The Emerging Smile: Art and Science of Dentistry from the 17th to 19th Century

An Essay Presented

by

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Introduction

Dentistry up until the late 18th century was essentially nonexistent and with that oral health was deemed unnecessary. Tooth decay, losing teeth, and having a tooth pulled by a street "tooth-puller" was considered normal at the time and these negative associations translated into art. The social conventions of the time, directed by the aristocratic class, were to keep a tight-lipped manner in formal portraits. Certainly, a member of this social class would want their permanent image to reflect these standards of fashion. Consequently, all those who fall outside of society are considered unsavory characters and depicted as such by showing their teeth. However, the rise of dentistry and the work of Pierre Fauchard coincided with a shift in these conventions, such that Europeans transformed how they cared for their teeth which thereby changed how they thought about the cultural meaning of showing teeth. Thus, Pierre Fauchard's seminal work, *Le Chirurgien-dentiste*, inaugurated a new phase of dentistry which in turn had an impact on societal attitudes towards oral health. his shift transformed the open smile from a symbol of the unsavory to an emblem of respectability, reflecting the broader acceptance and desire for healthy, visible teeth among the enlightened public.

This thesis will attempt to investigate the sociocultural awareness and perceptions on the rise of dentistry. To clarify, this work does not suggest that art and dentistry have a simple cause-and-effect relationship. There is no implication that any of the following artists or their peers thought explicitly about the state of dentistry or Fauchard's work prior to completing their work of art. However, this thesis will bring these two disciplines together in order to articulate the general conditions that produced the portraits during their time.

Before Dentistry: The Portrait in the 18th Century

What Colin Jones calls the "old regime of teeth" is fundamentally how teeth were treated aesthetically and medically before Fauchard's work and thereby modern dentistry at large.[1] During this time, the elite and ruling class did not have high regard for dental care. For instance, King Louis XIV, although miraculously being born with two teeth already, had lost most of his teeth and the royal doctors described "that 'the king's teeth are poor by nature."[2] Yet, the king's doctors were seemingly unconcerned with this fact because "by the late seventeenth century, most elite surgeons were also tending to disdain manual operations upon the teeth."[3] Rather, they preferred to leave the dental care to the circus-like performances of teeth pullers known as "operators for the teeth."[4]

The king, himself, eventually got his teeth extracted by these tooth operators when his tooth decay worsened significantly in the 1670s and 1680s.[5] Thus, if the most powerful and wealthy man in France could not get proper health care it certainly seems logical that the working class did not either. It seemed that losing one's teeth was simply associated as a part of getting older. Sources from the early 18th century claim "Individuals who keep all their teeth healthy until an advanced age are extremely rare...Discomfort, inconvenience, problems with chewing food, facial disfigurement and the impairment of beauty caused by the bad state of the

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[1] Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution: In Eighteenth Century Paris*, Oxford, England, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014, 18.

[2] Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 19.
[3] Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 21.
[4] Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 21.

[5]Colin, Jones, "The King's Two Teeth." *History Workshop Journal* 65, no. 1 (2008): 79–95, https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbn014, 86.

mouth were the substance of everyday adult life."[6] Thus, bad oral health was normalized and dental procedures were essentially nonexistent unless one considers the performative extraction by the tooth operators a "procedure."

The aesthetic conventions of King Louis XIV and the French royalty at this time were tight-lipped portraits. In general, the nobility did not smile for it risks cracking their face-whitening creams, and the metabolic base of the creams damaged the teeth significantly, thus it seems logical that portraits would also depict them with closed mouths.[7] Furthermore, smiling was seen as a sign of weakness such that "letting one's face betray one's emotions was a sure way of giving rivals an advantage in the quest for preferment."[8] While these arguments by Jones are certainly an aspect of keeping a tight-lipped manner, they seem limited to some degree. The crucial factor is not face creams or showing weakness, but rather the conventions of high society at the time. Having good teeth was not an indicator of social status at a time when dentistry was nonexistent. If the King was depicted to have beautiful teeth, he would not have been associated with high class people as they did not have healthy teeth nor cared to. Thus, the societal associations seem like the driving force behind tight-lipped portraiture.

For instance, *Portrait of Louis XIV* (Fig.1) by Riguad shows the king with his lips closed and a serious expression plastered across his face. Riguad is credited with helping establish the standard for what a state portrait ought to look like; not aiming to express the King's character but glorify the monarchy.[9] Certainly, the King is glorified in this portrait such that at the age of 63, he has no wrinkles, is in excellent shape with his legs poking out of his cape in tights

[6] Jones, “The King’s Two Teeth.” 84.
[7] Jones, “The King’s Two Teeth.” 82.
[8] Jones, “The King’s Two Teeth.” 82.

[9] Hyacinthe, Rigaud, "Portrait of Louis XIV (the J. Paul Getty Museum Collection),” Getty, Accessed December 6, 2023, https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103RA8#full-artwork-details.

highlighting his muscles, and although he is toothless-- nobody knows. Had Riguad depicted the King with an open mouth toothless smile the audience would likely have had a different perception of the ruler. Although it was normal at the time to lose teeth, King Louis was not expected to be normal, after all, he was the miracle baby born with two teeth already. It is important to note, however, that painting in fake teeth was likely not even considered. The closed mouth is what signifies that the King is associated with the highest class.

The portrait style of the 18th century followed the acceptable codes of facial expressions set up by King Louis XIV's court painters Riguad and Charles Le Brun.[10] Le Brun in particular led the Academy of Painting and Sculpture which was governed by his approved artistic depictions of facial expressions outlined in his work, *Confèrence sur l'expression*.[11] Le Brun's preferred tranquil facial expression was justified by references to Antiquity, the ideology of the Renaissance, and physiology.[12] The latter focused in particular on Descartes's theories, "When the face was perfectly at rest, the soul was calm and unmarked."[13] Thus, artists ought to depict their facial expressions in this tranquil manner to display to the viewer the calm character of their subject. Jones theorizes that Riguad's portrait of the king (Fig. 1) followed Le Brun's rules such that "the king's mouth is dealt with in the insouciant manner we have evoked, his forehead shows not a wrinkle, thus highlighting the ruler's supposed tranquility of soul."[14] Thereby, demonstrating to his viewers, allies and enemies alike, that the King has an air of calmness about him.

Similarly, there were other books and theorists who wrote on proper etiquette in general in the 18th century. St. Jean-Baptiste De La Salle, in *The Rules of Christian Decorum and*

[10]Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 49.
[11] Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 50.
[12] Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 50.
[13] Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 51.
[14] Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 51.

Civility of 1703, wrote, "There are some people who raise their upper lip so high. . . that their teeth are almost entirely visible. This is entirely contradictory to decorum, which forbids you to allow your teeth to be uncovered, since nature gave us lips to conceal them."[15] If this was a standard one ought to follow in their everyday life, it is logical that this would be how someone would want to be depicted in a portrait. Earlier books also discussed proper etiquette surrounding the mouth such as the Book of the Courtier by Baldassare Castiglione of 1528. Castiglione used insights from classical philosophers such as Aristotle and Cicero to argue that open-mouth laughter was characteristic of "'fools, drunken men, the silly, the inept, or buffoons.'"[16] The facial distortions when one opens their mouth wide enough to laugh were certainly not exemplary of a tranquil soul.

Consequently, before the late 18th century, showing teeth in art was a disreputable thing and was often a representation of an unsavory character. For instance, most art pieces of elite figures before the 18th century would have no indication of teeth showing at all. Only drunks, fools, jesters, whores, lunatics, and more immoral people would be depicted with their teeth showing.[17] For instance, Diego Velazquez painted both the elite and the working class however there is a striking difference between his depictions of the two classes-- teeth. His work, *The Court Jester Don Juan de Calabazas* (also called *The Buffon Calabacillas*) (Fig 2.) shows the grinning Jester who served King Phillip IV from 1632 to 1629.[18] The figure was identified as this

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[15] Jeeves, Nicholas. "The Serious and the Smirk: The Smile in Portraiture," The Public Domain Review, Accessed December 6,2023. https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/the-serious-and-the-smirk-the-smile-in-portraiture/.

[16] Jones, *The Smile Revolution, 29.*

[17] Angus Trumble, *A brief history of the smile*. New York: BasicBooks, 2003. pg xxiii

[18] "The Buffoon Calabacillas - the Collection." The Collection - Museo Nacional del Prado, Accessed December 6, 2023, https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-buffoon-calabacillas/f5b4b198-ea59-480e-b30b-8e599cda31db.

specific jester by the gourd sitting next to him such that he was given the name "Calabazas" as gourds were associated with madness; Specifically, "the gourd not only identifies the figure in all likelihood but also functions to characterize him psychologically and to create a discourse on wine and its effects, to which the glass in the foreground contributes."[19] The facial gesture of the jester in this painting is characteristically described as a laughing dwarf which was uniquely reserved for seemingly inferior characters and thereby forbidden to depict nobility.[20] He has his mouth open considerably wide enough to see around five to six teeth. The teeth shown appear abnormally the same size across which seems to be an artistic choice. Velazquez wanted to highlight the "otherness" of his subject and further does so by blurring the jester's face.[21] This may be an attempt to show the jester in movement perhaps shaking his head at whomever or whatever he is looking up at.

This painting covers many of the characters described by Jones and Trumble who depicted with teeth around this time. First, he is a court jester and even wears the motley. Secondly, he is a drunk as there is a wine glass sitting next to him. Thirdly, he has some physical or psychological aliment given the gourd. These characters violated, although most likely out of their control, many of the aforementioned books and teachings of proper behavior and facial expressions. Thus, demonstrating how artistic depictions of teeth before the late 18th century were the antithesis of European civility.

Another portrait that is similar yet distinct from *The Court Jester Don Juan de Calabazas,* is the many self-portraits of Alexis Grimou. One example is the self-deprecating portrait aptly titled, *Portrait of the Artist as a Drinker* (Fig. 3), which shows himself happily

[19] "The Buffoon Calabacillas - the Collection."
[20] "The Buffoon Calabacillas - the Collection."
[21] "The Buffoon Calabacillas - the Collection."

drunk. He raises his wine glass in his left hand as if he is toasting to the viewer while firmly grasping the decanter in the other hand. [22] The painting is created in an oval format providing a more intimate interaction with the viewer. [23] He has dressed himself in a joker like costume with ballooned slashed sleeves. He looks directly at the viewer with his lips slightly parted in a soft smile displaying quite a significant number of teeth. Melissa Percival describes this visibility of teeth as "a nod to Bacchanalian revelry; no sneering Democritus" which seems entirely historically and artistically accurate. However, she argues that "his expression can be construed as a fashionable Rococo smile." [24] While he may have aesthetically framed his smile as soft and Rococo-esque, this inclusion of teeth would certainly not be considered "fashionable" at the time. This painting presents an interesting dichotomy of the "old regime."[25] It is presented as a fashionable Parisian self-portrait in its pose and coloration[26] yet the depiction of teeth is categorically not in vogue. The societal views of the time would not associate illustrating teeth as a signifier of high society.

To a greater extent, the inclusion of alcohol in the painting, and the self-proclamation as a drunk further isolates himself from being considered high society. Grimou was known to have a "relentless quest for drink [which] led to a life of impoverished isolation, devil-may-care laziness, and chaotic unorthodoxy." [27] Grimou's drinking was so frequent that he eventually died as a consequence of winning a drinking duel. [28] The historical association of drinking in northern

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[22] "Self-Portrait as a Drinker ('the Toper')." n.d. National Galleries of Scotland. Accessed April 17, 2024. https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/4990.

[23] Melissa Percival (2019) Taste and Trade: The Drinking Portraits of Alexis Grimou (1678–1733), The Art Bulletin, 101:1, 6-25, DOI: 10.1080/00043079.2018.1504539

[24] Melissa Percival (2019) Taste and Trade: The Drinking Portraits of Alexis Grimou (1678–1733), The Art Bulletin, 101:1, 6-25, DOI: 10.1080/00043079.2018.1504539

[25] Colin Jones, The Smile Revolution

[26] Melissa Percival (2019) Taste and Trade:

[27] Percival, Melissa. 2019. Taste and Trade: The Drinking Portraits of Alexis Grimou (1678–1733), The Art Bulletin, 101:1, 6-25, DOI: 10.1080/00043079.2018.1504539

[28] Levitine, George. "The Eighteenth-Century Rediscovery of Alexis Grimou and the Emergence of the Proto-Bohemian Image of the French Artist." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 2, no. 1 (1968): 58–76. https://doi.org/10.2307/2737654.

art paintings begins with "tavern scenes in which peasants or lowlife characters such as soldiers and prostitutes were crudely depicted enjoying alcohol, tobacco, and other pleasures."[29] While Grimou's self-portraits are certainly distinct from the tavern scenes, his works have lingering buffoonish traces of them. Such as the jolly raising of his glass or the inclusion of a hard wooden table, which oftentimes had half-ate meats and bread on it, although it is not seen in this particular portrait. Grimou preferred an association with "inebriated companions" as he had a "marked aversion for well-bred society" and ultimately "was supremely unconcerned with the matter of proper dress."[30] His distaste for high society is echoed by his choice to depict himself as a drunk.

Parisian society, and many art historians, associated Grimou more with 17th-century Netherlands painters who were famous for depicting low subjects. [31] Although *Portrait of the Artist as a Drinker* (Fig. 3) is relatively bright and highlighted by pastels, his later self-portraits shifted to a more Dutch style with darker shadows and muted colors. Grimou also rejected the Académie Royale which "upheld the concept of the nobility and the purity of the arts." [32] As Grimou had virtually no concern for high society, it follows that his paintings would also lack interest. Grimou's depiction of teeth in his self-portraits thereby provides an interesting perspective about societal influences both from the viewer and the artist. He had no interest in being perceived as high-class, and they unequivocally had no qualms about classifying him as a low-life.

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[29] Melissa Percival (2019) Taste and Trade:
[30] Levitine, George. "The Eighteenth-Century Rediscovery of Alexis Grimou and the Emergence of the Proto-Bohemian Image of the French Artist." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 2, no. 1 (1968): 58–76. https://doi.org/10.2307/2737654.

[31] Levitine, George. "The Eighteenth-Century
[32] Levitine, George. "The Eighteenth-Century"

Grimou differs from Velazquez's painting in a quite distinct way. Grimou created a self-portrait while Velazquez simply painted someone he viewed as low class. Grimou, thereby, had control over his image and how he wanted to present himself while the Court Jester Don Juan de Calabazas did not. Velazquez's act of painting was in and of itself an act of banishing his subject into an inescapable classification as an unsavory character. Grimou, on the other hand, was still a talented artist who was a part of Académie de Saint-Luc. His commissioned and celebrated works importantly were not these self-portraits as a drunk. This supports the idea that there is a key distinction in how the high society of the time viewed certain artworks. Importantly, they had negative associations with artworks that had immoral characters with depictions of teeth.

Post-Fauchard: The Portrait After the Rise of Dentistry from the 18th to 19th Century

Theatrical street performances of tooth-pullers in place of proper dental care thrived until Pierre Fauchard. Fauchard, born in 1678 to a modest family in Saint-Denis-de-Gastines started his training to become a surgeon in the French Navy at the age of just 15.[33] Whilst in the Navy he discovered that scurvy negatively affected the gums and teeth of the sailors and after three years, he left to become a dentist.[34] Fauchard's main goal was to "get the profession out of its ignorant state, and to withdraw it from the hands of quacks."[35] He had a disdain for the lack of standards for dentistry, particularly the street performing tooth pullers.[36] The latter were giving the art of dentistry a questionable reputation that Fauchard seemingly did not approve of. Thus, he established his practice in Angers, France, through years of learning and advancement became known as "a dentist of unparalleled skill and acumen" whose skills were sought out by many "elite and select patients."[37] Even more so, Fauchard coined himself as a "Chirurgien-Dentiste" or a surgeon dentist which became the title of his seminal work, *Le Chirugien-dentiste*.

Fauchard worked on his manuscript from 1723 to its final publication in 1728; with the help of 19 of his peers he published 783 pages and 42 plates.[38] The final manuscript of the first

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[33] Lynch CD, O'Sullivan VR, McGillycuddy CT. *Pierre Fauchard: the 'father of modern dentistry'.* Br Dent J. 2006 Dec 23;201(12):779-81. doi: 10.1038/sj.bdj.4814350. PMID: 17183395, 1.

[34] Viau G. "The Life of Pierre Fauchard (1678-1761)." Dent Regist. 1923 Aug;77(8):337-356. PMID: 33703801; PMCID: PMC7872641.

[35] Besombes, Andrew. *Pierre Fauchard, 1678-1761: The first dental surgeon, his work, his actuality*, Paris: Pierre Fauchard Academy, d, 1961, 32.

[36] Weinberger, Bernhard Wolf. *Pierre Fauchard, surgeon-dentist; a brief account of the beginning of modern dentistry, the first dental textbook, and professional life two hundred year sago*. Minneapolis, Minn,: Pierre Fauchard Academy, 1941, 38-40.

[37] Lynch, *Pierre Fauchard,* 2.

[38] Andrew Spielman, "The Birth of the Most Important 18th Century Dental Text: Pierre Fauchard's*Le Chirurgien Dentist*." *Journal of Dental Research* 86, no. 10 (2007): 922–26. https://doi.org/10.1177/154405910708601004.

edition shows three sets of handwriting: Fauchard, his mentor Jean Devaux, and then Fauchard again with notes from his reviewers.[39] The reviewers of his work helped Fauchard establish credibility and ultimately elevate dentistry to a science of its own. The book begins with a general discussion of the diseases of the mouth and teeth. Specifically, he discussed reasons for tooth decay such as eating too many sweets and periodontal disease, and how one ought to properly get rid of caries and fill a tooth. In this discussion, he dispels the popular theory of "tooth worms."[40] Furthermore, he stresses the importance of dental cleanings whilst also highlighting that the products commonly used were dangerous as they were made of acids, pumice, and alum, which destroyed the enamel.[41] Fauchard was very transparent that many dental practices done by charlatans were unsafe and understood why the public had a negative association with oral procedures. Thus, he emphasized that the dentist ought to make their patient as comfortable as possible; having the patient “in an armchair which is steady and firm, suitable and comfortable, the back of which should be of horsehair or with a soft pillow."[42] Also, the cold instruments should be used carefully and even warmed up as to not scare the patient. Thereby, he had to rewrite dental history and change public perception of oral health as unnecessary and dangerous.

Fauchard then goes into a discussion about instruments to be used for certain procedures which are depicted in some of the plates. Although specific details about the 42 plates are unknown, Fauchard likely did not engrave them himself and some of them are signed. The plates

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[39] Viau, "The Life."

[40] Pierre Fauchard Academy, August 7, 2023. https://fauchard.org/.

[41] Fischman SL. "The history of oral hygiene products: how far have we come in 6000 years?" Periodontol 2000. 1997;15(1):7-14. doi:10.1111/j.1600-0757.1997.tb00099.x

[42] Pierre Fauchard, *The Surgeon Dentist ... translated from the second edition ... by Lilian Lindsay with plates.* Translated by Lilian Lindsay. London, England: Butterworth & Co(Publishers) LTD, 1946,

were likely copper engravings as it was the common method for book illustrations in the 18th century. The process includes polishing the metal plate, using a burin, a steel rod with a sharp square tip, to cut in the desired lines, and inking the plate and wiping away the excess. Finally, the plate is ready to be pressed onto paper to reveal a reverse image of the original engraved plate.[43] Many of Fauchard's plates showed various tools for different procedures, orthodontics pieces, artificial teeth, and real teeth. The latter is shown in Fig. 4 titled, "Showing complete dentition in both jaws. One part of the bone removed to show the roots. Various kinds of teeth and their sockets" which shows 16 teeth from the left side of the mouth.[44] The teeth are shown both as a part of the mouth and as standalone pieces. The former demonstrates both the positioning of each different type of tooth and the scale of the roots within the bone structure. The latter shows the variability of teeth-- some have long and straight roots while others have curved ones. Thus, this plate demonstrates Fauchard's wide array of knowledge as he encountered a wide variety of tooth structures and shapes throughout his work as a dentist.

Fauchard also discussed the artificial pieces he perfected for replacing the loss of individual teeth up to a full-mouth (Fig. 5.) The full mouth false teeth, now known as dentures, shown in the plate titled "Several dentures—one enameled" are made from wire brackets and hand carved animal bone. Fauchard wrote about many of his own cases and specifically about a full set of dentures that lasted one of his patients 24 years.[45] The plate shows three different views of the dentures: an open mouth on top, a side view bracketed by the supportive wires, and a closed mouth on the bottom. Fauchard's work included such a wide variety of oral health that

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[43] "Engraving." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, December 21, 2018. https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/drawings-and-prints/materials-and-techniques/printmaking/engraving.

[44] Pierre Fauchard, *The Surgeon Dentist.*

[45] Pierre Fauchard, *The Surgeon Dentist.*

he was able to suggest how all people could benefit from dentistry. Given that tooth loss was considered a normal part of aging in the 17th century, Fauchard sought to spread prosthetics so that the edentulous masses had an opportunity to restore their teeth as well.

The influence of Fauchard and his book was profound; he created a comprehensive work for dentists to learn from all over the world. The book was quickly translated into other languages; including German.[46] He elevated dentistry to a legitimate profession, thereby making it an art to be done by "dentists rather than other unskilled tradesmen."[47] Not only did he separate dental care into its own respective field, but he stressed the importance of the competency and skillful responsibility of dentists. The latter is a large part of why Fauchard publicized all of his findings-- he wanted oral health to be effective and the best way to accomplish that is through educated professionals. Thus, it is suggested his work, "refine[d] the local perception of dentistry, leading to an increased respect and value for the profession it would soon become."[48] Although dental care was, and still is, a privileged medicine, the most important change to come from Fauchard is the change is social perceptions of dentistry. The latter seems to be the key factor in shifting the depiction of teeth in art from negative connotations to neutral or positive connotations.

For instance, Jones discusses how late 18th century France welcomed oral health through means of commercialization, with "Newspaper advertisements and handbills proclaimed the virtues of every kind of commodity that promoted good teeth and a healthy mouth...The toothbrush—and Paris-made brushes were recognized across Europe as the very best—became

[46] Spielman, “The Birth of."
[47] Spielman, "The Birth of."

[48] “Pierre Fauchard (1678–1761), Dentistry’s Founding Father - Hektoen International.” Hektoen International - An online medical humanities journal, June 1, 2023. https://hekint.org/2023/05/31/pierre-fauchard-1678-1761-dentistrys-founding-father/.

the center of what was to become a daily morning ritual."[49] This "proto-consumer revolution" was also propelled by this new desire to have white teeth which was in accordance with a new social wave of fashion, self-care, and health.[50] Ultimately, fitting into the social standard of a "new body" required "the new smile."[51] Membership into this social class required "spending newly-acquired surplus income on the fashionable novelties of a consumer society" and dentistry surely benefited from a group obsessed with their self-image.[52] Showing one's teeth became a cultural sign of status such that their healthy condition demonstrated an accessibility to the best and latest standards of dental care. Jones finds France becoming an "open-mouthed society" through means of the aforementioned advertisements and " in the profusion of writing and in the loquacity of Enlightenment sociability from salon to coffee-house."[53] Specifically, bourgeois men started smiling at work and coffee-houses whilst women such as salonnieres Suzanne Necker and Marie Thérèse Geoffrin started welcoming their guests with smiles.[54]

Hillam discusses how these areas which experienced economic growth in the 18th century had an urban culture closely aligned with the French one that Jones describes, one that had a "fascination with novelty and a preoccupation with the cult of the beautiful and youthful."[55] This preoccupation of the urban elite's new smile also came from their relationship with literary texts. For instance, Samuel Richardson's book Clarissa from 1748 which tells the tragic story of a young women who struggles with virtues, captured the public not for the plot but

[49] Colin Jones, "Incorruptible Teeth, or, the French Smile Revolution: Colin Jones." CABINET, Accessed December 6, 2023, https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/17/jones.php.

[50] Colin Jones, "Incorruptible Teeth
[51] Colin Jones, "Incorruptible Teeth
[52] Colin Jones, "Incorruptible Teeth
[53] Colin Jones, "Incorruptible Teeth
[54] Hughes, Kathryn. 2014. "The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth Century Paris – Review." *The Guardian*, October 17, 2014, sec. Books. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/17/smile-in-eighteenth-century-paris-review-colin-jones.
[55] Hillam, Christine, eds. *Dental Practice in Europe at the End of the 18th Century*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 11 Oct. 2016) doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004333611, 15.

for Clarissa's beautiful smile.[56] Similarly, Rousseau's Nouvelle Héloïse inspired the women to be more like the main character, Julie d'Etange whose "smiling-through-tears ingenue...managed to keep everyone cheerful even as she lay dying."[57] The literature that captured the people shifted from ancient books on etiquette to romantic tragic stories that portrayed characters with outward smiles.

As dental health improved, and as it became more socially acceptable to show one's teeth, artists began to reflect this change in their work. Gradually, artists began depicting their subjects with their teeth showing, and their subjects were not drunks, jesters, or whores they were the bourgeois class. The depiction of teeth in art became a symbol of health, beauty, and status, reflecting the values and aspirations of the emerging bourgeois class.

The Case of Vigée Le Brun

Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun serves as a key example of an artist that slowly began changed their portraits to include teeth. Le Brun painted many portraits of nobility and notably became Marie-Antoinette's court painter. Her work for Marie-Antoinette brought Le Brun into a world of wealth and class. Glancing at Le Brun's portraits one would notice how until the year 1785, all of her subjects sat with their mouths closed.[58] Only after that year did Le Brun start painting more of her subjects with slight open mouths just enough to see a few teeth. These teeth-showing subjects varied from herself, and religious figures, to noblemen and women.

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[56] Hughes, Kathryn. “The Smile Revolution."

[57] Hughes, Kathryn. “The Smile Revolution."

[58] “Results for ‘Elisabeth+louise+vigée+le+brun.’” The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed December 6, 2023. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search?sortBy=Relevance&q=Elisabeth%2BLouise%2BVig%C3%A9e%2BLe%2BBrun&offset=40.

For instance, *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 6) shows herself painting a portrait while making eye contact with the viewer with a soft open mouth. The piece gives the allusion that she has just paused for a moment to face the viewer while working on a painting. Her visible teeth suggest to the viewer that she may have been smiling while painting-- suggesting love for her craft. She shows this pure form of delighted emotion by smiling, and not simply a soft tooth-less smile, but a smile that is so powerful that it forces the mouth open. Not only does it capture this emotion, but it suggests that Le Brun wanted to depict herself as someone in an elite social circle that could afford dental care. Just as her clothes are fashionable, so are her teeth, contributing to an overall appearance of class.

The work is painted in a late Rococo style-- an era that "epitomized a fashionable ideal, wherein perpetual youth was libertine and pleasure-loving."[59] She is seen wearing a soft and loose white headdress that is delicately tied into a knot. Her curly hair poking out underneath is also painted in a soft hand, paralleling the airy headdress. She also wears a ruffled white lace collar with small embroidered flowers that contrasts the harsh dark dress she wears below. Her dress is tied with a large red ribbon that hangs loosely around her midsection. Her dress represents a style that Marie Antoinette popularized.[60] This indicates Le Brun is fashionable and of a high enough class to dress like the royals. Following the ribbon down her body leads the viewer to see her clutching a palette and dirty paintbrushes in her left hand. In her right hand she holds a thin brush just inches away from the canvas.

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[59] Lynch, Dr. April Renée. n.d. “Vigée Le Brun, Self-Portrait (Article).” Khan Academy. Accessed April 17, 2024. https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/later-europe-and-americas/enlightenment-revolution/a/vige-le-brun-self-portrait#:~:text=Rococo%20epitomized%20a%20fashionable%20ideal.

[60] Lynch, Dr. April Renée. “Vigée Le Brun."

It is probable that she is painting Marie Antoinette which is interesting considering that she painted this during the onset of the French Revolution.[61] She depicts Marie Antoinette with a closed mouth. This is reflective of her other portraits of Marie Antoinette. Suggesting a consistency with tight-lipped portraits for depicting the nobility regardless of the rise of dentistry. Jones points out how the court's consistency with King Louis XIV's "tradition of facial immobility" over the years led to "The monarchy thereby cut[ting] itself off from the cultural norms that it formerly had dictated."[62] Le Brun creates a vast distinction between herself and her beloved sitter. She depicts Marie Antoinette, tight-lipped and thereby old fashioned; she depicts herself opened mouth, joyous, and fashionable.

However, it is important to note that smiling in portraiture at this time differed from the norm and certainly garnered some criticism. Le Brun's work *Self-portrait with her Daughter Julie* (Fig. 7) was exhibited at a salon in 1787. The painting shows her open-mouthed and smiling at the viewer while holding her child affectionally on her lap. The salon was seemingly shocked by Le Brun's soft smile. For instance, *Mémoires secrets*, a gossip-sheet from the time wrote, "An affectation which artists, art lovers, and persons of taste have been united in condemning, and which finds no precedent among the ancients, is that in smiling, [Mme. Vigée-LeBrun] shows her teeth."[63] Yet, Le Brun continued to paint teeth and change the conventions of depicting smiles in art. Jones says, “The idea of the smile with the teeth showing was not exactly new, but to have Madame Vigée-Le Brun actually identified with this gesture is seen as throwing away the rulebook of Western art.”[64] Le Brun challenges not only the subject matter of art, but calls into question how "rulebooks" of art are created.

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[61] Lynch, Dr. April Renée. “Vigée Le Brun."
[62] Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 11.
[63] Jones, “Incorruptible Teeth."
[64] Jones, *The Smile Revolution.*

She has categorically shifted the representation of teeth that typify jesters, drunks, and whores in a heroic act of placing herself into the arena. Her open-mouthed self-portrait certainly risked falling in line with the former negative connotations. Yet the audience's artistic eye is simultaneously fixed on her smile and the new enlightened Parisian culture that Le Brun was a part of. The sociocultural context and the clues of class, such as the fancy dress and hat, allow Le Brun to recontextualize the smile. The contemporary audience is thereby forced into an uncomfortable confrontation; their mind battles the tensions of past conventions with a new emerging culture.

Similarly, she does this in her painting, *Self-Portrait with Her Daughter Julie* (Fig. 8), from 1789. This intimate scene shows a tender mother daughter scene where Le Brun embraces her daughter who hangs lovingly around her neck. The triangular composition is reminiscent of Raphael's Madonna and Child in *The Small Cowper Madonna* as the baby Jesus holding his mother's neck parallels the way Julie does.[65] Furthermore, the dress of Le Brun resembles a dress from antiquity-- an ancient Greek chiton.[66] The latter is a draped cloth that is sleeveless and hangs loosely at the top and more form fitting around the midsection. Dr. Ingrid E. Mida suggests these references are a way in which Le Brun "invites viewers to equate her artwork to that of the artistic legends of the past."[67] Her work is reminiscent of the past but also fixed firmly on the future.

This reference to antiquity also seems like a direct response to the aforementioned criticism from the *Mémoires secrets.* While the criticism says that smiling "finds no precedent

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[65] Mida, Ingrid E. n.d. "Vigée Le Brun, Self-Portrait with Her Daughter (Article)." Khan Academy. https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/rococo-neoclassicism/rococo/a/vigee-le-brun-self-portrait-with-her-daughter.

[66] Mida, Ingrid E. Vigée Le Brun."
[67] Mida, Ingrid E. Vigée Le Brun."

among the ancients," Le Brun has brought the ancients and smiling into conversation. She demonstrates both a continuation with the past through style and subject matter, but a distinction in artistic conventions. This painting creates an appreciation for the past while simultaneously challenging it to embrace change. Not only does she challenge the great artists of the past to embrace change, like Raphael, but also her viewers. She lets it be known that adding in maternal emotions of joy does not eradicate its artistic form. She still demonstrates mastery in light, textures, and color like her predecessors. However, she differentiates herself by painting something they have no expertise in-- the joys of motherhood.

Another critique of Le Brun came from Simone de Beauvoir, who describes Le Brun's portraits as narcissistic, "Madame Vigée-Lebrun never wearied of putting her smiling maternity on her canvases."[68] It is interesting that one would critique a mother that is warm and smiling; perhaps demonstrating the artistic conventions of the times. Le Brun forgoes the cold family portraits of the past and makes one exuding warmth. Evidently, Le Brun broke the artistic and societal standards of family portraits.

The references of the Madonna and Child certainly elevate the smile. The Madonna, one of the most moral women in the world, has a soft smile. Not only that, but the Child has an opened mouth as well. Previously an open-mouth was associated with immoral characters. However, here, Le Brun has used the virtuous characters to portray a positive connotation with the open-mouth. She thereby changes the way in which the viewer views teeth in visual culture. The viewer has to change their previous negative perception to a positive one. Looking at this

[68] Beauvoir, Simone de. 2009. *Extracts from The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Vintage.

portrait, the viewer does not see a drunk, whore, or a jester; rather they see an intimate scene of a mother and child. Their open-mouths have no traces of immorality, they only have traces of joy.

Furthermore, depicting her daughter with an open-mouth further elevates the class of the family. Suggesting that not only can Le Brun afford her own dental care, but also her daughter's. Dentistry in the 18th century was certainly a privileged medicine. Consequently, if a family can afford dental care it certainly elevates their class. Le Brun depicts both herself and her daughter classily, in regards to dress and tooth care. In fact, in Le Brun's memoirs, she describes her daughters mouth saying, "her pretty mouth, magnificent teeth... all went to make up one of the sweetest faces to be seen."[69] This outright description of her daughter's teeth as "magnificent" seems radical for the 18th century. The way in which one communicates about bodies is conditioned by medicine and its societal responses. Before the rise of dentistry, there seemed to be no positive connotations associated with teeth. However, here, Le Brun describes how her daughter's teeth were so recognizably gorgeous that they contributed to Julie's good looks.

Le Brun's work certainly is not representative of the wide scope of artists in Europe. However, her work does provide a lens into the changing perspective over the 18th century. Jones describes the emergence of the smile to fade as quickly as it came into fashion. Stating, "post-1789 revolutionary political culture would in the event reject the emergent white-tooth smile just as radically as it had rejected the disdainful fixity of the Versailles facial regime...The political mood was not right for smiling."[70] While this may be true for the revolutionaries, it may not be a fair evaluation for Le Brun. Le Brun painted many open-mouthed portraits after 1789. For instance, her work from 1793 titled, *The Princess von und zu Liechtenstein as Iris* shows a

[69] Vigée-Lebrun, Louise-Elisabeth. 1903. "Memoirs of Madame Vigée Lebrun 1755-1842." Translated by Lionel Strachey, 1864-1927. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company. https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/lebrun/memoirs/memoirs.html
[70] Jones, *The Smile Revolution*, 13.

young woman with her mouth slightly ajar in a soft smile. Although, it is important to note Le Brun did flee from France on the onset of the French Revolution due to her conservative politics.[71]

While Le Brun was exiled for over twelve years, she continued to grow her reputation and work across Europe.[72] During this period, she painted many royal families from Naples to Prussia and even exhibited at Paris salons.[73] Demonstrating how her social status remained high and she continued to associate with elite circles. Additionally, she began painting royal families with open-mouths such as the aforementioned *The Princess von und zu Liechtenstein as Iris.* This may suggest the royals of other European countries embraced the social status that dentistry brought. Thus, the open-mouth did not completely disappear because of the French Revolution. Instead, art and dentistry continued to advance; rejecting a descension into the dark ages.

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[71] Gita May, *Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun: The Odyssey of an Artist in an Age of Revolution*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/later-europe-and-americas/enlightenment-revolution/a/vige-le-brun-self-portrait#:~:text=Rococo%20epitomized%20a%20fashionable%20ideal,extremely%20conservative%20in%20her%20politics.

[72] "Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun." 2016. Palace of Versailles. October 28, 2016. https://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/history/great-characters/elisabeth-louise-vigee-brun#the-emigration-1789-1802.

[73] "Exhibition Overview." 2020. Metmuseum.org. 2020. https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/vigee-le-brun.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a major cultural and social revolution is illustrated by the shifts in dental care from before the late 18th century to the time of Pierre Fauchard's revolutionary work. Before then, dental care was at best elementary, tooth decay and loss were widespread, and neglect of oral health was a reflection of larger cultural indifference. The aristocracy's closed-mouth norms were a reflection of how little dental health was valued, which in turn affected how the socially excluded were stigmatized and portrayed in art. Fauchard's work created a framework for modern dentistry which in turn altered the perception of what a smile meant in society. Previously, showing off one's teeth could be seen as vulgar or humiliating, but it shifted to symbolize well-being, worth, and a sophisticated sense of self-care. This shift in perspective affected more than oral health; it also affected art. Vigée Le Brun reflects the changing society amidst the rise of modern dentistry and how that may have manifested itself in portraiture. Le Brun's portraits express emotions of love and happiness in a way categorically not seen before in art-- through smiling. Fundamentally, Fauchard's work, and consequently the evolution of dentistry, is part of a larger story of enlightenment, in which advances in knowledge and science transformed stigmatized visual representations of open smiles and visible teeth.

Appendix

Fig. 1: Riguad, Hyacinthe, *Portrait of Louis XIV*, Oil on canvas, 1701, Musée du Louvre, Paris

Fig. 2: Velazquez, Diego, *The Court Jester Don Juan de Calabazas*, Oil on canvas, 1635-1639.

Fig. 3: Alexis Grimou, Portrait of the Artist as a Drinker, 1724, oil on canvas, 39 × 33 in. (100 × 85 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris, INV5045 (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Franck Raux, © RMN–Grand Palais)

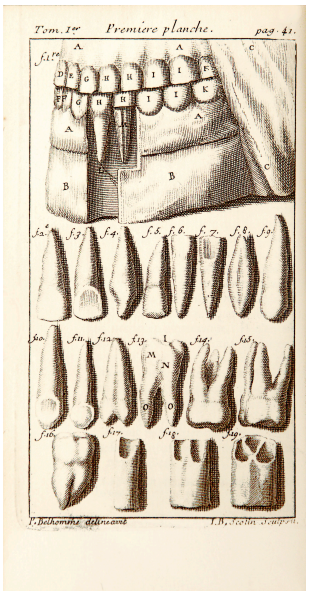

Fig. 4: Fauchard, Pierre. "Showing complete dentition in both jaws. Our part of the bone removed to show the roots. Various kinds of teeth and their sockets." *The Surgeon Dentist ... translated from the second edition ... by Lilian Lindsay.with plates.* 1946.

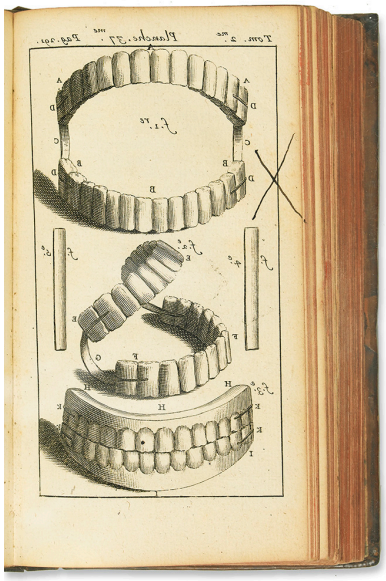

Fig. 5: Fauchard, Pierre. "Several dentures—one enameled" *The Surgeon Dentist ... translated from the second edition ... by Lilian Lindsay.with plates.* 1946.

Fig. 6: Le Brun, Elisabeth Louise Vigée, *Self-Portrait*, Oil on canvas, 1790, French

Fig 7: Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Self-Portrait with Her Daughter Julie*, 1786, oil on wood, 130 x 94 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

Figure 8: Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, Self-Portrait with Her Daughter Julie (à l'Antique), 1789, oil on wood, 130 x 94 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

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