

The practice of powdering wigs with flour from wheat or potato starch came to be in Europe with the dawn of the 18th century. Flour served two purposes for this fashion: first, to lighten the hair — lighter hair was in line with common beauty ideals, and there were no chemical bleaches at the time — and second, to absorb bad smells that were symptomatic of a lack of clean water for washing. Flour was a kind of baroque dry shampoo, with the added benefit of shaping the hair.

In ancient Egypt, wigs served as protection against sunburn, and one's own hair was shorn bald to stave off heat. In 18th century Europe, people wore their heads bare under their artificial hair too, but for different reasons. If one's own hair had not already fallen out because of syphilis — there were more syphilis victims than victims of the plague — people shaved off their hair because wigs provided an ideal shelter for vermin, and a bare scalp was to remain protected from infestation. Wigs were worn not only to hide the nude head, but also to display one's prosperity; wigs were expensive and members of the lower classes not only couldn't afford them, but were forbidden to wear or powder them. The court nobility was truly in a powder frenzy.

After bad harvests in 1774, the state price controls on crops in France were lifted. A sack of flour rose to a price that corresponded, approximately, to the average monthly income, leading to a series of riots known as the Flour War. The fight for fair flour prices was suppressed with the strength of 25,000 soldiers, after which the price was once again regulated by the state. As public knowledge of the royal family's participation in grain speculation surfaced, the harbingers of the French Revolution could be seen. This did not prevent the court nobility from continuing to powder their wigs.

The most famous wearer of extravagant hairstyles was queen Marie Antoinette. She owed her style, above all, to her hairdresser Léonard-Alexis Autié, the inventor of the pouf. To achieve this hairstyle, her mane, over the course of several hours, was brought to a height of approximately 60 centimeters with the use of support cushions, wire braids, hairpieces, animal fat, bows, and for optimal hold and color, flour powder. Autié was known for his elaborate wigs that could be up to a meter high and weigh more than five kilos. Antoinette had several of these wigs — worth several tens of thousands of euros in today's money — and changed them daily. As Autié coined Antoinette's look, the queen set a new ideal of beauty in Parisian society. Young women tried to conform to the fashion set by the queen, not infrequently going into debt at the expense of wigs. Due to her influence, Marie Antoinette was criticized in pamphlets for her opulent hairstyles, especially for the wig's most controversial ingredient: flour.

During the French Revolution, Antoinette was sentenced to death by guillotine. Her hair bleached itself overnight before her execution, and a colloquial medical term for the condition of sudden graying was dedicated to her: Marie Antoinette Syndrome. Meanwhile, Autié was so prosperous from the earnings of his hairstyles that he no longer had to work. But because of his connection to the royal family, his life was in danger and he had to flee to Russia, where he was entrusted with dressing the hair of noblemen, such as the corpse of Emperor Paul I.

In the decades to follow, wigs disappeared from everyday life. They were associated with the frowned-upon aristocracy; natural hair came back into fashion and flour back into the bun. The connection between flour and hair remains. Among the additives in industrially produced bread is the amino acid L-cysteine, which is found in plant proteins and is present in larger quantities in keratin, the main protein naturally present in horns, feathers and hair. For the purpose of efficiency, the food industry treats flour with cysteine to shorten its maturing time. It makes the dough more elastic and easier to knead. As an additive in the flour of baked goods, it gives a longer-lasting, voluminous shape.