

The Marie Antoinette Fantasy



by Sylvia Mac Neil

Paris has always been famous for creating fantasies and accessories for the feminine toilette, and the couturiers had the talent for rendering these fantasies quite indispensable. Take, for example, the various short capes, pelerines and fichus, not made to match the dress, but to harmonize with it. These pretty additions to the toilette, referred to as *confections*, by the French, were exceedingly popular.

One of the prettiest fantasies in the way of *confections* was the Marie Antoinette fichu, named for the Austrian born, teenage queen of France, Marie Antoinette. She is considered to be part of popular culture and a major historical figure. Some academics and scholars have deemed her frivolous and superficial, and have attributed the start of the French Revolution to her; others, however, have claimed that she was treated unjustly and that views of her ought to be more sympathetic. In 1774, Marie Antoinette was given free rein to renovate the *Petit Trianon*, a small *château* on the grounds of the Palace of Versailles. She redesigned the gardens in the English manner, and

chose the English dress of *indienne*, percale or muslin. Some years later, in 1784, she occupied herself with the creation of the *Hameau de la Reine*, The Queen's Hamlet, a model hamlet with a mill and twelve cottages in the surrounding garden of the *Petit Trianon*. When visiting the hamlet, she often donned a dress of white muslin with a white, gauze fichu and a straw hat. This innovativeness of dress of Marie Antoinette and her court imitated the simple, unsophisticated, country life of peasants.

It was a matter of common sense, if one went into the world, it was best to conform to its plain, uncomplicated rules. In short, every fashion device that was costly, fantastic, or novel was sure to take ground, for a time at least, with the pleasure loving, novelty seeking society. Soon, the *élégantes* adopted the simple feminine accessory, the fichu. A small, triangular scarf of lightweight material, it was worn over the shoulders and crossed in front, or tied in a loose knot at the breast. Brought into vogue by Marie Antoinette, variations of this popular fashion accessory, in countless fabrics and trims, were universally featured

Above: This painting is of Marie Antoinette and her children, when the mob broke into the Tuileries Palace on June 20, 1792. Several figures, including Marie Antoinette, are depicted wearing simple, white fichus.



Here is Chiffonnette, a 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ inch doll attributed to Huret, modeling a coquettish, little number made up in a fine, cotton dotted Swiss. The light and airy dress has a simple bodice with large, puffed sleeves and a full skirt trimmed with a flounce and garnished with Valenciennes lace.

in fashion journals in every decade since, from as early as the 1790s and continuing into the 20th century. Illustrations in black and white, others colored with brightly tinted inks, were illustrated and reviewed in periodicals such as *Le Bon Ton*, *Cendrillon*, *La Belle Assemblée*, *Le Follet* in French, and *Ladies' Museum*, *Ackerman's Repository* and *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* in English. More well known to those doing research today are *Journal des Demoiselles*, *Magasin des Demoiselles*, *La Mode Illustrée*, and naturally enough, "Godey's Ladies' Book" and "Peterson's Magazine." And let's not forget the fashion reviews and patterns offered every month in the favored, French children's magazine, *La Poupée Modèle*.

In the October, 1849, issue of "Peterson's Magazine," this detailed information and description appeared; "Among pelerines we have observed one just imported from Paris, made to sit low and easy round the neck. At the back it has something the appearance of a *berthe*; but in front it descends in long ends, which are crossed on the bosom, then carried behind, where they are tied at the back of the waist. This pelerine may be made of worked muslin, trimmed with narrow lace; or it may be of silk, either back or colored. If made of black, it may be trimmed with narrow lace; and if of colored silk, with a *ruche* of the same material. When the season becomes



The outstanding feature of this ensemble is the Marie Antoinette fichu which is fashioned from the same material as the dress. The back fits smoothly across the shoulders, the rounded bottom falling quite to the waist. The ends are simply crossed one over the other, falling prettily in long lappets. All is trimmed with Val lace to correspond.



The caprice for fancy is displayed in this striking red and black geometric print on a white background; woven white stripes accent the sheerness of the fine, cotton fabric. This model of grace and elegance is made up from the same pattern as the white dotted Swiss dress. It is surely destined to meet with great success.

Nothing could be more charming than Chiffonnette wearing a Marie Antoinette fichu modeled after an original doll's fichu in a museum in Monaco. Made of black taffeta, it is edged round with black silk fringe. A novel feature is the jet beaded braid. It is set at the edge of the neckline and just above the fringe on the cape-like portion. The fichu then narrows, and only one row of the braid continues down the center of the gently rounded lappets, looped over at the back.



This dainty fichu is made up in creamy white, fine cotton and Valenciennes lace. It is garnished in a similar manner to the black silk one, with the addition of three small tabs of lace set at the neckline in back.





Among the novelties is this fichu of white lace, draped in perfection. A 19th century lady's lace cap was used to make this fanciful creation.

Below, Chiffonnette wears the graceful lace fichu with a green and white windowpane plaid, cotton dress. It is arranged loosely, falling in beautiful, soft folds.

more advanced, this addition to the corsage, made of black velvet, and worn with a dress of colored silk, would have an elegant effect." It is generally the crossed fichu described here, with long, flowing ends at the back, which was known as the Marie Antoinette fichu. Ends could be long and narrow, nicely rounded or squared or very much pointed. They could, at pleasure, be simply looped one over the other, tied in a loose knot or a fanciful bow. From time to time the shorter fichus which simply crossed in the front also bore the same name.

The most novel creations featured in the domain of fashion always occupied a prominent place among the requirements of the wardrobes of dolls. With almost fairy-like skill couturiers transformed laces, materials, ribbons and garnitures into charming little coquetries so admired by the doll world. Among the tasteful and novel *confections* were miniature replicas of Marie Antoinette fichus. Like the adult counterparts they either matched the dress or coordinated with the ensemble. Many lady dolls wore a fichu of simple, white cotton, or black silk, and lace fichu were worn with most *folklorique* costumes. A fichu was even included in the ever-popular Bleurette's array of patterns in 1919. Among the fantasies found in original trousseaux of Huret and Rohmer dolls was a variation of the Marie Antoinette fichu. These were made of the same material as the dress, often a dainty, floral, cotton print or simple, crisp, white muslin. This fichu was made like a deep collar attached to the neckline of the dress in back, fell loose to cross in front, were then brought to the back and looped over or tied in a bow. These were decidedly the most delightful affairs introduced by Dame Fashion.





Familiar to lovers of early dolls with trousseaux is "The Trousseau Of Blondinette Davranche." Included in the sumptuous, couturier designed wardrobe are two dresses with the attached Marie Antoinette fichu, one in a tiny, floral cotton print with flounces, and the fanciful creation featured here. Made of fine, white muslin, this elegant model features a fichu crossed in front and looped over at the back, where the lappets cascade nearly to the hem. All is trimmed with fine, hand-embroidered scalloped ruffles, arranged with matchless taste. *Photo courtesy Theriaults*



This jaunty, little affair is an example of the Marie Antoinette fichu which is attached to the dress. Fashioned of aqua blue and white striped taffeta, it crosses over the gathered plastron in front and depends coquettishly at the back. All is trimmed with flounces pinked out along the edge, a tiny hole punched in the middle of each scallop,

In 1850, "Peterson's" included this fashion note: "Little bodies to wear with low-bodied dresses are in high vogue, as are the Marie-Antoinette and the peasant fichus." It continues with this description; "For an evening dress, when a lady does not wish to expose her neck, the bodies are made low and nearly straight across. Over them is worn those graceful Louis XIII, or Marie-Antoinette fichus. Some are made of spotted tulle and trimmed with lace, others of plain muslin. Round the latter runs a simple puffing with a double head and having a ribbon in it. This is at once inexpensive and remarkable for freshness."

In the early 1860s, white dresses of every description were in especial favor. Thin, vaporous materials, or "see-through" muslins, trimmed with fine ruches and airy flounces were made up for dinner or evening dresses, while jaconets, barred muslins, and linen lawns were for morning wear. Rows of wide insertion were used in the skirt, alternating with the same width of muslin. Many ladies remembered this as an old, but elegant, fashion revived. Made to coordinate with these dresses were small capes, fitting close to the shoulders and coming half-way to the waist, about as deep as the old style *berthe*, but commencing at the throat. These were much more suitable for mid-summer. Another wrap, the mantilla, was very small, open and reached a little below the waist. Paramount



in favor among the Fashionables were Marie Antoinette fichus, made up in the same material and trimmed to correspond with the dresses. The ladies were looking lovelier than ever, from the effect of fresh, light materials, often accented with knots and flowing bows and long streamers of bright, silk ribbons.

In the French magazine, *Journal Des Demoiselles*, in June, 1863, a Marie Antoinette fichu was included in a review of dinner and evening dresses: "I have also seen for evening a dress of striped taffeta without garniture, the bodice was low with a *guimpe*, and, on the shoulders, a Marie-Antoinette fichu crossed in front and tied behind; the fichu was the same material as the dress, garnished with two little ruffles surmounted by a *ruche*, the half-open long sleeves were garnished like the fichu."

In the mid 1860s, it was noted in several ladies' books that lace had once more found all the favor which formerly rendered it the most beautiful ornament of the female toilette, not to speak of the cuffs and ruffles of gentlemen of the ancient regime. It was no longer to balls that lace lent its charm and grace, it also ornamented morning dresses as well as evening ones. Lace being so generally worn, this beautiful and elegant material was produced in vast profusion and variety. Much of the new lace, such as Alençon, Brussels and Honiton, was remarkable for the richness of its patterns. Black Chantilly lace of superior quality was employed for light wraps and was adapted for trimming cloaks, jackets and other articles of dress. The lace *berthes* and fichus, invariably worn with low bodices, which had appeared were remarkable for the elegance and costliness of the

Colored engravings of children's fashions were often featured in French magazines, such as this one from *Journal Des Demoiselles* in the April issue of 1857: It described the second figure, "Little girl ten or twelve years old. Dress of poplin; the second skirt cut in points, is ornamented with velvet; the sleeves, with double ruffles, are made the same as the second skirt; the Marie-Antoinette fichu, tied behind, of the same fabric as the dress, is also garnished with velvet; Swiss muslin chemisette; puffed sleeves with embroidered cuffs; Louis XIII hat of straw surrounded with a plume."



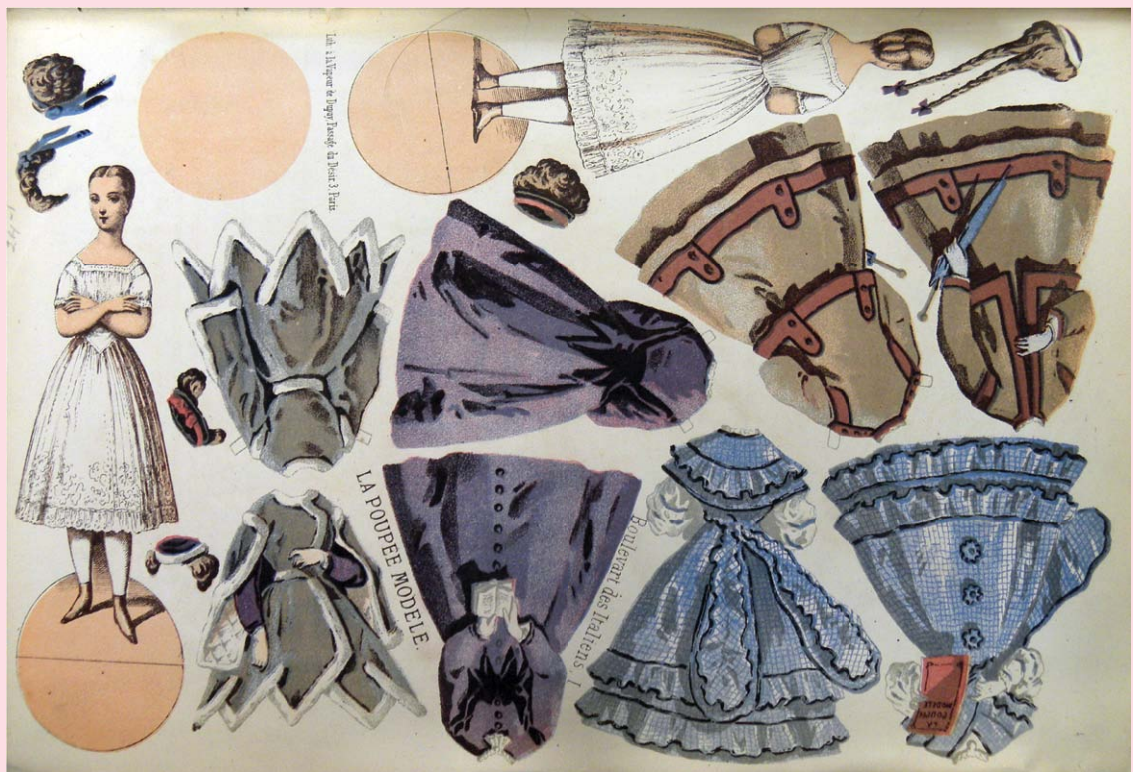
The January, 1860, issue of "Godey's Ladies' Book" gave this engraving, depicting what Dickens referred to as "worsted armor," "Bosom Friend, or Sontag. The spots are darned in black in imitation of ermine. A loop is put on one end, in front, and a button on the other, it crosses over and buttons at the back; the back is fastened to a cord and tassels passing round the waist and tied in front."

Fichu continued on page 64



This colored fashion plate from the August, 1863, issue of "Godey's" illustrates some charming summer dresses. The first figure is wearing a "White French muslin dress, trimmed with six rows of muslin quilling. The corsage is low, and over it is worn a Marie Antoinette fichu, laid in plaits, and trimmed with flutings and worked ruffling. The fichu ties at the back, and has long embroidered ends, also trimmed with a quilling of muslin. The sleeves are puffed, and just wide enough to pass the hand through. The hair is *crêpé*, and arranged in a waterfall at the back." The last figure on the right also wears a fichu, this one crossing in the front. This fichu is unusual in that it has sleeves. "Cuir-colored Paris grenadine, figured with black, and trimmed with five rows of box plaited green silk. The corsage is low, and over it is worn a fancy fichu, with long sleeves, trimmed with green ribbon. Fine straw hat, trimmed with green ribbons and a fall of black lace."

The November, 1867, issue of *La Poupée Modèle* included, in the "ANNEXES" a paper doll: "Color Plate, Figurine in cardboard to cut out and is the beginning of her trousseau for the year 1867-68." The blue and white check dress features a Marie Antoinette fichu, simply looped over at the back; all is trimmed with flounces and rows of narrow, black velvet ribbon along the edges, and garnished with rosettes.





This fashion engraving is from *Journal Des Demoiselles*, 1867. The second figure shows a: "Toilette for a young girl. – Dress of very light Swiss muslin. This skirt is lined in yellow straw-colored tarlatan, and is transparent under the dress of muslin. This type of lining is prettier than silk for a young person, and the effect is very sweet. – The bodice has a low neckline and long sleeves. – The Marie-Antoinette fichu is ornamented by two large tucks created by *entre-deux guipure*; it is tied behind and finishes in a form of long sash. It is also garnished round with *guipure* and lined in tarlatan. – The hat of white straw, in the shepherdess style, is ornamented with tea roses."

designs. Among the fichus was one very handsome style of white lace, trimmed with black velvet. It was formed by rows of lace insertion disposed alternately with rows of the narrowest, black velvet ribbon. All was edged round with frills of lace. Another fichu was formed of bands of black velvet ribbon and puffs of black tulle, with runnings of cerise colored ribbon passed under them.

In March of 1868, a pattern to make a Marie Antoinette fichu of tulle and lace was featured in "Peterson's:" "This Fichu is at present most fashionable over both high and low dresses. It is made in black and white net, either plain or figured. We give an engraving of a Fichu of plain Brussels net, trimmed with two rows of Cluny lace as far as the waist, where one row tapers off, and one only is continued round the ends. Oval medallions of Cluny ornament the ends of the Fichu, and five little tabs of insertion, edged with lace, are placed round the back of the neck." Another pattern was given in the July issue. Unlike the pattern in March, which had a seam in the center back, this one had seams on the shoulders, and the lappets as well as the back ended in sharp points. "The short, ungraceful sac-paletot is at last to be replaced. The two new forms of out-door covering are



This is the illustration of the fichu for which the pattern was given in the July, 1868, issue of "Peterson's." It is made up in black dotted tulle and edged round with black lace, headed by black, velvet ribbon. Zig-zag ribbon trims the back, and two jaunty bows set off the shoulders.

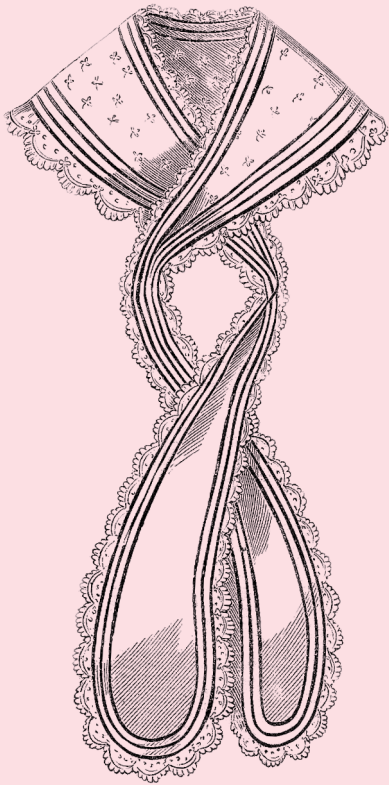


Peterson's Magazine, October, 1868, depicted this black and white engraving of: "CHILDREN'S FASHIONS. Fig. 1. A YOUNG GIRL'S DRESS OF PINK SILK, with two ruffles around the bottom; white alpaca over-dress, finished at the bottom with two narrow bands of pink silk; Marie Antoinette fichu of the same material trimmed with a ruching of pink silk."



The celebrated French fashion journal, *La Mode Illustrée*, in the Sunday, July 19, 1874, issue showcased this steel engraving: "Fiche Marie-Antoinette.

Toilette from the house of Mme Rossignon, Rue de Provence, 9. Made up in white muslin. The garniture is composed of puffs, *entredeux*, a ruche of muslin, and lace. Under the puffs and the *entredeux*, one cuts out the muslin." Courtesy of Patricia Allen



Marie Antoinette fichus were apparently paramount in popularity in 1868, for here is yet another illustration in the December issue of "Peterson's." This one sets high at the neck and is made up in a small, figured material, edged with lace and trimmed with rows of narrow ribbon.

the Marie Antoinette Fichu and the Lamballe Mantelet. The former crosses in front of the chest, and the ends are looped over at the back of the waist; the Lamballe is a small cape, with short ends that are left to hang at the sides. As the Marie Antoinette Fichu is likely to be the more popular of the two, we this month present our readers with the cut paper pattern of one. The fichu may be made and trimmed in a variety of styles. For morning wear, it can be cut out of the same material as the dress, and trimmed to correspond with it; in black taffetas, either embroidered or braided, and bordered with fringe, it is extremely stylish, as well as useful. For evening wear, it is very fashionable, in either black or white lace, in the new hand-embroidered tulle, and in white muslin, richly trimmed with Valenciennes lace, as in the illustration."

Another type of fichu was described in the March, 1859, issue of "Godey's:" "The pretty varieties of what Dickens calls 'worsted armor,' for children, the gaiters, carriage boots, jackets, talmas, hoods, caps, sleeves, and, in fact, every style of wraps for the open air, which are knit and crocheted by hand or by machinery, of Shetland, Berlin, and coarser wools, of every tint and color imaginable. They improve every year in gracefulness of shape and variety of purpose. ... For ladies' wear, hoods, rigolettes, Sontags, Marie Antoinettes, jackets, talmas, shawls, gauntlets, and sleeves, generally crocheted, or knit with crocheted borders, are in general use. We prefer the fichu Marie Antoinette to the Sontag for wear under a cloak, or as a morning-wrap, where a shawl would be in the way. It crosses on the bust, and fastens behind with a Cordelier, and does not rise towards the throat with the close, uncomfortable tightness of the Sontag, while the warmth is nearly the same."

The general use of the Marie Antoinette fichus continued. With their aid, old dresses or somber colored ones could be very much brightened up at comparatively little expense. For ladies who were unwilling to wear tight-fitting garments in the street without something to conceal the figure, these fichus were the most convenient. They were made in such a manner that they could at pleasure be either at the neck or in the center of the back, or at the waist, according to the manner the fichu was arranged, more or less forward in front. Sometimes they were made up in fine cottons, sometimes of black or white lace, black silk, or the material of the dress. These fichus were trimmed with ruches and narrow velvet ribbons, ruffles and fine pleats, bows and ribbons, or edged round with gathered lace flounces, made to the taste of the wearer. Fashion was the only arbiter here.

Place On Fold

Marie Antoinette Fichu

Cut One



Marie Antoinette Fichu

Cut Two

The pattern featured here is for the fichu made to match the white, dotted Swiss ensemble, and also the red and white cotton print. It will fit a lady doll 17" to 18". The seams to join the lappets are sewn with a French seam. Then, the edges of the fichu are folded under narrowly and hemmed. Valenciennes lace is gathered then whipped onto the edge all around.

A piece of fabric 18" X 12" is needed, and 3 ½ yards of Valenciennes lace to suit your fancy.



To sew a fine, narrow hem along a curve, first a small running stitch is sewn near the edge. The fabric is then turned under on the row of stitches, pulling the thread gently to form the curve; the fabric is turned a second time and hemmed.



Valenciennes lace is whipped onto the edge.