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Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género

Seminario **Vestido, moda y cultura**
Construcción y comunicación de
identidades sociales diversas: del vestido
medieval al estilo *dark*.

Sesión 4 XVIII a XIX: construcción de
identidades

ASHELFORD, Jane (1996), "Dress Suitable to their Station:
Clothes for Servants", en *The Art of Dress. Clothes and Society*
1500-1914, Londres: National Trust Enterprises Limited, pp.
289-303. (ROPA DE SIRVIENTES)

Dress Suitable to their Station: Clothes for Servants

The term livery comes from the Old French *livrer*, originally meaning to hand over food and clothes to servants and retainers. A seventeenth-century ballad on the wearing of livery runs:

The Nobles of our Land
Were much delighted then,
To have at their command
A crue of lustie Men,
Which by their Coates were knowne,
Of Tawnie, Red or Blue,
With Crests on their sleeves showne,
When this Old Cap was new.¹

From medieval times, in noble households in England, livery colours, picking out the two most prominent colours in the coat-of-arms of a noble family, might be worn by anyone who served in any way, and were not restricted to those who had a specific duty or post in the household. At this period a noble household could range from personal attendants who were well-born – including young men from another noble family who were learning the courtesies of life – to the most menial servants. Superior gentlemen servants would wear the livery colours on their hat, hood or gown. Lower servants would have their clothing provided by their employer, so that when they went abroad with their master, or came before his guests, they would wear full livery colours with an embroidered badge on the breast, back or sleeves.

Sumptuary laws were passed during the reigns of Richard II (1377–99) and Henry IV (1399–1413) to try to control the wearing of livery by limiting it to menial servants, in an attempt to cut down on private armies of retainers. But these efforts did not prove effective, for sumptuary legislation continued to be promulgated, including a series of ten proclamations issued between 1559 and 1597 by Elizabeth I (see p.27). These attempted to define exactly what fabrics, furs and trimmings could be worn by each

Prince, the carpenter at Erddig in
seventeenth century. He wears a heavy
hat which is too small for him, a stiff
collar and a black hat, the wide brim
which would afford protection from the
sun. The house at Erddig can be seen in
the background while Prince's virtues are extolled
by Philip Yorke I.
(The House of Denbigh, 1792, Erddig)

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rank of society. Servants were not allowed to wear silk, although an amendment passed in 1597 permitted the Queen's servants, and those of noblemen and gentlemen, to wear 'Badges and cognizances or other ornaments of velvet and silk' on their livery coats and cloaks. The household accounts for 1611-2 for Francis Manners, 6th Earl of Rutland, record that the blue coats worn by his servants were embroidered with a peacock. The upper servants had a velvet ground, costing 6s, whereas the lower servants had their peacocks embroidered on a satin ground at a cost of 5s.

New liveries would also be ordered for special occasions, such as a royal visit. Lord Rutland ordered his liveries with their peacocks ready for James I's visit to Belvoir Castle in 1612. When Elizabeth I made a royal progress to Lord North's home at Kirtling, near Cambridge, in 1578, North spent £23 3s 8d on tawny cloth for new livery, and £9 on coats for his servants, which were worn with gold neck chains and the badge of the family embroidered on the left sleeve.

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Queen Elizabeth I being carried
 ers of state, courtiers and
 of whom are attired according to
 ghts of the Garter lead the
 zcond from the left is George
 Earl of Cumberland (father of
 lifford, p.63); next to him is the
 rlain, Lord Hunsdon, carrying his
 office; holding the Sword of State is
 t, 7th Earl of Shrewsbury (step-son
 w of Bess of Hardwick, p.24).

Queen's chair stand three elderly
 o are 'grooms of our coaches or
 livery comprises red tunics
 in gold with the royal arms,
 eches and black skull-caps. Lining
 twelve Gentlemen Pensioners
 uniform of a black cloak and a
 office. Each holds a halberd issued
 al Armoury.

at hand side there are eight ladies
 and it is likely that the figure in the
 :lad in shimmering white and
 of the Queen's Maids of Honour.

o Robert Peake, c.1600,
 istle)

As summer and winter liveries formed part of the wages for every servant, this biannual provision represented a substantial financial outlay. This is why Rowland Whyte felt the need for some clarification from his master, Sir Robert Sidney, when he was entrusted with purchasing livery in London in 1597. He wrote, 'How many yards you will bestow in a cloak, what trimming, what colour?'² Servants taken into smaller households also received clothing as part of their wages. John Dee, the mathematician and astrologer, noted in his diary on 29 September 1595: 'Margery Stubble of Hounslow, our dry nurse, entered into the yere of her service beginning on Michelmas Day, and is to have £3 her yeres wages and a gown cloth of russet.'³

The return of Charles II in 1660 was marked in some style by the 5th Earl of Bedford, who ran up a bill of £245 2s 0d at the mercer, woollen draper, silkman, milliner, hosier, tailor, haberdasher and cutler. This was for 'several extraordinary liveries' for his male servants who were on public display: the coachman, three grooms, the postilion and his six footmen. The postilion assisted the coachman when he was driving four or more horses, while footmen at this period were employed to run on foot by the side of the master or mistress when out riding or in a carriage.

Although many servants were still required to run a noble household in the seventeenth century, the large number of gentlemen attendants had disappeared. Upper servants now meant the steward, butler, valet, groom of the chambers, clerk of the kitchen and, in time, the housekeeper, who were dressed much like their employers. The discarding of their livery was regarded as a rise in status and social advancement. Lower servants, like the coachman and the footman and, on large estates, the park keeper and gamekeeper, continued to wear the family livery. In smaller households, provision of new livery to estate workers was more erratic – as they were rarely inside the house or on public view. This attitude is clearly stated in a letter written by Sir John Verney of Claydon in 1698, refusing to give his keeper a new livery: 'I gave him one last year, there is no reason which I should give one a livery that doth not wait on me nor my wife ten times in a year.'⁴

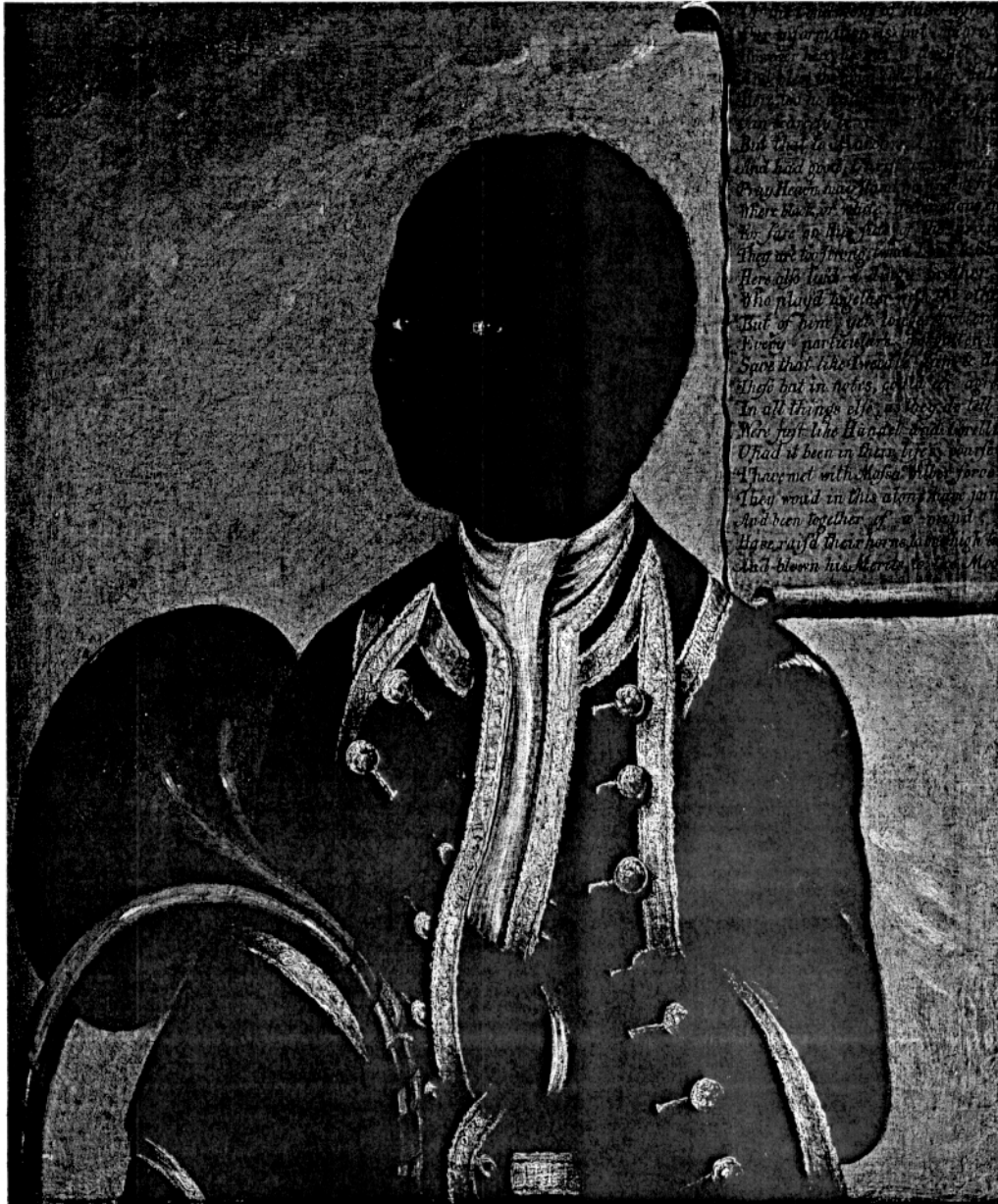
Even modest households would provide livery if they could afford to do so. When Samuel Pepys was given his first important post, he immediately ordered some livery for his solitary male servant, recording the event in his diary on 23 March 1662: 'This morning was brought to me my boyes fine livery, which is very handsome, and I do think to keep to black and gold lace upon gray, being the colour of my armes for ever.'⁵

To complement the livery of coachmen and postilions, the family coach and horse trappings, and even the sedan-chairs, would be decorated in the family colours, embellished with the coat-of-arms. When Sir John Verney married for the second time in 1692, he decided to alter his coat-of-arms to incorporate those of his new wife. He wrote: 'I have put side glasses in my Coach, and taken off the red tassels from my harness and put on white ones and also white trappings on ye bridels and made new liveries for my servants, the Arms I will alter shortly by putting her Coate with mine.'⁶

Lady Verney, writing to her stepson Ralph in 1704, gives some idea of the cost of livery. She warned him that he would have to spend about £150 a year if he wanted to compete with Sir Edward Denton who 'has a very rich Liverys a making at your tailor . . . a whole cloth a laced with Crimson Yellow and Gold, the breadth of your Hand and made full-laced like the Queen's'.⁷

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258 The black coachboy at Erddig, wearing very smart livery, comprising a red waistcoat and a green jacket with red revers and The edge of both garments is liberally with silver lace and silver buttons. (Unknown artist, 1730s, Erddig)

Ralph's son, also Ralph, 2nd Earl Verney, was a flamboyant character, whose coach-and-six was escorted round the country by 'a brace of tall negroes, with silver French horns . . . perpetually making a noise, like Sir Henry Sidney's Trompeters in the days of Elizabeth, blowing very joyfully to behold and see'.⁸ It was considered something of a status symbol at this time to have a black servant, and this is why they are so frequently included in family portraits (see 74 and 98).

At Erddig, hanging in the servants' hall, is a striking portrait of a black coachboy, clad in smart livery, holding the horn that he would have blown whilst riding on a coach

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(258). This is traditionally held to be the coachboy employed by John Meller, owner of Erddig in the early eighteenth century. Recent research, however, suggests it might be an inn sign which was later adapted by Philip Yorke I to fit in with his collection of servants' portraits (see p.294). He added a poem in the 1770s admitting 'our information is "but me'gre"' about the boy, but it was certain that if he had 'met with Massa Wilberforce [the philanthropist MP William Wilberforce who campaigned for abolition of the slave trade]' he would have blown his horn to praise 'his merits to the Moon'. The status of negro servants in England was that of slaves until 1772, when employers were no longer allowed to keep them against their will. Before 1772 they were required to wear closely-fitting collars engraved with the name and dwelling of their master, so that they could be identified if they escaped. A collar can be seen in Kneller's portrait of Captain Thomas Lucy and his page at Charlecote (see 74).

In the eighteenth century livery for household servants tended to be made from cloth, serge or plush, and consisted of a collarless knee-length coat liberally trimmed with gold or silver braid and buttons stamped with the employer's crest, a long waistcoat, knee-breeches and white silk stockings (see 265). The coat was usually made in two colours, with the collar, lapels and cuffs contrasting with the main colour, but matching the waistcoat. The distinctive 'shoulder' knot was worn on the right shoulder. It was a bunch of cord or braid loops that was sometimes tipped with ornamental metal tags. The knot was such an intrinsic part of livery that a footman was often referred to as a 'Knight of the Shoulder Knot'. If the footmen wore their own hair, it had to be powdered: otherwise a wig was worn at all times. When dressed in his formal attire, the footman wore a bag wig, a square black silk bag enclosing the queue of the wig, drawn in at the nape of the neck by a running string concealed by a black bow.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, the footman still retained his outdoor function, as a running servant. His out-of-doors livery consisted of a great coat that fell below the knees and a tricorne hat, sometimes trimmed with gold braid, and even with a cockade. He often carried a long cane with a gold or silver top containing a mixture of eggs and white wine to sustain him as he ran through the streets. A running footman could cut an impressive figure. In George Farquhar's play, *The Beaux' Stratagem*, 1707, a servant when asked about the footman's livery, replies: 'Livery! Lord, Madam I took him for a captain, he's so bedizen'd with Lace, and then he has . . . a silver-headed Cane dangling at his Nuckles . . . and has a fine long periwig tied up in a bag.'⁹

The difficulty in distinguishing between gentlemen and servants in livery was particularly acute for foreign visitors, creating problems of identification and etiquette. When Count Kielmansegge was entertained by the Duke of Newcastle at his London home in Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1761-2, he found that 'At least ten to twelve servants out of livery waited upon us, of whom the majority wore long wigs, which would naturally make it difficult for a stranger to distinguish between guests and servants. Now all these people, in spite of their fine clothing, expect their tips when you leave, but to a gold-laced coat you cannot offer a solitary shilling.'¹⁰

Fashion influences took place in reverse, too, at this time. Two garments from the working man's wardrobe, the frock-coat and the greatcoat, made the transition from practical garments to fashionable wear. The frock-coat had acquired fashionable status by the 1740s, followed shortly by the greatcoat, with its large collar and wide cuffs. The

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enduring quality of greatcoats can be seen in an unusual survival of servants' livery at Erddig (259). Hanging in the butler's pantry are two greatcoats, or box coats, that belonged to the Yorkes' coachman (see p.295). In the 1790s another working man's outer garment, the coachman's caped greatcoat (260) was similarly elevated in status and became an essential part of the gentleman's wardrobe. Ladies also wore caped overcoats when travelling in inclement weather. The one illustrated here (261) is made from close wool of a felt-like texture, so thick that the edges of the coat have been left unbound as they do not fray. It would certainly have offered protection from the cold. When the greatcoat was no longer fashionable, George Augustus Sala wrote sadly in 1859 of its demise:

But where is the great coat – the long, voluminous wide-skirted garment of brown or drab broad cloth, reaching to the ankle, possessing unnumbered pockets. . . . This venerable garment had a cape, which, in wet or snowy weather, when travelling outside the 'Highflyer' coach, you turned over your head. Your father wore it before you, and you hoped to leave it to your eldest son. Solemn repairs – careful renovation of buttons and braiding were done to it, from time to time. A new great coat was an event – a thing to be remembered as happening once or so in a lifetime.¹¹

Erddig was given to the National Trust by the last of the Yorkes, Philip III in 1973. It is not a particularly fine house architecturally, but it has two great assets – a fine collection of early eighteenth-century furniture, and a uniquely rich archive of inventories, letters, household accounts and information about the servants, kept by the Yorke family since 1733, when Simon Yorke I inherited the estate from his uncle, John Meller. (The eldest Yorke sons were invariably called Simon or Philip, hence the numbering to identify individuals.)

The information about the servants employed by the Yorkes not only includes details in the household accounts, but also portraits of them with tributes in verse, which now hang in the servants' hall at Erddig. The first set of portraits was painted for Philip Yorke I in the 1790s by John Walters of Denbigh. The second set was commissioned by his son Simon II in 1830 from an anonymous painter. Later generations are recorded in daguerreotypes and photographs. As Merlin Waterson explains in his book about Erddig, 'there was nothing unusual about a country-house owner having expensive portraits painted of his horse, his prize-winning bulls or his dogs – they, after all, were the product of careful breeding like their owners – but to extend the treatment to generations of servants was thought to be a symptom of extreme eccentricity'.¹²

As livery was replaced on a regular, usually annual, basis, it was not worn until it was in a state of total disrepair, but departing servants would often take their livery with them and recirculate garments on the second-hand clothes market, where they would gradually be reduced to tatters. We have good reason, therefore, to bless the eccentricity of the Yorkes, as the portraits provide a very rare chance of visually tracing the development of the dress of household servants since the eighteenth century.

At Erddig livery was given only to the footmen, coachmen, grooms and postilion – again, the servants most likely to be on public view. In 1776, for example, Philip Yorke noted that he took on a new coachman on the understanding that he would receive £20 a



259 These nineteenth-century livery coats, called box coats, were worn by the footmen of the Yorkes for generations of whom have inscribed their names on the wall of the butler's pantry at Erddig. They would have been worn with top hats and boots of which matched the braid decoration of the coat collar and cuffs. Double-breasted coats were also worn by the coachman and the footman with top hat with cockade and top boots.

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From the late eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth, the coachman's dress with its layers of capes afforded him protection from the elements. He always wore a top hat, and, when on the box of the coach, gaiters. A coachman in the nineteenth century would be expected to wear a wig and a top hat. The lady in the illustration is a traveller in *The Departure* – a working woman – wearing a kerchief and a long apron over a bedgown. (Upton, 1792)

An example of fashion borrowing from the eighteenth century. This wool caped coat, made between 1820-30, and thought to be for a coachman, features a high collar, a buttoned front, and four layers of capes covering the belt. The high collar has beige velvet slots around it, and the coat has a scarf. Beige velvet has also lined the collar and its concealed opening, and there is a slit opening at the bottom of the coat with a flap buttoned at



year in wages, plus a 'full suit of livery with plush breeches & pair Buckskin breeches & Waistcoat and Frock Greatcoat and boots in every second year and to provide himself out of his said wages with a frock coat for common work allow him also a jacket when neat'.¹³ The estate workers at Erddig, therefore, did not wear livery, and a portrait of Edward Prince, the carpenter, painted in 1792, shows him in working clothes (see 256).

The last member of the Erddig staff to wear livery was John Jones. Originally employed as a coachman, in time he combined the roles of carpenter, gardener and estate foreman. By 1943, when a photographer from *Picture Post* came to the house, Jones was the estate odd-job man and, at the photographer's request, he donned his long-relinquished livery – a coat, with a collar decorated with braid, and top hat (see 259), and posed for a photograph with the only other remaining member of staff, the housekeeper, Lucy Jones (no relation).

Unlike their male counterparts, female servants in the eighteenth century did not wear livery or uniform. It was an established practice that the maid should be given the

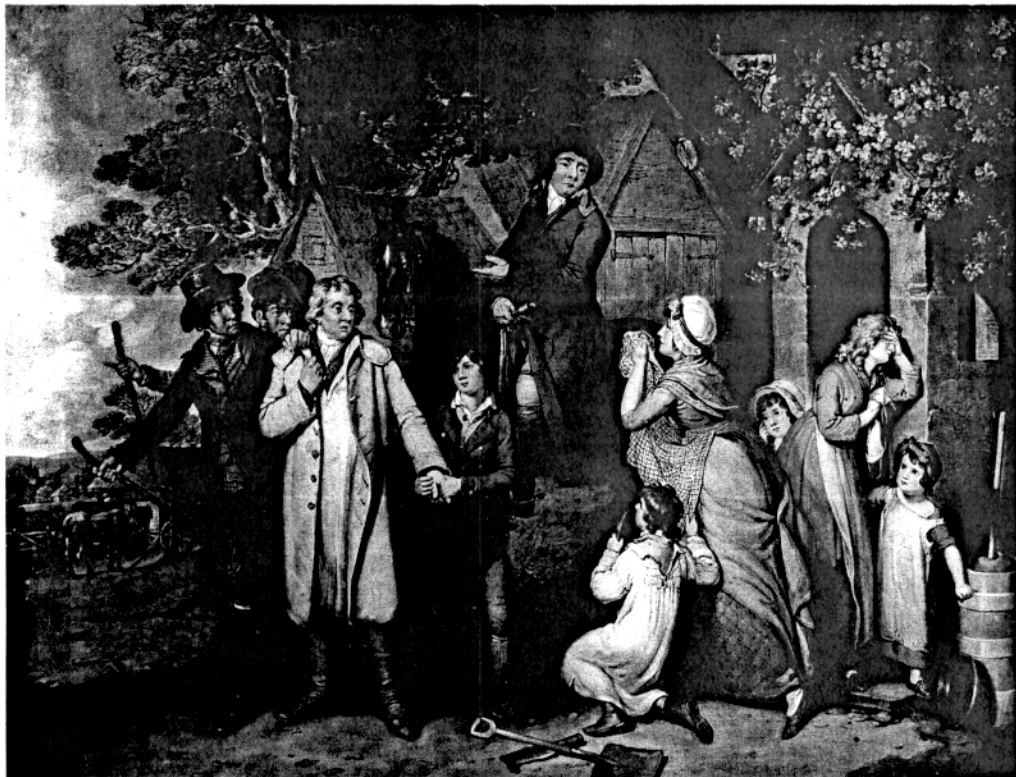
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cast-off clothes of her mistress and, in the event of her death, part or all of her wardrobe. When the Countess of Bristol died in 1741, her husband, John Hervey, 1st Earl, wrote to their son:

I am glad to find that you have delivered to Williams all the things which were your poor mother's and which by a customary sort of right are now due to every common servant in her place; but as her merit and services for near 18 years have been of the most uncommon kind, that consideration alone would have entitled her to any favour out of the ordinary course of proceedings between executors and residuary legatees.¹⁴

Just as confusion between a gentleman and his liveried servants could cause problems, so the similarity in appearance of a mistress and her personal maid or waiting woman could give rise to embarrassing social situations. Daniel Defoe wrote in 1725: 'I remember I was put very much to the Blush being at a Friend's House and by him required to salute the Ladies, and I kiss'd the chamber jade [hussy] into the bargain for she was as well dressed as the best.'¹⁵

Typically, a country woman's working dress in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would have comprised a cotton or linen bedgown, petticoat and apron. The bedgown was a three-quarter-length loose wrapping jacket that was worn over a petticoat of wool or linen. As it had no fastening, it could be secured about the waist by apron strings. This arrangement can be seen clearly in an 1803 print, *The Rapacious*



262 An 1803 print showing the unedifying spectacle of a zealous agent carrying out an eviction order. The wife of the evictee is wearing a red bedgown over a blue petticoat, which has been pulled round at the back and held in place at the waist by apron strings. The lady next to her has a similar combination. The tenant is wearing a smock (see pp. 301-3) under a loose, simple coat. His son, kneeling, wears a smock with a simple back opening that has a small decoration around it.

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Webster, housekeeper at Erddig, in the mid-1850s. Her plain black dress, full skirt, a rather coarse-woollen shawl and a white lace cap with wide black ribbon.

steward or the Unfortunate tenant (262). The bedgown probably originated as a kind of dressing jacket, but it was also worn by millworkers in Lancashire, who could have the price of it deducted from their wages.

Until the latter part of the eighteenth century, when cheap, factory-made suits and trousers provided him with a fashionable alternative, the traditional garb of a countryman was a smock (see p.302) worn with breeches made from leather, corduroy (a stout, ribbed cotton material introduced in 1795) or linen, with leather gaiters to protect the lower part of the leg. These garments were made at home and passed on from one generation to the next. It was a costume eminently suited to the wear and tear of country life, and breeches and gaiters were to reappear in the nineteenth century in the wardrobe of the country gentleman (see 136). Whether he wore a tailored Norfolk suit or matching jacket and knickerbockers of the finest wool, he would team them with leather gaiters or thick socks and stout leather shoes (see 207).

In the nineteenth century, the rather informal relationship between family and servants in matters of dress gave way to stricter and more prescribed forms of service. The housekeeper, the senior female servant of the house, would not wear uniform, but was usually dressed in black, carrying the symbol of her authority, a ring of keys to all the rooms, closets and cupboards for which she was responsible. Sarah Wells, the mother of H.G. Wells, was promoted from lady's maid to housekeeper at Uppark in Sussex in 1880. Her son, in his *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), says that she looked the part when she 'assumed a lace cap, lace apron, black silk dress and all the rest of it', though he rather disloyally went on to say that she was 'perhaps the worst housekeeper that was ever thought of'. Unfortunately Sarah 'did not know how to plan work, control servants, buy stores or economise in any way.'¹⁶ Inevitably her incompetence could not be tolerated and in 1893 Sarah was given a month's notice, at seventy-one years of age.

Mary Webster, the housekeeper at Erddig for more than thirty years, was photographed in the mid-1850s prominently displaying her badge of office, a bunch of keys (263). Philip Yorke II wrote an accompanying poem:

Upon the portly frame we look
Of one who was our former Cook
No better keeper of our Store
Did ever enter at our door.¹⁷

Her skill at financial management stood in strong contrast to Sarah Wells's. When she died in 1875, to the amazement of all, her will revealed she had saved £1,300.

Under the command of the housekeeper came the housemaids, who cleaned and tidied the house. For morning work, nineteenth-century maids would wear print dresses with a cap and apron, then change after lunch into black dresses, with a clean apron and frilly cap for their afternoon and evening duties.

The parlourmaid was a somewhat superior maid-servant who, in the absence of a footman, was expected to wait at table and usher in the guests. As she would be seen by all who visited the house, she was expected to be smartly dressed at all times. The importance placed on the parlourmaid's appearance is stressed by Arnold Bennett in *Anna of the Five Towns*, 1902, a novel about life in the Potteries at the turn of the

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century. When Anna is invited out to tea, she is suitably impressed by the maid who answers the door wearing 'black alpaca with white wristbands, cap, streamers, and embroidered apron (each article a dernier crie from Bostock's great shop at Hambridge)'.¹⁸ Like the housemaids, the parlourmaid wore a print dress with cap and apron in the morning, and after lunch a black dress, the style of which conformed to fashion, a fresh apron and cap. By the end of the nineteenth century, she wore a distinctive starched and frilled apron with a bib secured by cross-straps behind.

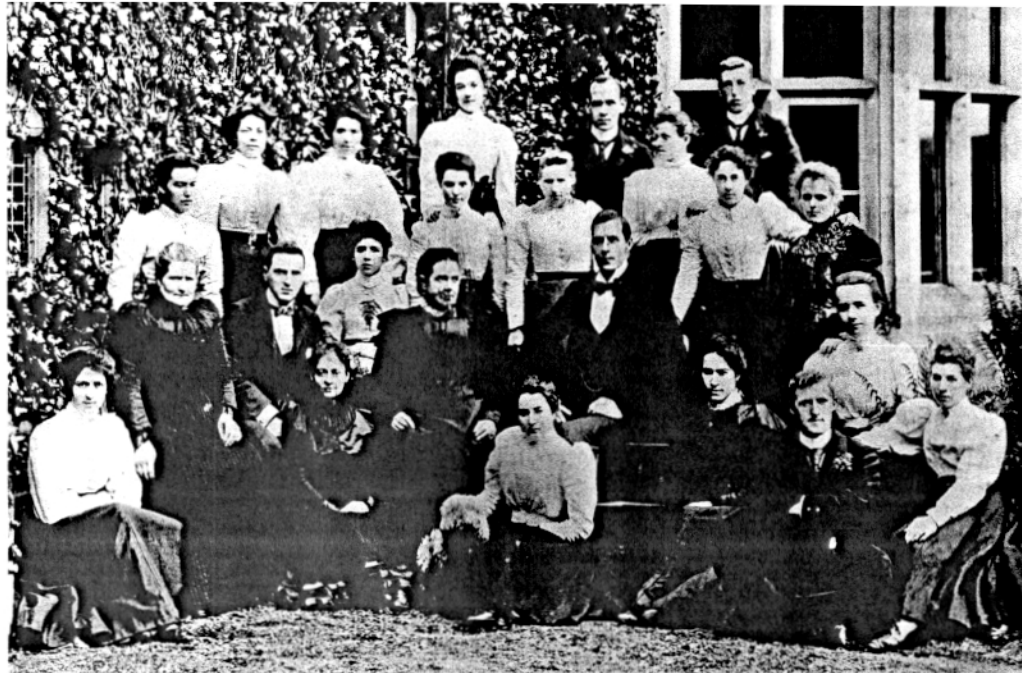
The lady's maid did not usually come under the aegis of the housekeeper, but was employed directly by her mistress. As in the previous century, she did not wear a uniform but expected to be fashionably, though not flamboyantly, dressed. Before her elevation to housekeeper, Sarah Wells had been lady's maid to Lady Fetherstonhaugh and her sister, Miss Bullock, at Uppark. She was more admirably equipped for this role, as she had served a four-year apprenticeship with a dressmaker and had taken lessons in millinery. A knowledge of fashion and dressmaking was essential for a lady's maid, as she was required to dress and undress her mistress, put out suitable clothes for whatever activity she might be engaged in during the day, wash her lace and fine linen and keep her wardrobe in an immaculate state of repair. In her autobiography, *Edwardian Daughter*, Sonia Keppel recalled all the tasks her mother's maid had performed, and how surprised she was that her mother managed to cope when deprived of her services in 1914. She remembered the maid 'setting out her underclothes under their lace cover; kneeling on the floor to put on Mamma's stockings, lacing Mamma into her stays (as though she were reining in a runaway horse); doing her hair; pinning her veil on to her hat; buttoning up her gloves; putting her powder and cigarettes and money into her bag. And, behind the scenes, washing, ironing, mending.'¹⁹

Another female member of staff who was usually directly answerable to the mistress of the house was the children's nurse. She wore a print dress in the morning and a soberly-coloured dress with cap and apron in the afternoon. The severity of the nurse's headwear is indelibly linked in Frances Crompton's mind with discipline and obedience, when remembering her childhood in the 1890s: 'We consider nurse a very cross person. . . Her aprons are as stiff as the nursery tea-tray, besides being the same plain shape, and she will wear the tightest and sternest caps that were ever seen . . . her caps were all strictish, but her Sunday cap was savage.'²⁰

When the children were old enough, they would pass from the care of the nurse to the governess who undertook their early education. The governess was expected to have a ladylike but unassuming appearance. Usually a gentlewoman in reduced circumstances, the governess was socially superior to the nurse, but was not, unlike the lady's maid, entitled to her employer's cast-off clothing.

For male servants, too, the contrast between the dress of upper and lower ranks became more marked in the nineteenth century. The butler was now the head male servant in the household. He continued to wear a sober version of fashionable dress. Lord Hamilton, describing the menservants employed by his parents at Chesterfield House in London in the 1860s, recalled the butler, Burgh, in a 'short frock-coat of the day, unbuttoned, and the natural majesty of his appearance was enhanced by a pointed grey "Imperial" [a small tuft of hair left growing beneath the lower lip, so-called because the Emperor Napoleon III wore one]'.²¹ In the 1870s the butler's uniform was

ehold staff of Cragside pose in luty clothes, 1890s. By the end of omen could choose between a ; blouse and skirt, and a day uses and dresses worn here have igot sleeves, narrow waists elt, and flared skirts. The practice brics gave a strong definition to and the extra weight and body he skirts is particularly noticeable by the seated girls in the fore- entral figures in the group, the in a black satin dress and the man in a morning suit, are likely : senior members of the household ekeeper and the butler.



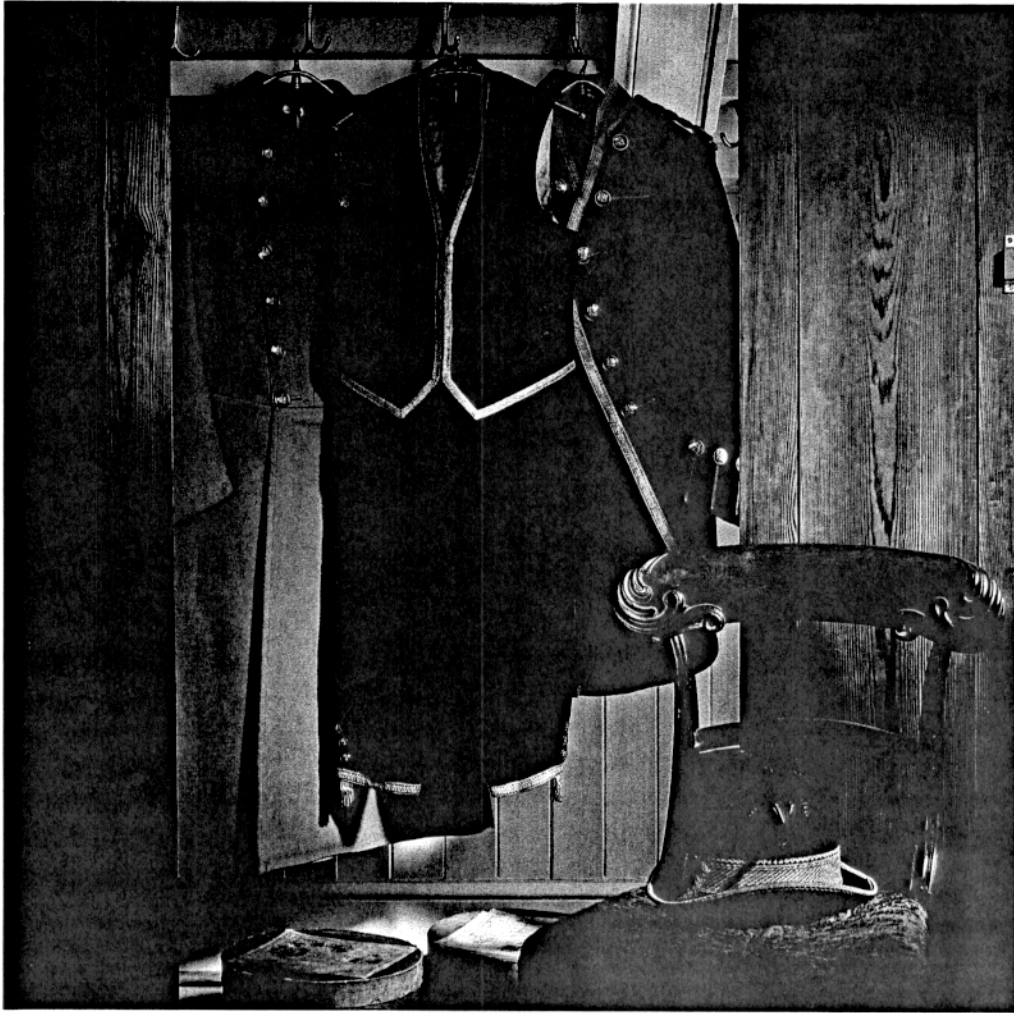
standardised as a version of his master's evening dress – black tailcoat and trousers, stiff white shirt and tie.

Under the butler came the footmen, no longer fulfilling their running duties, but carrying out a whole host of tasks within the house. They still wore livery when on duty, and were thus clad in a fossilised version of eighteenth-century fashion. In grander establishments there were four sets of livery: 'undress' and 'full dress' for indoors, and the same for outdoors. Footmen, being seen in public more than any other member of staff, were often chosen for their looks rather than their character, so that their expensive livery could be seen to best advantage. Lord Hamilton remembered:

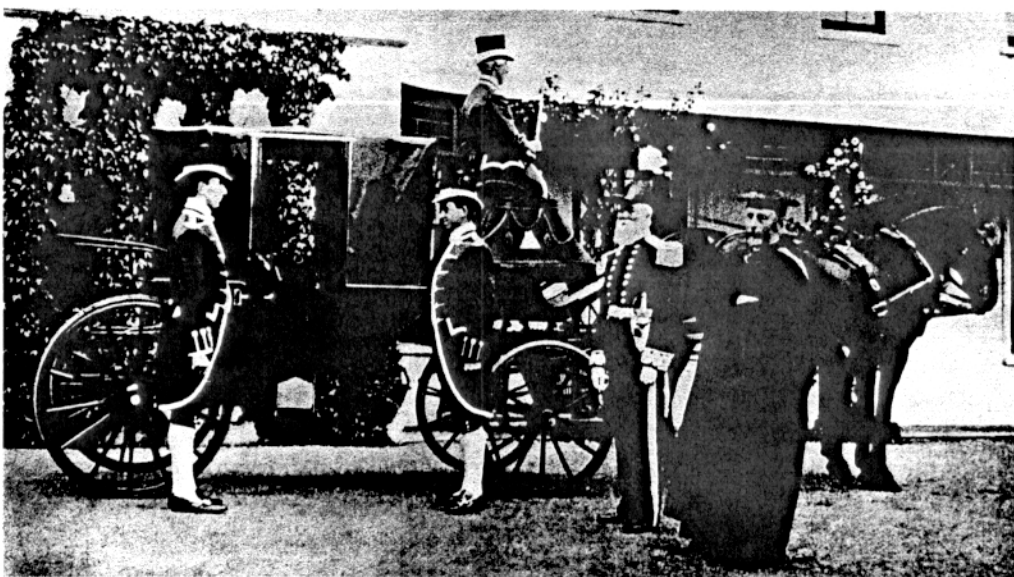
[they] were noble and impressive figures, but it must be owned that their moral worth was not always on a par with the magnificence of their physical deportment. They were always engaged by Burgh, who was more concerned with their physique and more especially with the contour of their calves than with the whiteness of their souls. As the livery to which a recruit succeeded was very expensive, it was first and foremost essential that newcomers should be of stock size, so as to slip into their legacies without any straining of buttons or loose ungainly flaps.²²

Lanhydrock in Cornwall has been the home of the Robartes family for four hundred years. In 1881, following a disastrous fire, Thomas Agar-Robartes, later 6th Lord Clifden, rebuilt the house to the highest standards of comfort of the time: it now provides a fascinating example of a late Victorian house with all its service quarters intact. Part of the top floor was the realm of the footmen, and their bedrooms and livery room have recently been redecorated to show how they would have looked in the 1880s and 90s. Sadly, there is little remaining of Robartes' livery, apart from some footmen's striped waistcoats, appropriately in the Cornish colours of gold and black (see 3). But the National Trust has been lent the very complete liveries of male servants from another

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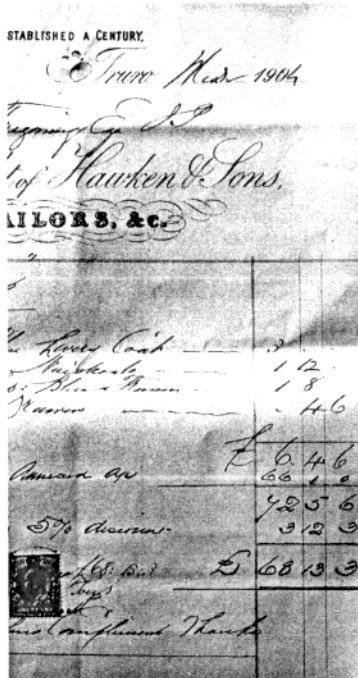


265 When John S. Tregoning of Land appointed High Sheriff of Cornwall in 1904-5, he purchased new liveries for his footmen, coachman and postilion from a local tailor in Truro. The splendid suits, in the family of blue and silver, and the coachman's livery, have been loaned to the National Trust and are now displayed in the footmen's wardrobes on the first floor at Lanhydrock. This livery room has recently been redecorated to show how it would have looked in the late nineteenth century. The only surviving livery of the Robertes family at Lanhydrock is shown in 3.



266 John S. Tregoning, High Sheriff of Cornwall, 1904-5, with his chaplain, coachman and postilion in their new livery. Full dress livery such as this was a fashionable version of eighteenth-century court dress. The sloped-back coat is reminiscent of the coats in the 1770s (119), as are the distinctive trimmings of buttons and braid. The long length coat was worn with a long waistcoat, knee-breeches, white silk stockings, buckled shoes and, in this instance, a cockade. The employer's crest, once embroidered on the coat, is now stamped onto the buttons.

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All the Landue livery was purchased from Hawken & Sons, an old-established firm in Truro. Livery could also be ordered from a number of specialist outfitters in London; John S. Tregoning bought theirs from Simpson & Bradley Street.

In the late nineteenth-century photograph of the gardening staff at Petworth, the head gardener plays the main tool of his trade. His collection of equipment includes the scythe, the wheelbarrow, the model of lawnmower and the more modern tools of the trade, the rake and trowel. Proudly in the middle, the head gardener is dressed in a wool suit and, unlike the other staff, he holds his hats on his knee.

Cornish country house, by the Tregonings of Landue, and these, in their blue and silver splendour, hang in the footmen's wardrobes at Lanhydrock (265).

Just as Lord North prepared for the visit of Elizabeth I in 1578 by ordering new livery, and Lord Bedford marked the Restoration of Charles II by lavish spending on servants' clothes, so John S. Tregoning celebrated his appointment as the High Sheriff of Cornwall in 1904 by fitting out his footmen, coachman and postilion in new liveries (266). The garments hark back to those specified by Philip Yorke I a century and a half earlier. For the footmen, jacket with shoulder knot, waistcoat, plush breeches, greatcoat and hat; for the coachman, plush breeches; for the postilion, breeches in velvet.²³ Even the blue and yellow rosettes to adorn the horses survive. All this livery was purchased from Hawken & Sons, Tailors, of Truro, for the sum of £68 13s 3d (267).

Although Tregoning patronised a local Cornish tailor, livery was often ordered from specialist shops of which there were many in London. One of the most prestigious was owned by T.S. Freeman and Sons at 18 Fenchurch Street and another was Thomas Townend of 110 Oxford Street.

At Petworth in Sussex, like Erddig, there is another good collection of images of servants. Petworth was the home in the mid-nineteenth century of George Wyndham, 1st Lord Leconfield, whose daughter-in-law compiled an album of photos of about thirty of the servants in the household. The album bears the title 'All the dear servants at Petworth when I came there', and they pose, sometimes rather self-consciously, in their best clothes. In the 1880s and 90s a local photographer, Walter Kevis, also took group pictures of the different household departments wearing their working clothes. Perhaps one of the most interesting is that of the gardening staff (268).

An earlier photograph, c.1860, shows two men and a boy surveying a fallen tree in the park at Petworth. One man wears a suit and a top hat, the other a smock and a bowler hat. The countryman's smock, generally thought of as an ancient garment, in fact has a fairly short history. It dates from the mid-eighteenth century, and evolved from a loose



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269 Originally the smock was a protective garment worn only when working, but the availability of cheap, washable cotton brought it into the general everyday wear of the workers, with the most elaborate embroidered version reserved for church-going on Sundays. It proved, however, a relatively short-lived fashion, and when this photograph of cleavers at Uppark estate in Sussex was taken in the nineteenth century, smocks were worn by older, more conservative countrymen. The darker smock worn by the man on the right would have been of glazed linen, its protective cape-like collar designed to deflect the

protective overgarment, generally made of cotton or linen, worn by men working with horses or labouring on the land (269). As the century progressed, the embroidered area on the smock became larger, the patterns more complex. Smocks seem to have been confined to the south of England and the Midlands, with distinctive regional variations in shape. They were available in different colours and quality of linen, determined by the type of work the wearer was involved in – the coarser and simpler garments being used for heavy work, the finest linen smock reserved for Sunday best.

An average smock required about 8 yards of twilled cotton cloth or linen. Its shape was identical to that of a shirt, so it was easy to cut out and sew together. But it was cut very full so that the volume of material could offer total protection to the wearer. To control this fullness, the fabric was gathered up into pleats, which were then embroidered with white or buff thread. The most finely worked smocks were the ones least worn, and most likely therefore to survive.

Smocks were also produced commercially in towns centred around factories that produced the cloth. At Newark-on-Trent in Nottinghamshire ten smock-makers were listed from 1819 to 1872. The linen was woven in Newark, dyed locally, and the smocks made and sold in the town. Designs for the embroidery, stamped on sheet metal pattern printers, are still in existence.

Smocks declined when inexpensive, mass-produced fashionable clothes became generally available. They were seen as old-fashioned garments, worn only by the elderly, though traditionalists like Gertrude Jekyll and the novelist Thomas Hardy deplored the fact that young countrymen had forsaken their durable smocks and corduroy breeches for cheap and shoddy versions of the middle-class suit. Hardy observed that the great change took place between the 1850s and 80s, by which time it was no longer possible to distinguish between urban men and rural men merely by the colour of their clothing.

157



ightful sketch by Claire Avery, May 1914, transforms what was tional dress of the working nto a fashionable garment that is ; practical. The next year, the the cover of *Vogue*.

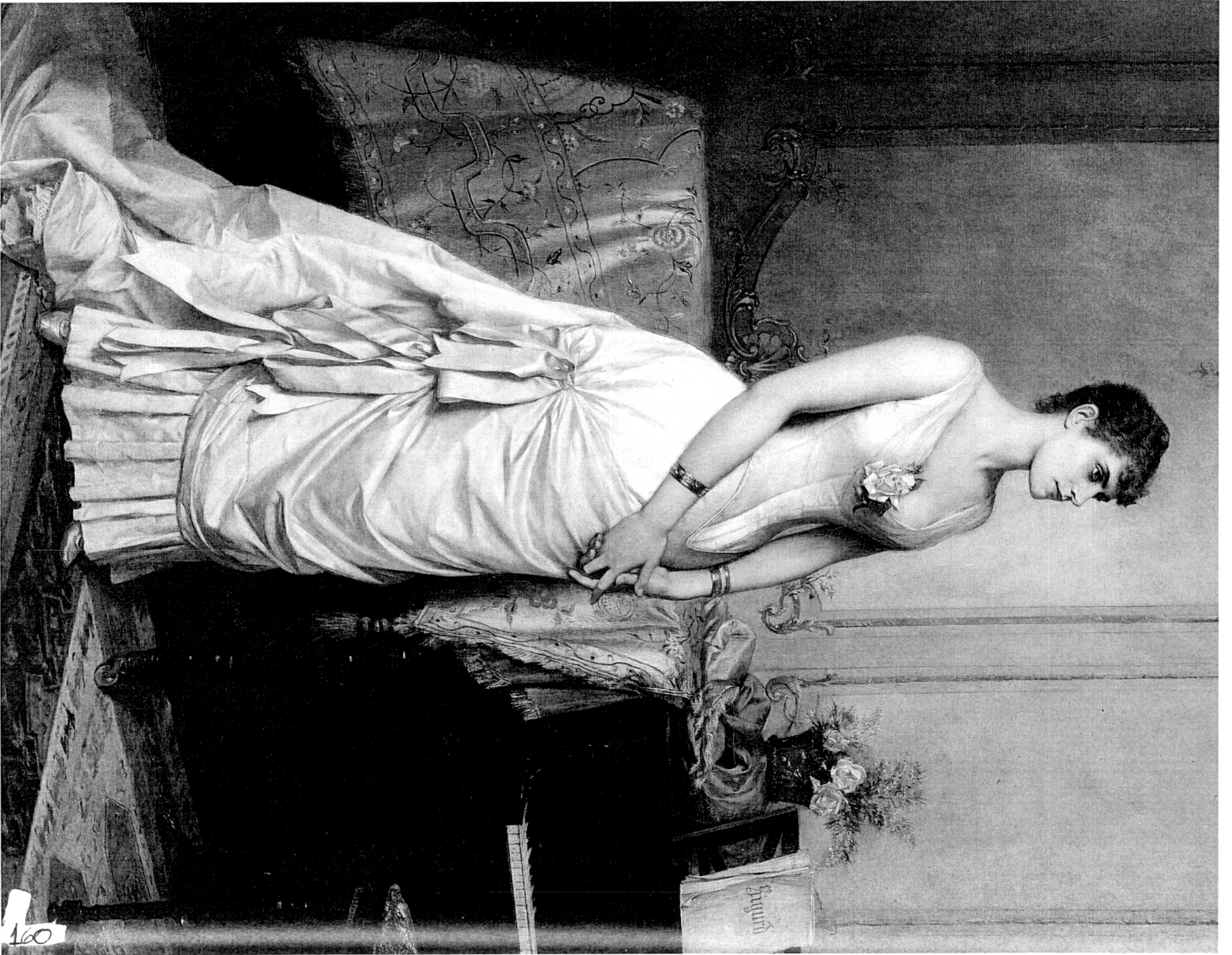
Countrymen, who formerly wore 'whitey-brown flecked with white' were now 'as dark as a London crowd. . . Formerly they came in frock coats and gaiters, the shepherds with their crooks, the carters with a zone [girdle] of whipcord round their hats, thatchers with a straw tucked into the brim and so on. Now . . . there is no mark of speciality in the groups, who might be tailors or undertakers for what they exhibit externally.'²⁴

But smocking now had acquired fashionable status, employed on tea-gowns produced by Liberty's in the late 1880s. An article written by Mrs Oscar Wilde on the 'fashionable revival of this difficult craft' for *The Woman's World* in 1890 explained that 'the artistic modistes had to send their delicate "Liberty" silks down to humble cottages in this county [Sussex] and in Dorsetshire where a few conservative rustics still adhere to the old smock frock.'²⁵ Smocking was also used extensively in children's clothing, and a beautiful silk smock, c.1910, made for a child by a Liberty's outworker can be seen in the Kay-Shuttleworth collection at Gawthorpe Hall.

The final apotheosis of the smock from working-man's uniform to female fashion garment was encouraged by the actress Ellen Terry, who had always favoured loose-fitting smocked dresses and had the smocks made locally to her home in Kent, Smallhythe Place, in a variety of vivid colours. She wore them with a blouse and skirt and flat sandals. Her daughter Edie, a 'highly imaginative stage costumier and a notable Suffragette',²⁶ also adopted this combination for everyday wear and daringly wore the smock with baggy trousers. When an American friend, Claire Avery, an artist who worked for *Vogue*, visited Ellen and Edie at Smallhythe, she was very impressed by their clothes. In May 1914 an anonymous article appeared in *Vogue* about the smock being an eminently suitable garment for gardening. It had been discovered in England by some unnamed artists who 'brought the smock habit back to America to their garden loving friends, who live in them during the Long Island summer, and bring them into town in winter'.²⁷ Claire's accompanying sketch (270) confirmed the smock as an enduring fashion garment.

A cartoon published in *Punch* in 1912 depicts an old man in a smock talking to a lady in a carriage, who is looking at the receding figure of a fashionably-dressed girl in an identical hat. Her Ladyship asks, 'Isn't that my gardener's daughter, Giles?' He replies, 'Yes, yer ladyship; Quite a mistake, touching my 'at to 'er. Why she's as poor as I be.'²⁸

Mistaken identity between master and servant, mistress and maid, has been a theme of this chapter, but this was now a general trend rather than an embarrassing incident. On the eve of the First World War, with increased opportunities for employment outside service and profound changes in the social climate, it was becoming difficult to determine a person's station in life by their clothes.



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THE TRIUMPH OF THE CORSET

Nineteenth-century gentlemen bestowed unprecedented admiration on the hourglass silhouette.

In the nineteenth century, an era of great primness, the prudish bourgeoisie wore high-necked dresses for daywear. Yet the décolletage still flourished in the context of the evening gown, which was ironically described as “dressy.” One of the basic principles in deciding decency was the appropriateness of a particular attire to its place and circumstance. Ladies who appeared at the opera in gowns that were insufficiently low at the neckline were sometimes asked to leave their loges. Empress Eugénie in Paris and William II in Berlin could be punctilious on this score.

During the Napoleonic era (1804–15) and the Restoration (1815–30), the corset reigned despotically. The fashion was for wide-set breasts, and this acrobatic feat was accomplished with the help of a complex system of boning, invented by the corset-maker Leroy. These corsets were known as “divorces.” After the Restoration, gowns were cut with even lower décolletages. The waistline, which had ridden up to just beneath the breasts, dropped back to its normal height. This once more provoked a liking for slender silhouettes and, inevitably, brought on ever crueler corsets. Comfort again took a back seat to appearances.

At this time, corsets were still very expensive, costing from twenty to forty francs (about 140 dollars in today’s currency). Women who made their own at

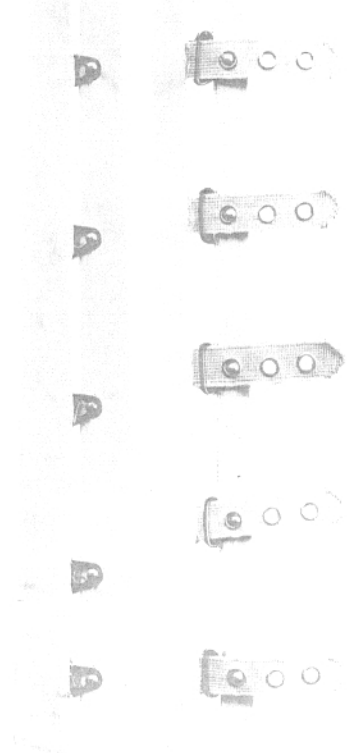


The “Spécialité” Corset

ette, strangled in a rose-colored corset. Above, a British advertisement for the “Spécialité Corset.”

Opposite, *The Singer Rose Caron*, by Auguste Toulmouche, 1828–1890 (Musée Carnavalet, Paris).

Bedtime, right, a lithograph by Devéria, who was famous for his scenes of everyday life. Below and opposite, far right, various fastening systems for corsets (Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris). Opposite above, a box for the "Mexican" corset (Musée de la Bonneterie, Troyes); opposite below, a corset designed to be laced by the wearer, from the *Moniteur de la mode, journal du grand monde*. Overleaf, *Portrait of Several Women*, Joseph Tominc (National Gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia).

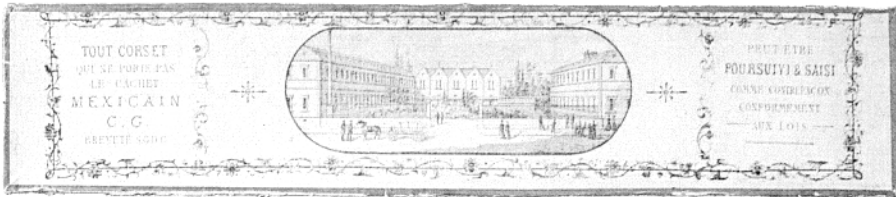


home in order to economize were advised in how-to manuals to use extremely strong and lasting cloth: bombazine, a twilled or corded dress material; nankeen from the Indies; or unbleached broadcloth.

Books that offered practical or health advice often contained elaborate theories from specialists. The following passage gives an example: "Steel busks are to be avoided, as they cause electricity to gather at the bust and may occasion an internal irritation of the chest or stomach. To avoid this inconvenience,

they are to be covered with gummed taffeta." As whalebone busks tended to bow outward over time, an ingenious solution was proposed: "When you notice the stays beginning to give, wear your corset inside out for several days."

While women worried over the noxious electricity produced by their readily deformed busks, King Charles X repined: "It was not uncommon in the old days to discover a Diana, a Venus, or a Niobe in France; nowadays one meets only wasps."

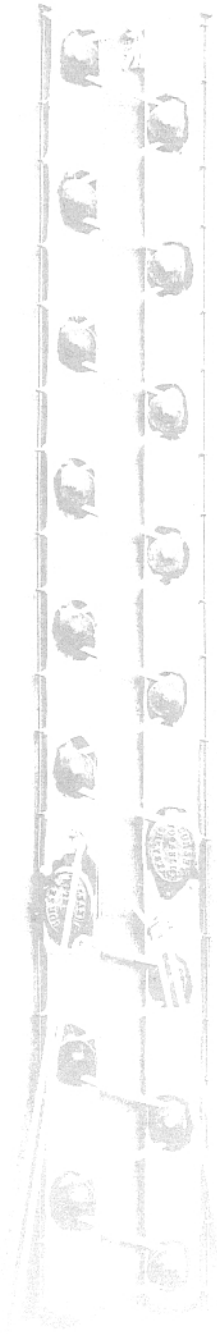
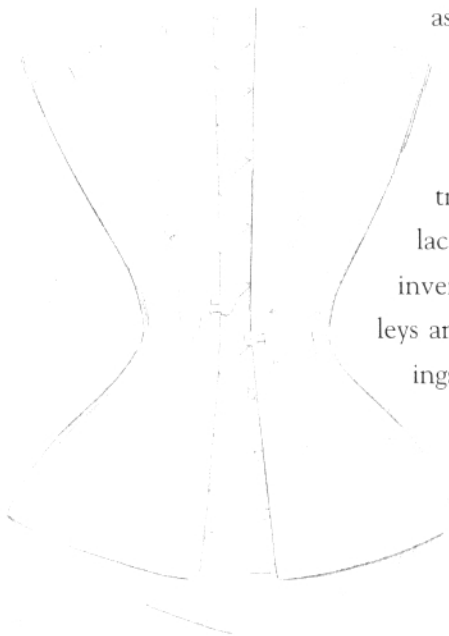


The romantic woman of 1830, with her full sleeves and great bell-shaped skirts—her garments, in short, a mass of swollen volumes—needed to define her waist all the more explicitly. She was transformed into a great silky insect with outspread wings.

At the Exposition Universelle of 1823, the first mechanical corset was exhibited. The corset was equipped with small pulleys, not

as a specialty item for sadomasochists, but as a clever design that allowed women to lace and unlace their corsets unassisted. When Josselin, originally a merchant in braids and trimmings, observed his wife cutting her corset lace because no one was on hand to help her, he invented the Instant Release system. A line of pulleys and miniature gadgets, as precise as the workings of a clock, ran up and down the corset's back, allowing a woman to unfasten it all by herself.

Toward 1828, a discovery was made that greatly improved the strength and durability of garments, namely the inven-







Leg-of-mutton sleeves, wasp waist, and bell-shaped skirt—the new silhouette brought the corset back in triumph. These sleeves eventually reached gigantic proportions, as did the collars which opened out and spanned the shoulders. Below, at their largest, toward 1835, the sleeves were sometimes stuffed with feathers or supported by a wire cage (Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris).

tion of metal eyelets for the laces. These were much stronger than embroidered eyelets, yet hand-embroidery continued to be placed over the metal insert. Josselin, seconded by Nolet, invented the two-part busk with metal fasteners, considerably simplifying the task of hooking up one's corset. Systems for closing the garments were added on and superimposed, sometimes making corsets look like orthopedic undergarments. While there existed only two patents for corsets in 1828, sixty-four would be registered between 1828 and 1848.

In 1832, a Swiss tailor named Jean Werly established in Bar-le-Duc the first factory to weave seamless corsets. The garments emerged from the loom boned, busked, fanned out, and ready to sell. This first advance in industrialized corset-making would make it possible to put corsets on the market that were distinctly less expensive.

The year 1840 was another important date in the history of the corset. A system of lacing known as "lazy lacing" was developed. A set of elastic laces allowed a woman to dress and undress without the help of a servant, a husband, or a lover. This was a great convenience for adulterous women, as a famous caricature from this era demonstrates: a husband is surprised on helping his wife undress in the evening to find the knots on her corset different from the ones he remembers tying in the morning.

The woman of the 1840s, in her corset and crinolines, appeared spectacularly useless. The less natural her appearance, the more seductive she became.



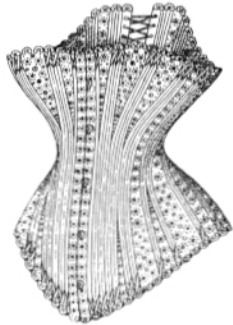
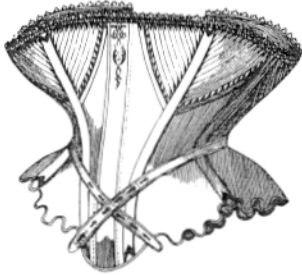


Her body was hidden under a great quantity of fabric trimmed with ribbons and frills. Laced, fastened, and buttoned into the complexities of her dress, she simultaneously offered and withheld herself. And behind the mask of the woman's parade outfit was her body, as soft and white as could be desired.

In the mid-nineteenth century, women began to take over from tailors the specialized work of making corsets. The garments were made in lots ahead of time—this was the beginning of ready-to-wear.



Many caricaturists used the corset as a prop in their mockery of cuckolds. *Suspicion*, left, provides an illustration of this inexhaustible theme. Again, it is the corset that betrays the unfaithful wife: "That's funny, this morning I made an overhand knot and tonight it's a bow!" Above, box for a "Mexican" corset (Musée de la Bonneterie, Troyes).



During this period the general passion for crinolines provoked unexpected tragedies. The larger the bell of the skirt, the more tightly the waist was pinched in. A Paris paper reported the following story in 1859: "A young woman, whose thin waist was admired by all her rivals, died two days after the ball. What had happened? Her family decided to find out the cause of her sudden death at such a young age and had an autopsy performed. The findings were rather surprising: the liver had been pierced by three of the girl's ribs! This shows how one may die at the age of twenty-three, not of typhus or in childbirth but because of a corset."

One particularly fervent opponent of both the crinoline and the corset was Friedrich Theodor Vischer, a professor of aesthetics: "The crinoline is impertinent by virtue of its size and its monstrous challenge to men. When a man draws near, the crinoline seems to say: 'Kindly step down from this sidewalk—or will you have the audacity to brush me in passing, to press up against me?'"

Whereas the fashionable female of the revolutionary years was long and willowy, the Second Empire woman was buxom. The corsets of those years were so long that they bruised the thighs. The fashion was for boat-necked décolletages that left the shoulders naked and the breasts low, "majestic protuberances, pale and soft, no longer made to arch upward but to be worn low, as though two pears gathered in a pair of goblets" (Philippe Perrot, *Les Dessus et les Dessous de la bourgeoisie*).

AUX
CORSETS MERVEILLEUX

Maison BAEHR & Co.
Inventeurs du CORSET L'EXPANSIBLE

MAISON DE CONFIANCE FONDÉE EN 1882
66, Chaussée-d'Antin, Paris

La plus grande spécialité de Corsets de Paris

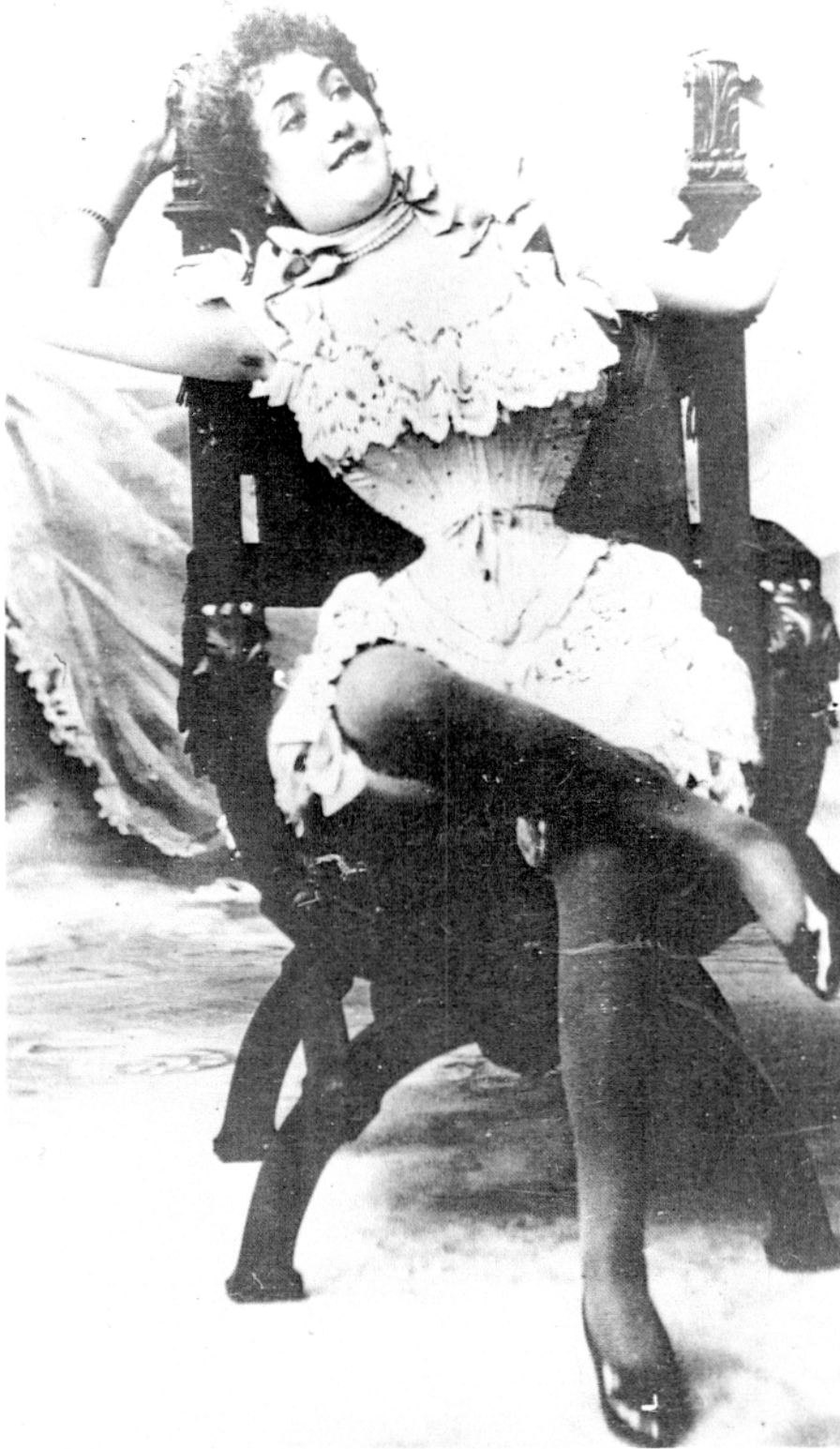
EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE 1900
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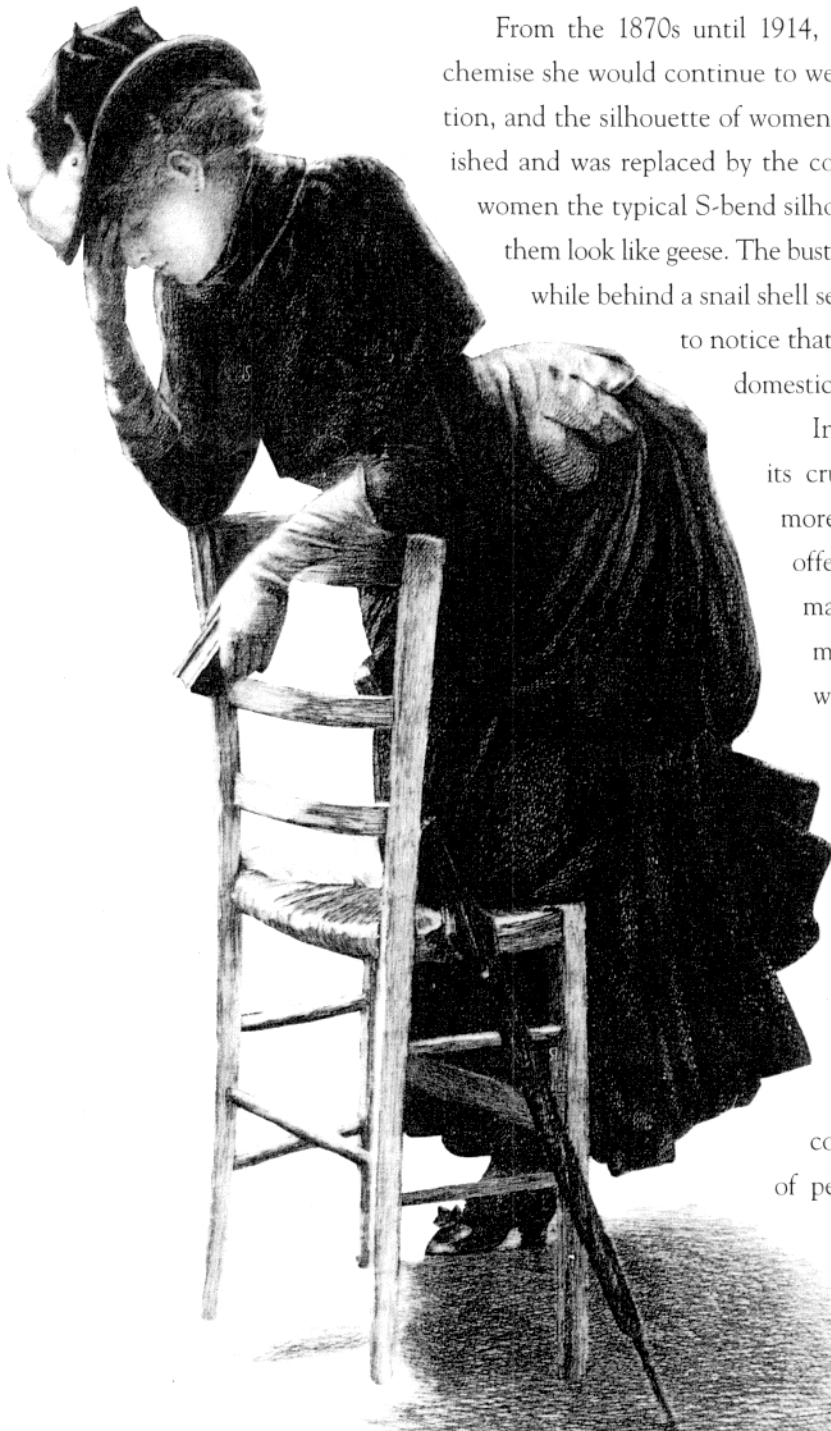


"My darling's slender waist can be encircled, I believe, by the fingers of my two hands" could well have been said of the actress Polaire, left, in 1890. But the photographs of that period were often retouched and the reality may have been less extreme. Opposite, from top: the Léoty corset, 1867; a corset from 1872 "priced at Fr 6.90 at the *Grand marché parisien*"; "a seamless corset from Barle-Duc, entirely embroidered and hemmed by hand"; and "a seamless corset with 54 stays, total weight 300 grams [10 oz.]" (from Léoty's *Le Corset à travers les ages*, 1893). Overleaf, *Empress Eugénie and Her Ladies of Honor*, 1855, Franz Xaver Winterhalter (Château de Compiègne). The Prussian field marshal von Moltke describes the empress as she appears in the painting: "Beautiful, elegant, with a superb throat and arms, slender in silhouette and wearing an exquisite, luxurious dress."

L 30







From the 1870s until 1914, women would remain in fetters. Over her chemise she would continue to wear a strangling corset. Fashion lost its direction, and the silhouette of women seems to have wavered. The crinoline vanished and was replaced by the combination of corsetry and bustle that gave women the typical S-bend silhouette of the turn of the century—and made them look like geese. The bust was thrust forward, overhanging the stomach, while behind a snail shell seemed to be dragged. Caricaturists were quick to notice that the new shapes gave ladies a resemblance to domestic fowl.

In the nineteenth century, corsetry reached its cruel and lunatic extremes. Models became more numerous and more specialized. Catalogues offered a wide selection: nuptial corsets, corsets made of white satin for the ball, lightly boned morning corsets, stayless corsets for night wear, nursing corsets with drawbridge gussets, traveling corsets with tabs that could be let out at night for sleeping, riding corsets with elastic at the hips; corsets for singing, for dancing, for bathing at the seaside (unboned), for riding the velocipede (made of jersey); cool and supple doeskin corsets for summer wear, pearl gray or chamois-colored and trimmed with Nile or periwinkle satin; and net corsets of violet silk cord with a small sachet of perfume hanging in the center. The many fabrics and laces made it possible to invent an infinite number of different models. A corset-maker might mix Chantilly or Valenciennes



Reshuffling women's hemispheres: the wide corolla of the crinoline gave way to styles that emphasized the posterior, opposite page, with the bustle raised to counterbalance it. The bustle made it easier for a woman to kneel in church, as this woman is doing, than to sit. At first, the projecting effect was achieved by a horse-hair cushion, and later by a metal frame. A woman could sit only on the tip of her bottom at the very edge of the chair. Engraving, 1833, after Jean Béraud (Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris). Left, an illustration by Georges Roux (Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris). Sports and other outdoor activities did manage to extend the range of a woman's movements and simplify her clothes, despite the leg-of-mutton sleeves and hats with big bows.

lace with Pekin ribbon, brocaded silk with lawn (a fine linen) or Irish guipure. The constricting mechanism was now set several notches tighter. And on top of everything else, a woman had to worry, while being strangled at the waist into an hourglass, about a new, internal enemy—the rust that was eating away at her metallic stays! Luckily, the Warner Company in America had invented stays of stainless steel.