



the seventeenth century, legs were considered to be an important attribute for men, but not for women. Until the twentieth century women 'had no legs' as they were hidden under long and heavy skirts. Men instead proudly showed their legs by wearing hose and padded jackets, or *pourpoint*, which emphasised their broad chests and narrow waists (fig. 1.11).⁸

Why was it men rather than women who benefited most from such 'differentiation'? Some historians have indicated the importance of armour. The knight's armour encapsulated manly virtue on the battlefield, distinguishing the man of honour from the man of faith (clerics) and above all from the simple peasant who worked the land. However, it was impossible to wear any form of armour with long clothing or robes. It therefore became necessary to wear padded garments to protect, in particular, the chest. And so the *pourpoint* was invented: a padded jacket that was initially worn under armour but by the 1330s was already being worn as outerwear.⁹

The differentiation of men's and women's wear is also believed to have been the first step towards a general sartorial dynamism for both genders. As the two genders diverged aesthetically, small material details started to change: garment lengths got longer or shorter from one year to the next, and colours came increasingly to distinguish what was fashionable from what was not. However, the extent of change in medieval 'fashion' should not be exaggerated. It was slow and interested only a minority in society. The *pourpoint* was a garment worn only by members of the elite and therefore instances of this 'first wave of fashion' can only be ascribed to the restricted space of late medieval European courts. Some historians have traced the appearance of fashion specifically to the fourteenth-century courts of Bourgogne and Provence, where the first seeds of a 'renaissance' in European society manifested themselves.

Such a hypothesis on the birth of fashion has been the subject of intense debate, with historians disagreeing as to whether gendered changes in courtly environments can fully explain fashion and whether the transition was sudden or gradual. An illuminated manuscript, dating from the 1460s, shows the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg (r. 1433–7) arriving in Siena (fig. 1.12). Whilst it illustrates the gender differentiation between noblewomen with long trains and courtiers wearing *pourpoints*, it also shows how royal imagery was still represented by traditional long robes. Certainly, fashion acquired in this period two key attributes that came to define it over the centuries. First, fashion was not 'for everyone'. Historian Timothy Brook underlines how fashion is based on 'the principle of constant disappointment and failure' according to which 'fashion discriminates between the elite and the mediocre and most people must fail to make the grade'.¹⁰ Fashion would not be so if everyone could be fashionable. It is a process that must be exclusive: whilst it claims to embrace the majority, only a minority can achieve it. Second, and as



- 1.9 Knitted 'sugar-loaf' hat, c.1600–50
Natural greyish-brown coarse wool
National Museum of Denmark

This 'sugar-loaf' hat, excavated from one of the old city moats of Copenhagen, is a rare example of the type of head covering worn by commoners in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

- 1.10 Youth's brown leather jerkin, c.1550–1600
Museum of London

Practical leather garments, such as this late Tudor jerkin, could be beautifully decorated by slashing or pinking the leather to create a zig-zag pattern.

- 1.11 'Courtiers in a Rose Garden', c.1440–50 (detail)
South Netherlands, one of a series of tapestries
Wool warp with wool, silk and metallic weft yarns;
314.3 x 247.7 cm
The Metropolitan Museum, New York

This sumptuous late medieval tapestry shows the gender differentiation between men's and women's clothing. Whilst women continued to wear long dresses, men wore snug-fitting *pourpoints*, hip-length quilted doublets with stockings beneath, which emphasised the chest – an image of strength and masculinity.

a consequence, the pursuit of fashion is an expensive activity. Much more than in the present, medieval fashion implied substantial financial outlays. Werner Sombart, in his *Luxus und Kapitalismus*, published more than a century ago, conceived of medieval fashion as a form of luxury. For him luxury was an exercise not just in spending, but also in appearance, a fight against inevitable death by means of money and time – a fitting analysis of today's obsession with fame, wealth and cosmetic surgery. Medieval and early modern commentators were perplexed by fashion and often contrasted the transient pleasure found in luxury consumption with the longer-term decadence of the body and ultimate death. In *Young Man Meets Death* (fig. 1.13), a fashionable youth is confronted by Death's naked and slowly decaying body.¹¹ It is a comment on the fact that fashion became a way to fight against time, to elude the finite span imposed by nature.

According to Sombart, it was during the Middle Ages that the association between fashion, beauty and the healthy appeal of youth was first acknowledged. Fashion's intimate relationship with luxury made it something that only the few could afford. Yet dress historians



5.23 'Tout ce qu'il faut pour voyager en avion' ('All that is needed for travelling by air'), 1929
From the magazine *La Belle Jardinière*, published by the eponymous Parisian department store (active 1820s–1970s)
Illustration by G. Cazenove;
27.5 x 22.5 cm
Courtesy of Diktats

In the 1920s and 1930s air travel was an exhilarating experience for those who could afford it. The accommodation may have looked luxurious but it was still a somewhat tiring way to travel. Hence the need for clothes, for both men and women, that were comfortable and versatile: simple suits, a sturdy overcoat, leather gloves and low profile shoes. Colours were greys, browns and blues that showed the least amount of dirt and materials that creased were avoided in favour of knitted woollens or sturdy cotton blends.

for the *Transformation of Male Clothing* in collaboration with the Parisian couturier Madeleine Vionnet (1876–1975). In this proclamation he argued that society had 'to eliminate linings, useless pockets and irrational rows of buttons, trouser cuffs, berets, petticoats, half belts, collars, paddings, and other similar antique, ridiculous, and anti-sporting remnants that are nothing other than dirt and sweat collectors'.²⁶ Typical of the spirit of Futurism, his eclectic output ranged from painting and the theatre to interior design and photography. But it was in fashion that he made his mark with the 'TuTa', the precursor of the modern tracksuit. Initially the TuTa was conceived as a new form of dress designed to reform the intellectual elite and their philosophy. Thayaht wanted a garment that maximised the use of cloth (this is why the TuTa is completely straight) with the least amount of sewing. It is an example of sartorial minimalism, with its seven buttons (many less than a shirt, jacket and trousers combined) and a simple canvas belt. The very name TuTa (still used in Italian for a tracksuit) derives from its T-shape and its resonance with the surname of its inventor. Over time it became a new way of dressing informally by millions of people around the world. The tracksuit today is one of the most commonly used garments for work, and with small modifications, also for sport and leisure.

Leisure and Mass Fashion

Only after the end of the First World War did many of the sartorial solutions adopted in the world of sport enter into the realm of everyday wear both in Europe and North America. By the early 1920s menswear had adopted some informal characteristics, mostly in the form of a less tailored silhouette with baggy trousers, knee-length socks and V-neck patterned sweaters. This was the type of clothing worn by Edward, Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VIII before he abdicated to marry the twice-divorced American, Wallis Simpson) (fig. 5.24). In the late 1920s and during the 1930s the informal, but extremely fashionable, look of the Prince of Wales, set off with a Windsor-knotted tie, was imitated by young men across Europe and North America.

Tennis influenced the development of casualwear in the interwar period. In the early 1920s the French tennis player Suzanne Lenglen (1899–1938) scandalised the more traditional public by wearing a short-pleated cotton skirt and an elasticated hair band, both created for her by the Parisian couturier Jean Patou (1880–1936) (fig. 5.25). As the scandal subsided, Lenglen's dress became one of the major influences in many a young woman's



5.24 The Prince of Wales riding his bicycle, 1911
Illustration from *George V and Edward VIII, A Royal Souvenir*, by F. G. H. Salusbury
(*Daily Express Publications*, 1936)
Author's collection

From his teenage years onwards, the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VIII) became an icon of English fashion, adopting informal dress for all non-official occasions.



6.16 French models in dresses and coats by Paul Poiret, 1910
 Photograph by Henri Manuel (1889–1947)
 Courtesy of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstbibliothek. Lipperheidesche Kostümbibliothek, Berlin

Poiret toured across Europe and the United States with models who wore his creations, which attracted enormous crowds. In 1921 the *Washington Herald* remarked of Poiret's models: 'The Paris mannequin is a subject apart, a unique being. You watch her and forget that you come to choose a frock ...'

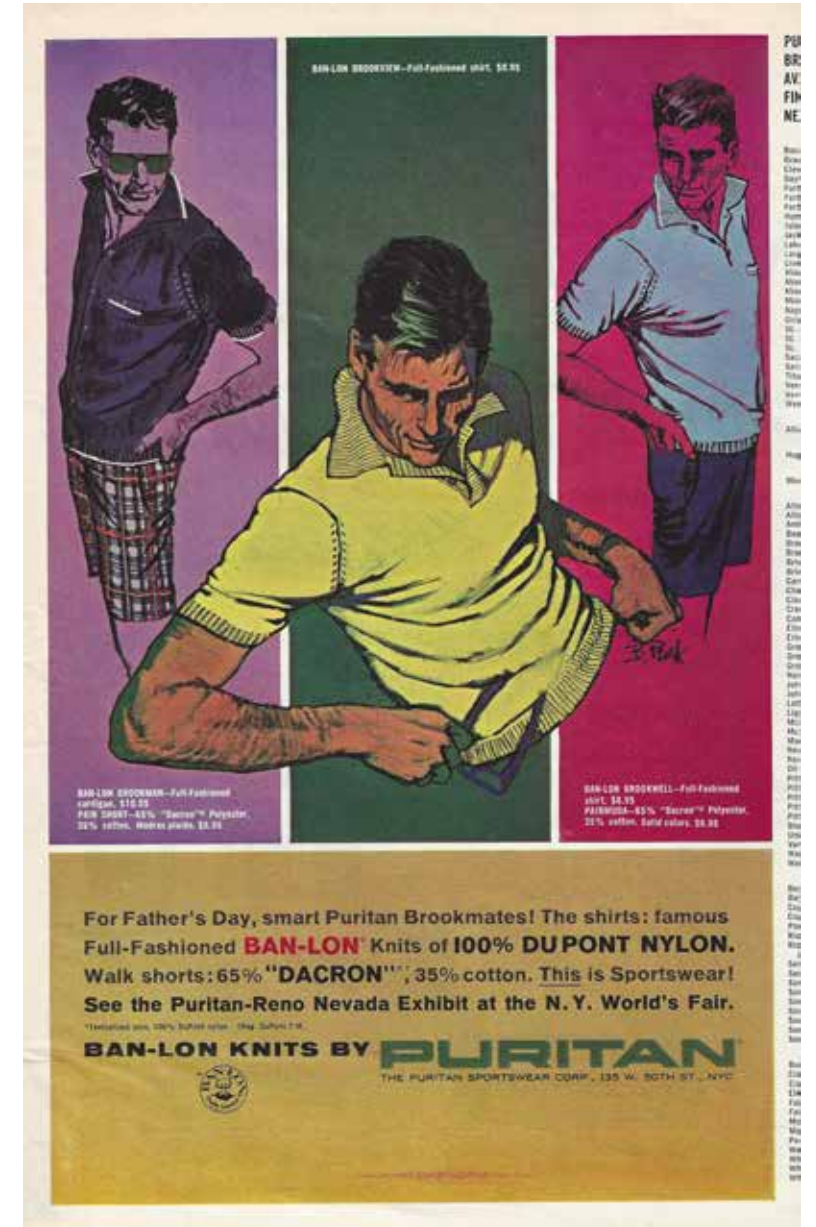


7.17 Film still from *The Giant*, starring James Dean, 1956

James Dean wears jeans and a shirt open to the waist in a scene from the 1956 film *The Giant*, director George Stevens's epic Western.

7.18 Advertisement for 'Puritan', men's casual clothing brand, 1965
Author's collection

The United States marketed informal wear, such as these Puritan polo shirts, often produced with synthetic fibres, for the wider masses.



ing, were added; in 1886 the first label appeared, 'Levi's' with two horses (initially this was made of leather but in 1955 it was replaced by a cardboard version as it was more easily washable). The dungarees version was invented by rival company Wrangler in 1905, and the application of the zipper was added by the Lee brand in 1926.¹⁴

It was only in the 1930s that jeans became one of the most used garments by young Americans. Jeans were a cheap alternative to wool or flannel trousers, especially in the years following the economic crash of 1929. During the Second World War, jeans were worn by US soldiers when they were not in uniform, thus consol-

idating the idea that they were an all-American product. The same can be said of the T-shirt, invented as underwear but used by the US Army as outerwear. In the case of both jeans and the T-shirt, their use by US forces has allowed them to acquire masculine connotations that have in turn made them acceptable to civilians, not just in the United States but worldwide (fig. 7.16).

From the 1950s, jeans, together with Coca-Cola, Hollywood films, rock music and hair wax, have conquered young customers. This new vision of youth was presented in films such as *The Wild One* (1953) with Marlon Brando, and *East of Eden* (1954) and *Rebel with-*

7.28 New Romantics,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
1980s
Photograph by Homer
Sykes (b. 1949)

The New Romantic style of
the early 1980s was a youth
culture strongly influenced by
Punk, but more commercial
in form.

