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Diana Davis, *The Tastemakers: British Dealers and the Anglo-Gallic Interior, 1785–1865*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2020. xii + 308 pp. Plates, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-60606-641-6.

Review by Conor Lucey, University College Dublin.

In 1810, the Prince Regent (later George IV) purchased a set of twelve Sèvres porcelain plates from the London dealer Robert Fogg for the princely sum of £157, 10s. Originally made for Louis XVI in 1783, the set had cost Fogg only £61 a year earlier from the dealer Philippe-Claude Maelrondt in Paris. As an example of the Francophile tastes of the Regency period, of the symbiotic relationship between contemporary British and French makers and dealers, and of the extravagant markup that French luxury goods commanded in Britain's elite consumer market, this anecdote (among many other similar examples threaded throughout this book) crystallizes the purpose of this fascinating new study, concerned with the trade origins of "utilizing modernity to sell the past" (p. 79).

Diana Davis's account of the much-maligned "Louis Quatorze" style (here rechristened "Anglo-Gallic" to reflect its unique "melding of two cultures" (p. 2)) traces the gradual emergence of the antique trade in early nineteenth-century Britain. While the British market for French furniture and *objets d'arts* was already well established by the eighteenth century, the demand for and supply of objects old and new in the decades either side of 1800 was driven by a new generation of art dealers. Often, but not exclusively highly skilled craftsmen in their own right, this new class of maker/retailer reflected the diversity of practices and expertise required for success in a rapidly evolving art market. Pivotal to the success of this opulent new taste were the dispersed collections of fine and decorative arts created for the Bourbon monarchy. Ornamented wares and furnishings that were deemed undesirable in post-Revolutionary France, both aesthetically and ideologically, were rebranded and often repurposed for aristocratic drawing rooms across the British Isles. Shifting the emphasis from patron to dealer, Davis argues that the cultivation of taste and fine art connoisseurship during the Regency period represented a transformative moment in the history of British collecting.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, entitled "Trade, Taste, and Retail," considers the emergence of a decorative style that successfully combined French design with a British sensibility; the complexity of trade and political relations between two famously antagonistic nations; and the creative marketing strategies used by dealers to forge perceptions of value (of both objects and reputations) in a flourishing marketplace. A fascinating if complex picture emerges of London makers imitating French goods; of French *émigrés* working in London for

British manufactories; and of British retailers negotiating supply deals with French makers. A combination of connoisseurship and business sense was paramount. A type of dealer cartel formed by Phillips auction house in New Bond Street in the 1810s, for example, extending to goldsmiths, cabinetmakers, and retailers based variously between London and Paris, confirms the importance of collaboration and interdependence for a style “driven by commerce” (p. 56). The Anglo-Gallic style was an expensive if essentially egalitarian taste. French royal provenance signified quality for British buyers, and “Parisian elegancies,” the most common descriptor in contemporary catalogs and point-of-sale retail outlets, clearly appealed to the landed classes and *nouveaux riches* alike. As much plutocratic as aristocratic, then, money rather than class was unequivocally the determining factor in the success of a decorative style that “delighted in extravagant display, an evocation of wealth, culture and status” (p. 243). Window displays and pattern books helped enhance prestige and created new markets. The German-born entrepreneur Rudolph Ackermann (1764–1834) opened a luxury goods emporium in the Strand, London and published a long-running magazine, *The Repository of the Arts*, aimed squarely at promoting French fashions and furnishings to the middle classes. Ackermann’s description of a plate illustrating a “French bed,” published in 1816 and pirated from a French design issued some years earlier (Plates 55 and 56), illustrates his commercial aplomb and the complex visual and material identities of the “Louis Quatorze” style. Described as “an English bed with corner posts, decorated agreeably to Parisian fancy,” it represented the best of both worlds, being of British manufacture but moderated by French taste.

The second part of the book, “The Dealer-Producer,” examines the dealer as, somewhat paradoxically, a manufacturer of “antique” furniture. Here, Davis rejects modern preoccupations with authenticity as decidedly anachronistic, drawing theoretical ballast from an object-centered scholarship that privileges the “continuing history” of things (p. 154). Discrete chapters devoted to furniture, gilding, and porcelain illustrate how “old” French stock (sometimes only twenty or thirty years old) was customarily redecorated and reconfigured to suit the Regency taste for gilded opulence. With the addition of ormolu (gilt-bronze) mounts and new painted panels, eighteenth-century sugar basins and fruit dishes were transformed into potpourri vases and inkstands for British libraries and saloons. By the 1820s, the elaboration of already richly ornamented wares was the stock-in-trade of individuals like Edward Homes Baldock (1777–1845), whose “Seve [sic], Dresden, Oriental China and Antique Furniture Warehouse” in Hanway Street specialized in such alchemy. Old wine in decidedly new bottles was patently the order of the day. Defective Sèvres stock was acquired by London dealers at reduced prices and augmented with gilt mounts and repainted ceramic panels, and new furniture produced by Robert Hume, a cabinetmaker, picture dealer, and interior decorator of Portland Street, commanded prices “comparable to that paid for the most exceptional seventeenth-century examples” (p. 167). Novels by Catherine Gore, Charles White, and Maria Edgeworth provide a different glimpse of this new breed of dealer-producer, touching on the delicate question of social mobility. As successful businessmen in a genteel trade they often bridged the class divide, and even shared spaces of leisure and resort designed for the *ton*. [1]

The overarching narrative is centered on the shift in taste from French-style wares (extending to both French- and British-made luxury goods) to genuine, unadulterated French antiques, and how a decidedly French-inflected decorative style became something quintessentially British. It is a story full of marvelous ambivalences and contradictions, especially to a modern sensibility where authenticity and attribution remain central to collecting policies both public and private. British auction catalogs of the 1790s already distinguished between “real old Seve” and “Paris”

(meaning “modern”) wares, and “antique” was a term used to describe authentically old pieces by the 1820s. But “real old Seve” more properly signified soft-paste porcelain for contemporary audiences, and Davis argues that it was in fact the dealer and not the collector who forged interest in French furnishings and *objets d’arts* with a genuine historical (and often Romantic) provenance. The Anglo-Gallic style in its heyday was, it seems, entirely unconcerned with authenticity or stylistic accuracy, drawing freely on the various forms, ornaments, and decorative styles associated with the French kings and their notoriously self-indulgent mistresses, from the Baroque richness of André-Charles Boulle (1642–1732), one of the most esteemed craftsmen at the court of Louis XIV, to the refined neoclassicism of Jean-Henri Riesener (1734–1806), whose work exemplified the reign of Louis XVI. In this sense, the Anglo-Gallic style was distinct from other antiquarian and historicist styles of the period.

Building on the work of Clive Wainwright, Carolyn Sargentson, and Mark Westgarth, among others, *The Tastemakers* draws on an impressive range of primary sources, including daybooks, ledgers, and billheads, but also diaries, newspapers, and popular literature.[2] While later chapters are arguably overburdened with descriptive detail, and the chapter on representative interiors is disappointingly short (limited to Hamilton Palace, Wrest Park, and 148 Piccadilly, the extraordinary *kunsthhaus* of Lionel de Rothschild), there is overall a very satisfying balance between description and analysis. The formal characteristics of this richly eclectic style are itemized in forensic detail, but deftly balanced by the early chapters that consider fully the cultural, economic and political contexts that gave rise to this unique style of decoration. A biographical appendix of key dealers, both French and British, serves as a useful resource for further research. The book is well illustrated with plates and figures, although many of the “room portraits” would have benefited from a horizontal (or landscape) orientation on the page, the better to identify and scrutinize the details of decoration and furniture so lucidly captured in the text.

Clearly composed in a jargon-free yet scholarly style, *The Tastemakers* is a fine book that will do much to broaden the historical understanding of and appreciation for a much-maligned decorative style in the established literature of British interior design history. Concluding with the period of the great public exhibitions and new museum spaces of the 1850s and 1860s, it elevates a hitherto underrepresented figure in that history—the dealer-producer of “French” luxury goods—to a key role in “creating the modern concept of the antique from the old and unwanted” (p. 13).

NOTES

[1] For representative examples, see Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee* (1812), Charles White, *Almacks’ Revisited* (1828), and Catherine Gore, *Pin Money* (1831).

[2] Clive Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior: The British Collector at Home 1750-1850* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London: V&A Museum, 1996); Mark Westgarth, “The Emergence of the Antique and Curiosity Dealer 1815–c.1850: The Commodification of Historical Objects,” 3 vols. (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2006).

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