not only a statement but a tool of social control. Another example of abused power stems from wigs. As wigs grew taller, the common plebeians grew angrier. In the mid to late 1700’s the common alternative for hair powder was flour. Consequently, as more wigs were demanded, more flour was, making the product have a much higher demand. In return, common folks could not afford to pay for a loaf of bread. So as you can see, it was pretty easy for them to get angry at the rich who had an obsolete use for the textile. Based on these few examples alone, we can see how the lower class was often completely disregarded.

However, this spree of erraticness was fleeting. Not everyone could share the ideologies and notions that the rich perceived, making the fashion, art and lifestyle entirely unsustainable. More structured and educated thoughts were cultivated at the turn of the 18th century also known as the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was a program of reform – a chance for nations across the globe to do better, and make their countries safer, stronger, and more reliable for all its citizens. Goals of the Enlightenment included liberation, acceptance and unity. As you can see, seldom points of the Rococo Era fit into these new beliefs. Through this cultural revolution, ideas about art and fashion began to change. Less appreciated was the frivolity of their dresses and paintings.

According to an article by Study.com, “Art became more purposeful in expressing the Enlightenment’s philosophical and social ideas. This was in contrast to the Rococo style, which emphasized art being purely decorative.” Many art critics suggested turning to simpler, neoclassicism styles, most of which were inspired by Greek and Roman art. As a result, dresses were stripped down, and makeup was wiped away. Some radicals continued their then provocative ways of dressing and living, but their individuality was quick to fade over time. So what did we learn?

Now, the year is 1783 and cotton dresses with empire waistlines, top hats, and pearl necklaces are all the rage. The grandiose doors to the high-society driven Rococo fashion have now closed. However, all hope is not lost. If you chose to be an outlier, great. Strive towards your individuality and own it. If not, then go with the flow, and see wherever life takes you. Wherever you end up, I hope to see you in the next century.

