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“The Modernisation of Female Dress”

by CLARE MC CARRON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF PLATES	Page 1
INTRODUCTION	Page 2 - 5
CHAPTER ONE The Modernisation of Male Dress	Pages 7 - 10
CHAPTER TWO The Modernisation of Female Dress	Pages 11 - 18
CHAPTER THREE The Resistance to the Modernisation of Female Dress	Pages 19 - 24
CONCLUSION	Page 25
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Pages 26 - 27

LIST OF PLATES

Fig. 1.	Byrde, D., 1979	Page 26
Fig. 2.	Hollander, A., 1994	Page 82
Fig. 3.	Hollander, A., 1988	Page 7
Fig. 4.	Hollander, A., 1988	Page 190
Fig. 5.	Hollander, A., 1994	Page 105
Fig. 6.	Hollander, A., 1994	Page 197
Fig. 7.	Wilson, E., 1989	Page 12
Fig. 8.	Ewing, E., 1974	Page 95
Fig. 9.	Hollander, A., 1988	Page 341
Fig. 10.	Hollander, A., 1994	Page 156
Fig. 11.	Walkley, C., 1985	Page 121
Fig. 12.	Walkley, C., 1985	Page 122
Fig. 13.	Walkley, C., 1985	Page 141
Fig. 14.	Ewing, E., 1975	Page 91
Fig. 15.	Ewing, E., 1975	Page 85
Fig. 16.	Marly, D., 1986	Page 146
Fig. 17.	Marly, D., 1986	Page 156
Fig. 18.	Marly, D., 1986	Page 86
Fig. 19.	Poiret, P., 1986	Page 64
Fig. 20.	Hollander, A., 1994	Page 164
Fig. 21.	Marly, D., 1990	Page 34
Fig. 22.	Hollander, A., 1988	Page 325
Fig. 23.	Marly, D., 1986	Page 127
Fig. 24.	Walkley, C. 1985	Page 113
Fig. 25.	Walkley, C. 1985	Page 114
Fig. 26.	Walkley, C. 1985	Page 112
Fig. 27.	Walkley, C. 1985	Page 51
Fig. 28.	Walkley, C. 1985	Page 59
Fig. 29.	Walkley, C. 1985	Page 68
Fig. 30.	Berch, B., 1988	Page 68

INTRODUCTION

When one presents oneself in front of other human beings, the first impression that one makes is a visual one. Apart from the face and hands this visual impression is created by clothes. I am fascinated by the power of clothes to act as a medium in creating an impression of the body. Clothes can convey the form, posture, nature and gesture of the body. This creates an overall impact and additionally indicates the wearer's stature and attitude. Clothes can magnify or diminish one's ability to make one's presence felt. In Western society, which invented fashion in the fourteenth century, the visual impact and symbolic reading of clothes has become an integral part of our daily lives. We do not realise the scale and depth of this subtle form of communication. No-one who wears clothes, or is part of a society that wears clothes, is exempt from this equation. Everyone is judged and judges others according to the clothed image they present. As Nathan Joseph states, "the wearer of clothes has committed himself to the statements they make. To change the message, he must remove or conceal them; he can't remain mute as in speech," (11, p. 49).

The meaning of clothes can only be discussed in the context of the period during which they are worn. Fashion, environment, social status, culture and personal motives are all inter-related factors in determining how and why one clothes oneself in a certain way. Of most interest to me are the aspects of dress that are closely connected to social expectation. Western society has demanded dress codes that clearly distinguish between the male and female image. It is my argument that this dress code has inhibited the female's ability to fully express herself through clothes. Furthermore, this lack of expression corresponds to the subordinate role of women in society.

J. C. Flügel dealt with the subject of clothes on a rather simplistic level. He discussed the motives behind dress in personal terms only. This consisted of a debate as to whether the primary reason for wearing clothes was modesty, decoration or protection. He deduced that:

modesty by its very nature seems to be something that is secondary; it is a reaction against a more primitive tendency to self-display and, therefore, seems to imply the previous existence of this latter, without which it can have no *raison d'être*," (7, pp. 18 - 19).

This observation, concerning instinctive self-display, enhanced by clothes/decoration, is a validation of the concept of clothes as a vehicle of self-expression and attention. Flügel goes on to state that, "the essential purpose of decoration is to beautify the bodily appearance, so as to attract the admiring glances of others and fortify one's self esteem," (7, p.20). The individual can use clothes to enhance their appearance and gain admiration. Although he seems to be referring to sexual attractiveness, the same principle applies to gaining higher status within a social grouping. In his book Modesty in Dress, James Laver reinforces the visual gender distinctions of clothes by establishing the seductive principle and hierarchical principle. Having stated that the study of clothes was no longer considered frivolous he concluded that the motive behind female dress was to beautify oneself. The aim was to appear attractive, presumably to a male audience. The male motive, conversely, was to increase personal status. This assessment marks a change in motivation for self-representation between the sexes. The sex-conscious female is engaged in superficial display. The class-conscious male is involved in bettering himself in society.

The work of Elizabeth Wilson and Anne Hollander was most influential in developing the theme of this thesis. Wilson seizes upon the ambivalence of meaning in clothes described by Flügel and Laver, and uses it to confirm the importance of fashion in society.

Fashion parodies itself. In elevating the ephemeral to cult status it ultimately mocks many of the moral pretensions of the dominant culture, which in turn, has denounced it for its surface frivolity while perhaps secretly stung by the way in which fashion pricks the whole moral balloon. At the same time, fashion is taken at face value and dismissed as trivial, in an attempt to deflect the sting of its true seriousness, its surreptitious unmasking of hypocrisy, (8, p.10).

In Sex and Suits, Anne Hollander extends Flügel's observation that young children indulge in self-decoration and display. She writes that:

In modern fashion, the sexuality of clothing is its first quality, clothes address the personal self first of all, and only afterwards the world. Little children learn that clothes give them private identity, defining inward ideas of the personal body which begin with ideas of sexuality, (10, p.6).

In this context sexuality means more than a physical identity. It is a starting point for developing and displaying an individual personality, through clothes. The wearer must feel comfortable in his clothes to be able to project confidence to the viewer.

Hollander's most important theory is that the adoption of the suit by men was not a regrettable rejection of fashion but the natural development of male dress. The evolution of the suit was influenced by Neo-classicism as the garments followed the form but allowed enough freedom for natural posture and gesture to be expressed. There was an overall unity in image. These characteristics are resonant of Greek sculpture, which has influenced Western ideals of human beauty to this day. She argues that male dress was more progressive than female dress. This is endorsed by the fact that the modernisation of female dress did not occur until approximately one hundred years after male advances. Female modernisation, which involved the shortening of skirts and wearing of trousers, however, met with male resistance. Victorian society placed greater importance on gender distinction through clothes than any other society. Basically, trousers symbolised masculinity; the skirt symbolised femininity. Victorian men and women had different roles to perform in society, and this distinction was reinforced in all aspects of daily life. In the period between 1910 and 1945 women managed to overcome this sartorial tyranny. Changes in society and in dress ran parallel. It is a pivotal time in demonstrating the importance of clothes in society and in recognising how restrictive female dress had been.

Female dress was restrictive because the imposition of a skirt did not allow full expression of bodily gestures or freedom of movement. According to Anne Hollander the prime function of Western dress is, "to contribute to the making of a self-conscious individual image, an image linked to all other imaginative and idealised visualisations of the human body," (9, p.XIV). Below the waist all women were of uniform appearance. The image conveyed a sense of their subordinate role in society rather than the impression of a unique human being. Simone de Beauvoir recognised that, "not to have confidence in one's body is to lose confidence in oneself," (3, p. 355). Confidence in the body is dictated by the clothes worn over it. For centuries the choice of female clothes was dictated by a patriarchal society.

My intention is to analyse the image projected by the clothed female figure since 1800. This will be achieved through the use of illustrations including fashion plates, photography and satirical cartoons. Female dress will be discussed in relation to male fashion, general fashion trends, and social and political changes. My objective is to show that the containment through clothes of the female physical presence was closely related to the containment of female activity in society. Female dress inhibited personal expectation and diminishes public confidence in the abilities of the wearer. In Chapter I, I will deal with the modernisation of male dress. I will consider the social factors and discuss the symbolism of the costume. This event laid the foundation for the symbolic sartorial distinctions between the sexes. It also, however, challenged female dress to respond to its modernising principles. Chapter II deals with the modernisation of female dress which occurred between 1910 and 1945. I will reflect upon the factors contributing to sartorial advances and discuss the more hostile responses to sartorial and social changes in women's lives. Significantly, the visual impact of the clothed woman became more impressive and remarkable than ever before. It expressed individuality and activity, and symbolised the collective launch of women into more challenging spheres of society. Chapter III is a reflection on how vital it was that women overcame the limitations of dress. Unique circumstances during the wars had made

change possible. Since the 1850s almost all realms of patriarchal society had united to consolidate the passive role women performed in society. Politics, economics, philosophy and the media were used to suppress female emancipation, including dress reform. This is the surest proof that clothes are a significant and compelling vehicle of communication in modern Western society.

CHAPTER ONE

The Modernisation of Male Dress

Trousers have always been worn in Western society but it was not until the eighteenth century that they became fashionable. The Romans first encountered trousers when they invaded Northern Europe; they considered the garment the hallmark of the savage. In agricultural and coastal regions of Britain, a version of modern-style trousers were worn by the working class since the fifteenth century. Historically, therefore, there was the stigma of the poor and the uncultured attached to the wearing of trousers.

Since late antiquity the scheme of European costume dressed men and women in similar bag-like garments without curve-following seams, either for armholes or to create any fit around the body. It is worth noting that fashion history emphasises the costume of the middle and upper classes, hence the wearing of trousers by both sexes of the working classes, was generally unrecorded. During the early Middle Ages both sexes wore tunics and gowns. James Laver asserts that all developments in male dress evolved from sportswear, although I would contend that war and labour had as great an influence on fashion, as leisure (12, p.45). Owing to their more active role in life men wore their tunic shorter, on the knee, whereas the female tunic covered the whole leg. Consequently, the male tunic entailed the wearing of separate leg coverings which were loosely drawn up and attached to a waistband. Men's clothes began to follow the form of the body although still consisting of draped garments. One of the greatest influences on male fashion was related to late thirteenth century developments in plate armour which replaced chain-mail.

Innovations in armour mark the first real modernity in Western fashion, showing ways to redesign all the separate parts of the male body and put them back together into a newly created shape, one that replaced the naked human frame with another one that made a close three-dimensional line-for-line commentary on it in another medium. (10, p.43).

The approach to male clothing was radically altered. Henceforth, tailoring began to suggest interesting new lines for the torso and the whole shape of the legs and arms were considered. Plate armour required an undergarment to protect the body from its metal casing. This garment was made by the linen-armourers who may be described as the first true tailors of Europe. Male fashion was quick to ape the shapes created by the armourer and from the fourteenth century onwards male and female fashions began to look very different. In the sixteenth century, the sartorial principle of close-fitting, stiff male dress was perfected. (see fig. 1). The tunic revealed the whole leg, separate hose evolved into fitted tights and the codpiece was invented to complete the look.

By the 1650s the use and prestige of armour was waning. The Thirty Years War and the English Civil War produced the swashbuckling, rough and ready soldier, dressed in loose breeches, shirt and leather jerkin. The sartorial mood was freer and more impulsive, reflected in looser clothes, flowing hair and wrinkled stockings. "There was, in harmony with this new Baroque mode, a general 'delight in disorder', the first sartorial display of attractive nonchalance." (10, p.51). Breeches evolved into modern trousers as social changes converted the uncouth stigma of trousers into a positive enlightened trait.

Trousers, as signifiers of a basic lifestyle and robust spirit, became a desirable emblem. The image presented by the French Revolutionary (see fig. 2), conveyed an air of physical strength and idealism. It was the costume of the plebeian, as well as connoting pure, honest, idealism, and belief in the ordinary man's ability to change his environment. Significantly, clothes gave their name to different aspects of the French Revolution such as the *sans-culottes* or the *muscadin* (Royalist fop). The revolutionaries eschewed *culottes* (or breeches) as a symbol of the inequality of the 'ancien régime'. In the following decade the political connotations associated with trousers subsided but the garment was now established as a popular dress choice.

Fashion was displayed at and evolved from the royal courts of Europe. In the eighteenth century, the French Revolution, and the beheading of the British monarch Charles I, lead to fashion trends that distanced one from the pomp and excesses associated with court life in favour of a more sombre and simple image which was in keeping with the mood of the times.

For citizens of the rising merchant and professional classes, especially in Protestant countries, a dark and plain suit relieved by simple white linen reasserted its very old associations with clerical intelligence, further supported by suggestions of probity and religious integrity. At the same time, simple textures, including leather and plenty of buttons, obliquely suggested a potent, quasi-military readiness if not ruthlessness. Both of these effects first succeeded in the non-courtly bourgeois vein, in Northwest Europe and in England under the Commonwealth. Such a creative combination of opposites - the easy roughness of practical war gear blended with the reticence of clerical clothing - has had a lasting power over the masculine sartorial imagination. (10, p.78)

Trousers symbolised man's newfound confidence and belief in his ability to control his environment. In this Age of Reason the gentleman took pride in simple but unceremonious costume that reflected "a sensible mind with an adult disdain for primitive institutions and their personal fripperies, however exquisite." (10, p.21).

Trousers became mainstream fashion in the early nineteenth century. The direction fashion took was influenced by the visual arts, in which there was a revival of interest in Classical Greek art. Visual consciousness of the antique matched emergent ideas of Nature and Reason and of Liberty and Equality.

For the dressed figure, analogous simplifications were now imperative for both sexes. The fundamental structure of the body was rediscovered but entirely in antique form. The system of clearly delineated limbs, heads and muscles, of harmonious stomachs and buttocks and breasts that was perfected in antique nude sculpture was adopted as the most authentic vision of the body". (10, p.86).

Greek sculpture celebrated the beauty and grace of the human body (see figs. 3 & 4). The Classical image became the new image of natural man conveying a sense of uncorrupted moral and mental qualities. Tailors designed male clothes to fit this

new ideal. "They offered the perfect Classical body, aptly translated into the modern garments", (10, pp. 87 - 88). Display of muscle was replaced by display of clothes which "gave the impression that the nude hero was even more natural when dressed", (10, p.91). Male dress was instilled with the charm and grace that had been the reserve of Classical Greek nude sculpture.

Figure 5 is an example of male dress in 1826. This figure wears close-fitting trousers that follow the shape of the legs. The garment covers from hips to feet, helping to create a flowing unified image which heightens the body. Trousers aid the articulation of the body's posture and air. The lower body is not disguised by an artificial form, such as the skirt, and is not engaged in the visual pretense and pomposity associated with female attire. Male costume surpassed female costume in its visual integrity and authority.

Figure 6, is an example of trousers as part of a contemporary suit. This photograph proves why the garment is such a popular dress choice. The sense of motion and agility that is the distinguishing feature of Greek nude sculpture is echoed in this image. The trousers retain the form of the body and expresses the exertion and motion the legs. What is clear is that clothes which serve to articulate the body are more visually impressive than clothes that require the body to conform to its shape. Trousers are a vital component in articulating the body and men recognised this when they chose to wear them.

CHAPTER TWO

The Modernisation of Female Dress

The modernisation of womens dress involved allowing the lower half of the female body to be visually defined through clothes. Displaying the female legs could be achieved by shortening the skirt or wearing trousers. Trousers, however, had been established as a signifier of masculinity; to be worn by men only. This sartorial code was so deeply ingrained in society that any attempt to challenge it had been easily dismissed. Early in the twentieth century changes were occurring in many aspects of daily life and the potential for radical change was increasing. Gradual changes occurred in the lifestyles and dress of women from the late nineteenth century. It was these subtle changes that made possible the radical modernisation of female dress in the 1920s.

At the turn of the century sports which involved great physical exertion were being practised by women. Bicycling, for example, had become a popular sport from 1890 and the costume women adopted for the activity was given much consideration.

Women of leisure had always worn long skirts when taking part in sports, including tennis, which required a good deal of running. But the look of the legs in motion did not become interesting or problematic until the widespread use of the bicycle at the end of the nineteenth century. Only then did divided skirts and knickerbockers seem necessary, in order to articulate the legs; presumably, the look of legs pumping under skirts was even less acceptable to modesty than the dreaded trouser. (9, p.340).

Of further concern to society must have been the fact that the Dress Reform Society supported the new bicycling costume (see fig. 7).

There was a sense in which the movement for 'rational dress' was an attempt to modernise dress, particularly, but not exclusively, female dress, and to devise a form of clothing suitable for the pace and demands of urban industrial life in capitalist societies where public life was becoming important in a new way, and where women in particular were moving into the public sphere", (19, pp.32-33).

Figure 8, demonstrates the advances made in women's dress between 1877 and 1922, spurred on by the interplay of sports crazes and fashion design during that period. This modernisation of dress projected a sense of independence and mobility. The Jazz Age symbolised modernity, the machine age and a break with the past. This was what the 1920s flapper was all about. However;

The popular meaning of emancipation for women had shifted away from the ideas of social and political rights that had been so important before 1914. Social emancipation; the freedom to drink, to smoke, even to make love, to dispense for ever with chaperons - served as a substitute for possibly more solid economic freedom, (19, p.79).

In the 1920s modernisation of female dress was achieved through wearing shorter skirts, full articulation of the body was thus expressed (see fig. 9).

Women's work - domestic, agricultural, or later, industrial - was often recognised to impose back breaking strain; but it was not seen to make demands on the locomotive functions of the legs and feet. Neither was women's pleasure. It took modern fashionable amusements to make the public aware of women's legs, and it took photography to catch them in action....Legs became part of the total visual composition of the female body in its clothes, not just in Classical draperies or in the nude, and their action, not just their shape, similarly became an accustomed fact of visual life. (9, p. 340).

In the 1930s for every British person who bought a daily newspaper, two bought cinema tickets. Cinema attendances reached a world peak in the depression of the thirties, its influence and impact on the public was undeniable. Through film people became conscious of the movement and gestures of the body; and the impression it creates. "Manners were easing, spontaneous clothes and gestures were modish, not just for women but for everyone", (9, p. 341.). Movie stars dictated fashion trends. In 1931, Marlene Dietrich posed for publicity photographs wearing trousers. This caused a craze for the fashion throughout America. It was ironic that a star renowned for her femininity should launch a vogue of fashionable masculinity, (see fig. 10). The trouser suit follows the form of her body and creates presence. Her feminine appeal is maintained because the whole female form is distinguishable through the clothes.

The satirical magazine, Punch, offered a guide to British male opinion and a sense of

how society was reacting to change. Figures. 11 - 13 are examples of the prevalent attitude during World War I. It was accepted that the Women's Land Army and munition workers would have to wear trousers but in these circumstances the fact that women were not projecting the traditional female image was considered patriotic rather than sartorially or socially radical. The cartoonists observed the confusion caused by the blurring of visual gender codes. Notably, the female is not interpreted as asserting a masculine personality or adopting a male role, as was the case with the depiction of the Bloomerites. The male viewer mistakes the female munition worker for a man but the suggestions of gender role-reversal do not go beyond the visual. On the contrary, it is the very concept of the 'displaced' woman that forms the core of these jokes.

During the war years, women in trousers were interpreted as necessary and patriotic rather than symbolic of social reforms. This change in male attitude granted women the opportunity to wear trousers and decide how it made them feel to wear them.

It is too simplistic to assume that the sole catalyst for modernising female dress was the fact that women worked in factories (that necessitated the wearing of trousers). The wars did create unique circumstances. Women were provided with an opportunity to perform greater and more varied roles in society. As the nation focused on the enemy abroad, the advances of women were a far lesser concern. It was this lull in control over the place and image of women, that allowed for a break-through in women's emancipation. The result was that women were more confident in their own ability and potential. Concurrently, women had adopted more progressive forms of dress, and the clothed female image of the period projects this self-confidence and ease.

When World War I broke out in Europe, women were keen to serve their country, alongside men. In the past, wives had followed their husbands in battle and had been called upon to perform vital tasks. During the Napoleonic Wars, many women died, having endured a bitter winter climate, while marching between battles. The contribution of these women was rarely acknowledged or rewarded. In 1914,

traditional prejudices overruled logical decision making, and the value of women in the war campaign was resisted for as long as possible. The First World War involved all the major powers and for the first time troops from the world over-seas were sent to fight and work outside their own regions. The economic and human cost of this war could never have been anticipated. Britain mobilized 12.5% of its men, and lost half a million men under the age of thirty on the Western Front alone. The war office refused the services of the Fany's until 1916, and the Navy did not admit women into its ranks until 1917.

Often women's eagerness to serve was met with derisory rejection. Dame Vera Laughton, one of the first women to enlist in the Navy, recalled how in 1914 she had been informed by the Admiralty that, "We don't want any petticoats in here", (6, p. 89). Comments such as, "My good lady, go home and sit still", (6, p.86), speak volumes of the discrimination and disrespect that women suffered. These comments confirm the visual symbolism of clothes and are indicative of the type of image the female projected at the time - femininity. The implication of such comments is that women are their clothes; clothes which are designed to maintain their passivity and subordination. When eventually admitted, it was obvious that women's presence in the army was greeted with scepticism. This sentiment is echoed in the uniforms issued to women.

Figure 14, illustrates the style of uniform issued to the WRENS. Women found it so uncomfortable and impractical that many resorted to wearing civilian dress. It consisted of ankle length dressing gown style garments in scratchy serge. The image of a service woman in the poster of 1917 is relaxed and gentle in contrast to the disciplined look in the poster of 1939. The image is romantic; there is the suggestion that the woman is following behind the men rather than intent on her own mission within the army. The figure maintains its femininity; the lower body is static underneath layers of clothing. Figure 15, is a photograph of two nurses serving on a the front-line in 1917. They present a very different image: their clothes are practical and based on male dress (knee-breeches). They are physically free and the uniform

suggests a seriousness about what they are doing. It is obvious that they are operating on the front-line and are performing a vital and skilled service. It is reported that the attire of the nurses stunned most of those who witnessed them. Women's official uniforms gradually became more practical but trousers did not become part of the main uniform.

In 1917, the Women's Land Army was formed to aid the effort in Britain. The work of these women involved carrying out farm labour and providing state services so that the country could function as normally as possible. On the farms, women carried out very physical tasks.

Although their uniform included leggings or breeches, they were not issued with trousers. Farm-girls, on the other hand, who carried out the same duties opted to wear trousers for practicability. Women were now carrying out many new duties; bus conducting, factory inspections and driving vans, taking on roles of responsibility and skill that had hitherto been the sole domain of men. Although officialdom still preferred women not to wear trousers feminine versions of the standard uniform were issued for women, comprising of a mannish jacket, shirt, tie and skirt. It would thus appear to be acceptable that the top half of a woman could look male, to give her the look of authority to carry out her job, but the lower half must continue to convey the sign of the female, ensuring that she would never really be mistaken for a figure of true authority and status.

The attitude towards women in the services and the wearing of trousers was generally more positive when World War II began. In 1938, Dame Vaughan founded the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service to co-ordinate women's services in anticipation of war. Its uniform had a khaki, mock-male look, but a skirt was still insisted upon. The Land Army was immediately re-formed; its uniform consisted of knee-breeches or dungarees. The ARP (Air Raid Precautions) were issued with long coats, slacks and tin-hats (as opposed to civilian clothing). In 1941, the conscription of women was instigated, battledress included dungarees, wellington boots and tin-helmets. The role

and contribution of women was acknowledged and valued much more readily in this war and this is reflected in the type of uniforms women were issued.

The growing acceptance of trousers was visible in the office; women, particularly chose to wear them during the heat supply shortage. Trousers were adopted with much more ease; though middle-class women were the last to wear them. Most significantly, during this period, trouser-wearing crossed the barrier from being work-wear to acceptable leisure wear.

Figures 16 and 17, show women performing traditionally male tasks in 1916 and 1941 respectively. In 1916 it would have been unthinkable to allow the public to be presented with trousered women on active-duty. In 1939, this rationale had changed somewhat because women had proven themselves in World War I. Figure 17 presents women who are dressed exactly like men. Since their bodies are fully articulated, one senses their confidence and eagerness to work. The pose of the driver about to board the bus is particularly active and conveys control of the situation. Had she been skirted it is unlikely she could project such an image.

Such a level of mass mobilization, lasting for a matter of years could not be maintained except by a high-productivity industrialized economy, that is, an economy largely in the hands of the non-combatant part of the population. Prior to 1914, there were three munitions factories in Britain. This rose to 4,800 which employed 700,000 women. Women had also replaced men in the dockyards and all other types of factory work. Irrespective of gender, the clothes worn in these environments were strictly regulated according to safety and health standards, in place for many years. In this situation women could not be ridiculed for abandoning femininity, thus trousered women in the factories helped to break down the established taboos (see fig. 18). Under these circumstances a woman in trousers was not to be seen as, "either as a hussy or a rabid feminist; but simply as a patriot, (7,p. 14).

Modern mass war both strengthened the powers of organized labour and produced a

1. The first part of the report is a summary of the work done during the year. It is a brief statement of the results of the work, and is intended to give a general impression of the progress made.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed account of the work done during the year. It is a full and complete statement of the results of the work, and is intended to give a detailed impression of the progress made.

3. The third part of the report is a summary of the work done during the year. It is a brief statement of the results of the work, and is intended to give a general impression of the progress made.

4. The fourth part of the report is a detailed account of the work done during the year. It is a full and complete statement of the results of the work, and is intended to give a detailed impression of the progress made.

5. The fifth part of the report is a summary of the work done during the year. It is a brief statement of the results of the work, and is intended to give a general impression of the progress made.

revolution in the employment of women outside the household. In the 1920s, women were forced out of the labour market because of unprecedented level of unemployment in Britain between 1924 - 1929. Although there was an economic boom unemployment levels reached 10-12%. In 1932 - 1933 this level reached 22% - 23%. Even after the recovery of 1933, it remained at 16% - 17%. The revolution of female employment was temporary in World War I, but permanent in World War II.

Art in the twentieth century was marked by the emergence of the avant-garde which became part of the established culture. It remained isolated from the tastes and concerns of the mass of the Western public, though it impinged on it more than the public generally recognised. One of the greatest avant-garde fashion designers of the period was Paul Poiret. His work epitomized the mood of the age. He was a visionary and is considered the first moderniser of fashion. In 1908, he transformed the female silhouette by introducing the vertical look, (Figure 19). The corset, which moulded the body into shape was no longer required, creating a more natural look. The silhouette is reminiscent of eighteenth century Neo-classical fashion (see fig. 22). However, it was not Poiret's intent to liberate the female body, having dispensed with the corset, he shackled the feet by introducing the hobble skirt in 1910. The hobble skirt exposed women to a level of ridicule on a par with the crinoline and bustle. Sergei Diaghilev, the Russian impresario, took Ballet and transformed it into an avant-garde medium. The Russian Ballet arrived in Paris in 1911, and influenced all European artists and designers, including Paul Poiret. In the 1920s, he introduced a style of harem-trousers which sparked a brief vogue among the avant-garde. This heralded the appearance of trousers in fashionable circles. Poiret's contribution to the modernisation of female dress was that he allowed women to appear to be supporting their own weight and holding their own posture. The upholstered women of the belle époque was a thing of the past.

Gabrielle Chanel "is most famous for making the male suit female with no hint of androgyny, keeping only its sexual self-confidence and also insisting on subjective pleasure", (10, p.135). Chanel is the chief moderniser of female fashion. She

designed clothes in which she herself would feel comfortable and confident. Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton discuss Chanel in relation to dandyism; 'that essentially masculine cult of distinction and ascendancy which is crucially mediated through style and dress',

(5, p. 122). Beau Brummell, the original dandy, exuded confidence through his clothes and infiltrated the highest strata of society based on his image alone. Chanel disliked the fact that women were often denigrated through their clothes. Female fashion was often a source of entertainment and jokes: she insisted that clothes convey dignity. Men's sportswear incorporates elements of working class dress, such as ease of movement and durability. Chanel carried these traits into her own work. Her code of simplicity and elegance meant that her clothes followed and enhanced the form of the body, (see fig. 20). Chanel's clothes gave women the opportunity to express the same modern aspirations and intentions as men, while maintaining a female identity. The classic Chanel style remains in fashion, it is as constant as the male suit.

In 1947, Christian Dior launched the 'New Look', which dictated fashion for the following decade (see fig. 21). His inspiration stemmed from the styles of the 'belle époque'. He wrote, "I designed flower women, soft shoulders, full busts, waists as narrow as lianas and skirts as corollas", (14, p. 19). After the war, women were eager to adopt a more glamorous style of dress; they overlooked the conservative and traditional traits of Dior's 'New Look'. As Western governments were trying to get women out of the workforce and back into the kitchen - "From being all-capable, women were now told to become decorative stereotypes and semi-consciously Dior was co-operating in this sort of propaganda", (14, p. 23). Dior's 'New Look' dismissed all previous trends towards modernism. The sole intent behind the look was the modesty/display principle that had originally made female fashion a source of contempt and ridicule. Chanel was appalled by this, and returned to establish the Chanel suit as the classic of female attire.

CHAPTER THREE

Resistance to the Modernisation of Female Dress

Male fashion evolved upon the principle that it enhanced the figure while keeping it fully clothed. It set a precedent when it chose to emulate the bodily articulation of plate-armour. In the nineteenth century the Neo-classical look marked the next stage in the evolution of male dress and signified its modernisation. The Neo-classical female look (see fig. 22), was similar in structure to the male vogue. The silhouette did not deviate from the body but it is not as closely fitting as male dress. The natural human form was suggested, but it was not defined.

Women's fashion after 1800 consistently suggested quite different ideas, none of them modern at all, most of them following quite ancient and general sartorial custom. The effect of deliberate display sets the tone, supported by the effect of deliberate trouble taken for the purpose - elaborate headwear, difficult footwear, cosmetics, extraneous adornments and accessories, construction and extension," (10, p. 9).

The Neo-classical look for women was no more than the latest in a series of fashions. In compliance with fashion's demand for change, it was replaced with more restrictive, artificial structures - culminating in the crinoline skirt.

During the nineteenth century there was a reaction to the extremities and absurdities of women's fashion. In 1851, the bloomerite costume reached England, it consisted of a knee-length skirt, worn over long Turkish trousers. The costume was promoted on the grounds that it did not restrict the body and represented the emancipated, forward thinking woman. In 1880, Lady Harbonton founded the Rational Dress Society to promote a style of dress based on considerations of health, comfort and beauty. In Victorian society, however, the role of men and women had been inextricably linked to and defined by the clothed image. It became a moral mission to uphold this values, thus hampering attempts to modernise female dress.

As the industrial revolution transformed Britain into an urban society, the way of life was re-structure accordingly.

The world of the Victorian was changing so fast, clear distinctions in male and female roles and the preservation of distance between the classes, seemed of paramount importance. The clothes men wore became the most immediate and one the most important signals of status, occupation and aspiration. What women wore symbolised their sexual status", (19, p. 14).

Men were active in society : their day was divided between business and leisure - the work-place and the home. The Victorian ideal was that the woman should remain guardian of the home.

In 1861, the image presented by trouser wearing female miners was found to conflict with Victorian values and sensibilities, (see fig. 23). The concept of women as purely domesticated beings, devoid of physical strength, was being undermined. A commission was informed that it was immoral and brutalizing for women to work in mines. It consequently ruled that women could only work on the surface - where they continued to wear trousers. In 1865, the National Union of Miners campaigned to Parliament that only men should be employed, proposing the removal of 4,500 women from employment. They, too, claimed that employing women was degrading and immoral but their plea was not accepted as it was acknowledged that these women were usually the sole financial support in the home. Again in 1877, dress was used as a political tool against women as a Labour MP proposed the female trousered miners represented immorality. The women, however, had the support of the Rational Dress Movement and other individuals, such as Revd. Harry Mitchell of Pemberton, who argued that trousers for women was the dress of the future.

Dress and appearance was a pastime for women of the middle and upper classes but women could only decorate or exaggerate the standard female costume that was endorsed by society; the concept of fashion as a symbol of female frivolity was thus established. Women's fashion concerns could only address the issue of self-display

for reasons of sexual attraction, rather than individual presence. Christine Walkely notes that, "society was increasingly dominated by business and during business hours frivolity was not permissible. Sex attraction was relegated to the status of spare-time interest", (17, p. 94). This implies that since sex-attraction was the sole catalyst of female fashion, women themselves were relegated to spare-time interest: a very limited role in social life.

There was much criticism of the gloominess of male costume during the period, but I would contend that male fashion was responding to developments in working life and was still more progressive than female dress. Flügel wrote of the 'Great Masculine Renunciation' of the late eighteenth century, declaring that "Men suffered a great defeat in the sudden reduction of male sartorial decorativeness.....Man abandoned his claim to be considered beautiful. He henceforth aimed at being only useful." (7, p. 110-111). Conversely, Flügel having lamented the loss of bright, gay, ornamental clothes, admits that, "if there is a lack of romance, there is also absent the envy, the jealousy, the petty triumphs, defeats, superiority's and spitefulness engendered by the - doubtless more poetical - diversity and gaiety of the women's costume," (7, p. 114).

Thorstein Veblens believed that female dress signified women's social status and a disinterest and inability to work for a living. He stated that, "the substantial reason for our tenacious attachment to the skirt is just this: it is expensive and it hampers the wearers at every turn and incapacitates her for all useful exertion", (5, p. 167). More damaging than the physical restrictions were the concepts of femininity that were evoked by the clothed female image. The inarticulation of the lower body suggested a lack of clarity and mystery. This notion of female mystery had been unearthed to compound the theory that women were inferior. In arguing the fundamental difference between male and female dress, Anne Hollander points out that, although until the seventeenth century;

male fashion might be tight and heavy, cumbersome and elaborate, the shapes of masculine dress always continued to articulate the body, to demonstrate the existence of a trunk, neck and head with hair, of movable legs, feet and arms and sometimes genitals - where as those of feminine dress did not. The true structure of the female body was

always visually confused rather than explained by fashion.....Her pelvis and legs were always a mystery. (10,p.47 - 48).

This caused the division of the female image into top and bottom. Hollander draws comparisons with ancient myths of women;

It corresponds to one very tenacious myth about women, the same one that gave rise to the image of the mermaid, the perniciously divided female monster, a creature inherited by the gods only down to the girdle", (10, p. 61).

This visual portrayal can be compared and linked to a tradition of writing which confirms women's inferior status.

Sigmund Freud admitted that he did not know when or how the concept of male superiority came into being. In Gender and Genius, Christine Battersby discusses a tradition of writing about gender that condemns women to cultural and biological inferiority. The key concepts seems to be that women lacked the ability to attain genius because she lacked 'drive'. The 'drive' is related to differences between the physical characteristics of men and women. Aristotle referred to this when he wrote that women possess, "a deficiency in judgment, wit, reason, skill, talent and physical (and bodily heat)", (1, p. 11). His remark that the female was an 'underdeveloped male' suggests she is physically incomplete or undefined. Simone de Beauvoir describes the female as, "this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch." (3,p.295). If a woman is physically incomplete it goes without saying that she would not possess great intellect or spirituality; these were male traits.

The 'mystery' of the female body became it's 'femininity'. This was used to confirm her inferiority. It is interesting to observe that the link between femininity and mystery has been applied to discussion on clothed images. de Beauvoir wrote that "it would appear that every female human being is not necessarily a woman, to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatening reality known as femininity", (3, p. 13).

In a discussion between the writers of Police Review, (6 January 1978), and a contributor, the wearing of culottes was proposed as the ideal solution to the question of whether to introduce trousers into the policewomen's uniform. The logic behind the choice was analysed and deemed to parallel the conclusion made by J. Okely on school-uniform culottes. The garment, "concealed the existence of a split between the thighs the lower abdomen retained it's mystery", (2, pg. 274 - 275).

Punch magazine was written by London men, for London men. To them, the very idea of fashion seemed inexpressibly funny: it was feminine and foreign. One of Punch's first sustained outbursts was against the fashion for bloomers. In truth, very few women adopted bloomers yet Punch allocated vast coverage to the topic. The contributors to Punch recognised the threat presented by the garment and played their part in keeping the movement at bay, (see figs. 24 - 26).

Punch became the vehicle for the 'average middle-class males' fear and loathing of 'strong-minded' women and published endless cartoons throughout the second half of the nineteenth century in which ugly, bespectacled and even mustached women are wearing the trousers, both literally and figuratively, (19, p.30).

The plates in the magazine imply complete role-reversal between the sexes; all based on the fact that women are trousered. The assumptions made by these cartoonists reflect their apprehension, rather than social fact. It depicted women smoking in the street, asking men to dance or marry them and bossing their husbands: outrageous scenarios for the time. Although critics of the garment had to admit it had hygiene and health on it's side, this was over-ridden by "a fundamental impropriety", (17, p. 17). According to Punch, women would lose their sexual and social identity. They would not be treated as women anymore but could never be treated as equals to men. The implication of being somewhat lost between the two, aided the demise of the reformist's cause.

Punch contributors unwittingly point out the depersonalisation that was the essence of female fashion when they refer to its artificial and constrictive modes. Figures 27 -

29, serve to prove that the female did not even present a natural image - the figure is deformed and the pose is regulated by the clothes. Figure 27, ridicules the unnatural posture of corseted women in 1869 and figure 28, jokes about the slouching female silhouette of 1913. The female body is used to display the clothes rather than enhance her personal presence. Figure 29, may be read as the final warning against the adoption of masculine clothing principles.

In the twentieth century, the restrictions on female dress were addressed. Elsa Schiaparelli, a fashion designer of the 1930s, was conscious of the stigmatised image of women. In her work she plays with this image; she "suggests that the woman must play her way out of her predicament, the impasse of femininity", (5, p. 143).

The visual impact of the female was now much more authoritative and individual. Flügel, when referring to fashion in the 1920s, wrote that, "in asserting her rights as a human being, woman has lost some of her erotic privilege which she formerly enjoyed of the specific femininity", (7, p. 162). Women's public image was re-defined;

by taking up men's clothes, and having them well fitted to her feminine body, she showed herself to be interested not in female concerns like child-bearing and domesticity, nor in the standard feminine uses of alluring submissiveness. (10, p. 41).

Men and women now had equal choice in the image of themselves they wished to present.

Anne Hollander re-inforces the significance of trousered women,

demonstrating women's full humanity was essential: and that meant showing that they had bodies not unlike men's in many particulars. To show that women have ordinary working legs, just like men's was also to show that they have ordinary working muscles and tendons, as well as spleens and liver, lungs and stomachs, and, by extension, brains. (10, pg. 62).

Women's clothes conveyed their entitlement and intent to fully participate in society.

CONCLUSION

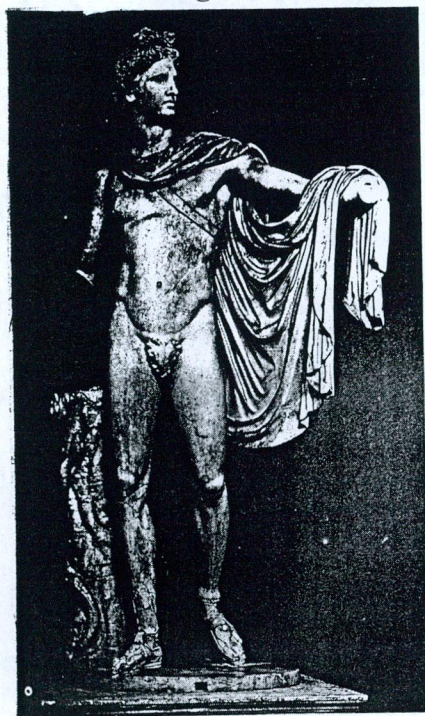
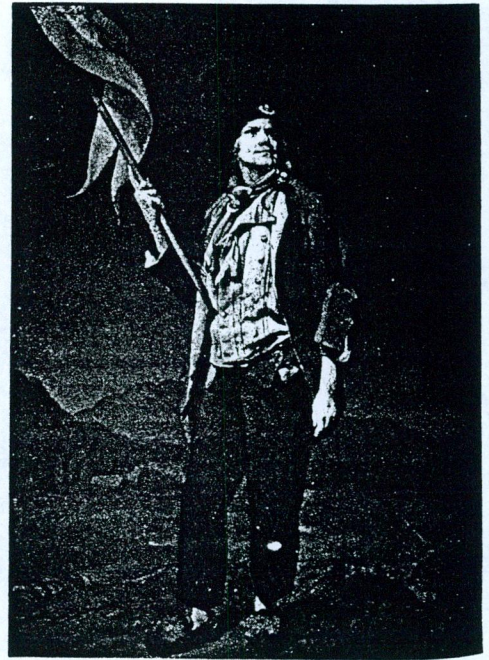
This thesis was based on the premise that clothes are a vital component in expressing individual presence and importance. I have documented how dress codes were instigated, on cultural and moral grounds, to limit the expressive power of female dress. It is significant because it reflects the visual power of clothes in society and the attempt to consolidate a subordinate role for women in society. The struggle of women to assert independence between 1850 - 1945 reveals the dichotomy inherent in clothes. Female clothes confirmed female folly and forewarned society of attempted reform. However, it also provided visual inspiration and enhanced personal confidence. The intricate and sometimes ethereal relationship between fashion and society renders it impossible to define the extent of influence one had on the other. However, in this period the proposition that women had to tackle the whole of society to achieve dress rights is undeniable.

Women's fashion today has completely incorporated the modernising principles of dress. It is difficult to imagine that such sweeping and strict sartorial codes were ever decreed or adhered to. Today, women have total choice in how they wish to clothe and express themselves; though a few bastions of the old regime remain. My final illustration portrays American fashion designer and social commentator, Elizabeth Hawes. In the 1930s she was considered radical for suggesting that clothes could look beautiful but be comfortable. She advocated a 'unisex-look' and insisted that women should wear trousers. Here she poses in trousers that she designed, epitomising the expression and self-assurance that was lacking in traditional female dress prior to modernisation.

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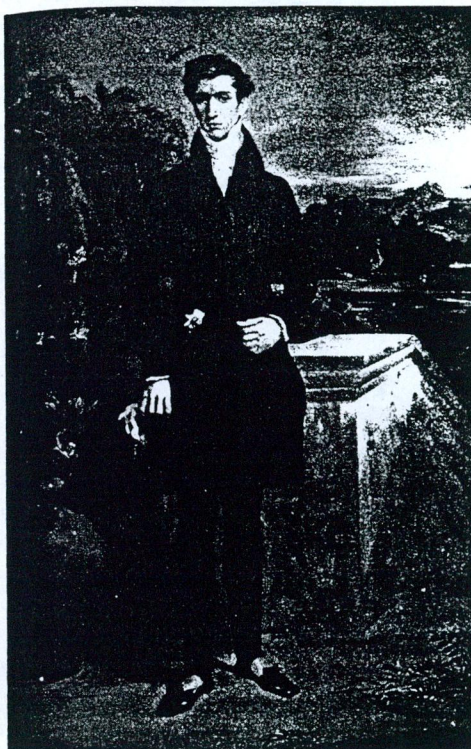


Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.



RATIONAL DRESS GAZETTE.

Organ of the Rational Dress League.

No. 13

OCTOBER, 1899.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

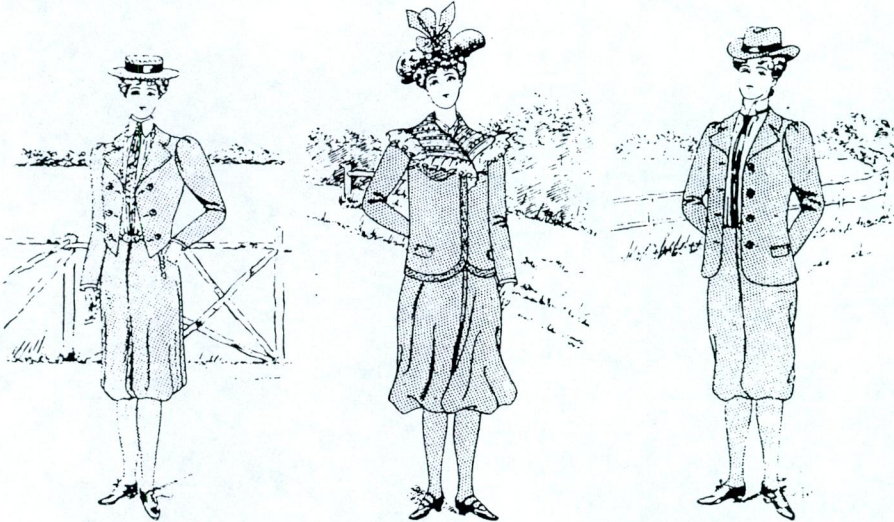
The Objects of the Association are to foster and encourage reform in the dress of both sexes, but more particularly to promote the wearing by women of some form of bifurcated garment, especially for such active purposes as cycling, tennis, golf, and other athletic exercises, walking tours, house-work, and business purposes. Annual Subscription 2 s. Entrance Fee 1 s.

Hon. Treasurer: VISCOUNTESS HARBERTON, 108, Cromwell Road, S.W.

Hon. Secretary: Mrs. P. J. HERON MAXWELL, 30, Ashley Gardens, S.W.

Assistant Secretary and Organiser: Miss EDITH M. VANCE, 64, Falsbury Road, N.W.

Application for Forms of Membership, Rules, Patterns, &c., should be addressed to the Secretary. M.S.s. and Sketches for the Gazette are cordially invited and should be sent to Mrs. HARTUNG, 10, Gullford Street, W.C. Annual Subscription to the Gazette (for non-members) 1 s. Single copies 1d.



Rational Dress up-to-date, reproduced by kind permission of the Editor of the "Daily Telegraph."

Fig. 7.

Fig. 8.

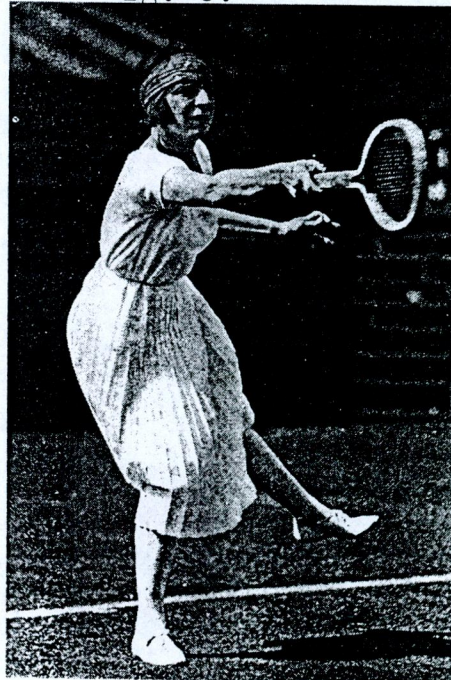
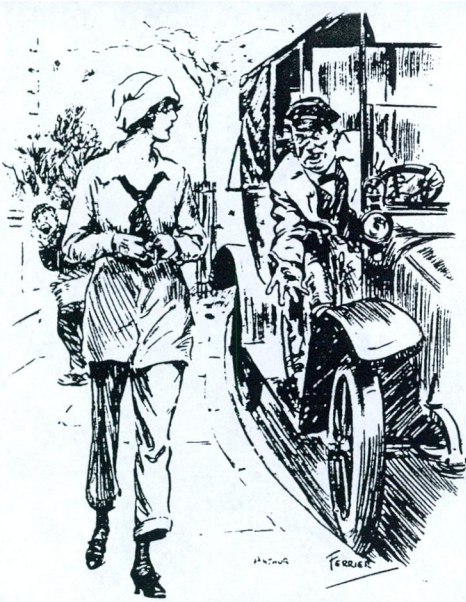




Fig. 9.





Taxi driver (who has received bare legal fare, to Lady Maud, on munitions). "Ere, wit 'n this? Calls yerself a gentleman, do yeh?"

Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.

OUR LAND-WORKERS.

Mabel (discussing a turn for the village Red Cross Concert). "WHAT ABOUT GETTING OURSELVES UP AS GIRLS?"
Ethel. "YES—BUT HAVE WE THE CLOTHES FOR IT?"

Fig. 13.



First Officer (in spasm of jealousy). "WHO'S THE KNOCK-KNEED CHAP WITH YOUR SISTER, OLD MAN?"
Second Officer. "MY OTHER SISTER."



Fig. 14.

Fig. 15



Fig. 12.

12.



Fig. 16.

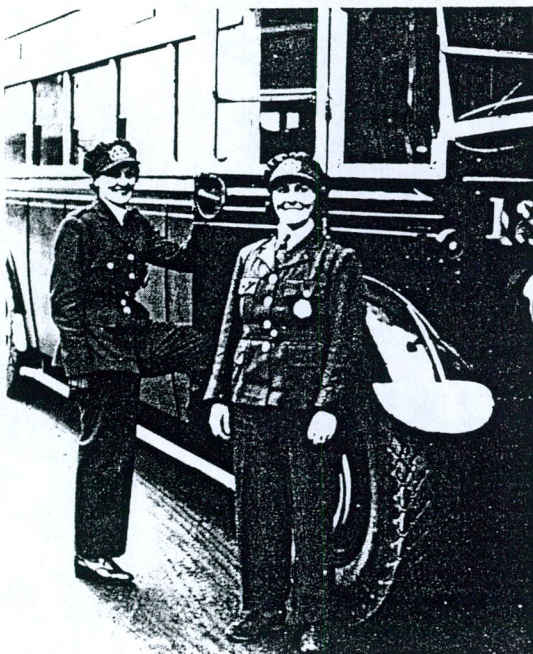


Fig. 17.



Fig. 18.



Fig. 19.

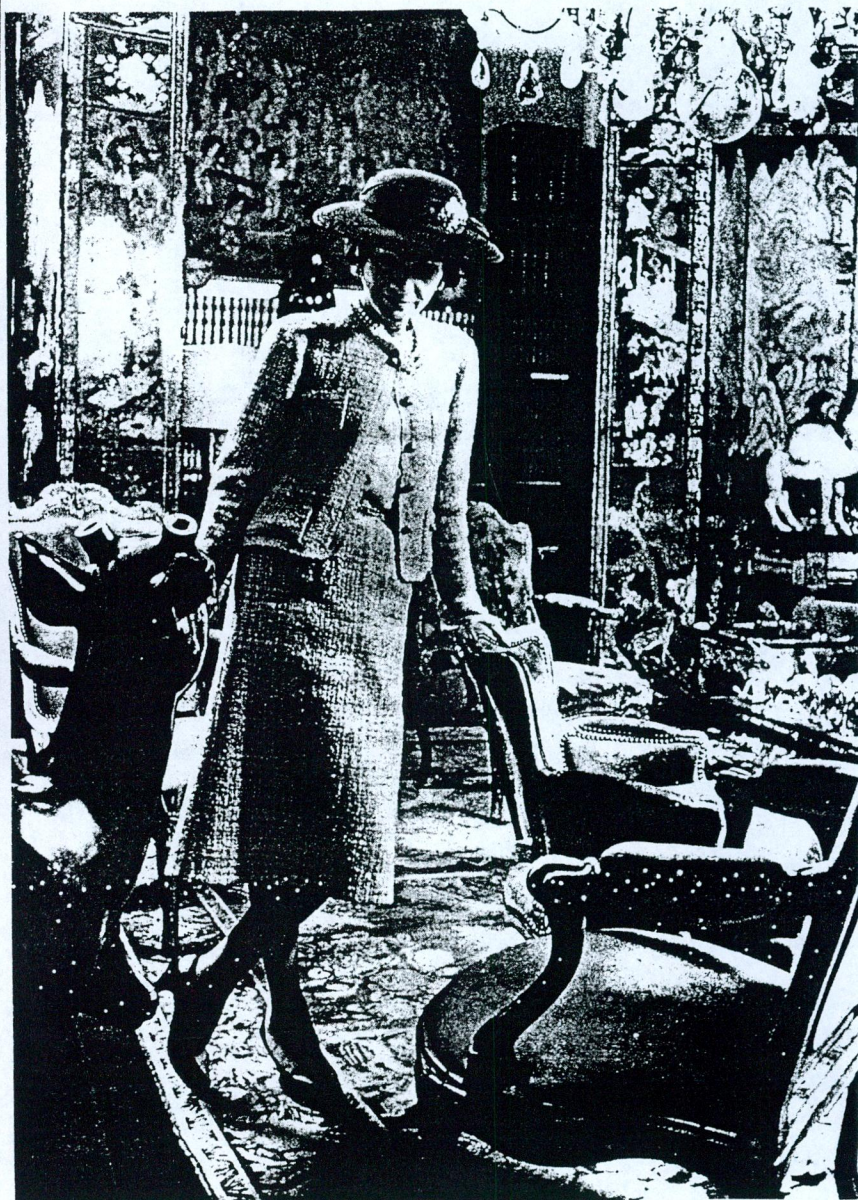


Fig. 20.



Fig. 21.



Fig. 22.



Fig. 23.



BLOOMERISM IN A BALL-ROOM.

Bloomer. "MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE OF DANCING THE NEXT POLKA WITH YOU?"

Fig. 24.



Fig. 25.

ONE OF THE DELIGHTFUL RESULTS OF BLOOMERISM.—THE LADIES WILL POP THE QUESTION.

Superior Creature. "SAY! OH, SAY, DEAREST! WILL YOU BE MINE?" &c., &c.

fig. 26.



BLOOMERISM—AN AMERICAN CUSTOM.



"THE GRECIAN BEND."

DOES NOT TIGHT-LACING AND HIGH HEELS GIVE A CHARMING GRACE AND DIGNITY TO THE FEMALE FIGURE?

Fig. 27.



Fig. 28.

"DRESS AND UNDRRESS."

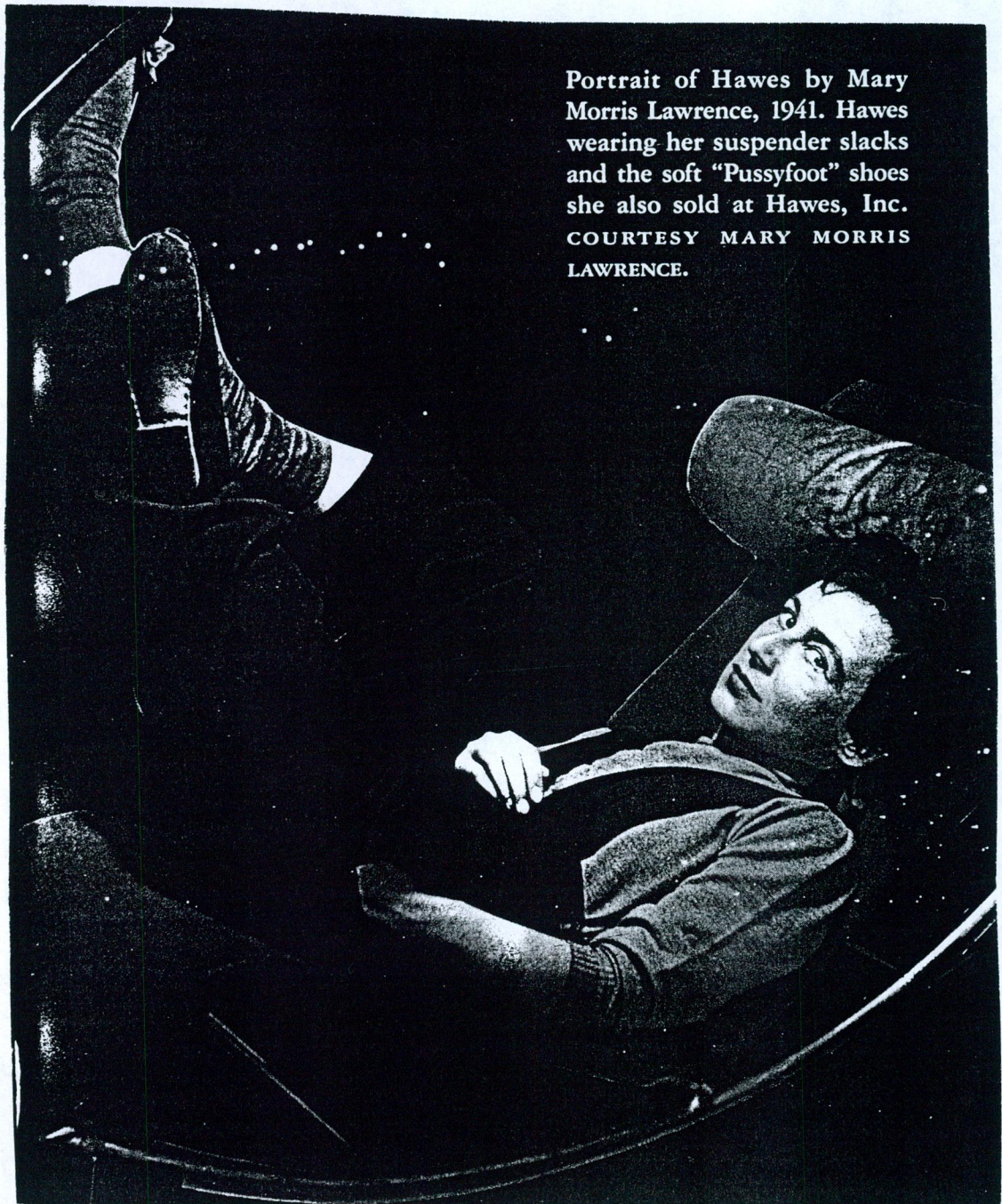
First Guest. "THAT MRS. ASTERISK'S A PRETTY WOMAN, AND SHE AIN'T BADLY GOT UP; BUT SHE LOOKS ALL WRONG SOMEHOW."
Second Guest. "OF COURSE SHE DOES. THE RIMICULOUS WOMAN PERSISTS IN WEARING HER BACKBONE, AND BACKBONES ARE QUITE GONE OUT."

Fig. 29.



"I TELL YOU WHAT, OLD THING. THIS NEW FEMININE TOUCH IS ALL RIGHT, BUT YOU 'LL HAVE TO ADOPT A NEW STANCE."

Fig. 30.



Portrait of Hawes by Mary Morris Lawrence, 1941. Hawes wearing her suspender slacks and the soft "Pussyfoot" shoes she also sold at Hawes, Inc. COURTESY MARY MORRIS LAWRENCE.

