

Unit 1

Describe the characteristic features of the twentieth century's fashion.

In this essay I will begin to explain fashion history in the twentieth century and talking about the characteristics within each decade. I will start by discussing the 1900's and what were the main features within their fashion and how it changed and progressed into being more modern.

In the 1900's Edwardian fashion was becoming more modern and Victorian styles and views were being torn apart. However, even though the views were being loosened the corsets certainly were not. Corsets were one of the most memorable and biggest characteristics of the Edwardian fashion. This feminine look was created by a fitted whalebone structure covered in satin or silk for a more upper class look. The structure of the corsets was very tailored to a woman's shape and pulled in as tight as possible to make their waist the tiniest it could be, by the waist being synched this means that the women's breasts were overhanging the waist giving them an eye-catching cleavage. The shape of the corset was everything, in the 1900's the corset shape changed due to the desirable 'S shaped' silhouette. Females believed that by changing the shape of the corset it was better for their health and posture, they believed that by pushing their pelvis back and the bosom forward helped take the direct pressure off the abdomen, which of course was completely the opposite. The skirts were fitted very close to the hips and were full length. These outfits were very highly adorned with lace, frills and small roses. They stuck to a very basic palette consisting of dusk pinks, pale blues and mauves. However, they were more daring when it would come to evening wear and would usually wear black.

The second biggest characteristic's in the female and Edwardian fashion was the hats. These very were a must and completed the silhouette of a woman. The hats at the start of the 1900's was positioned on top of the women's piled hair and would be decorated with feathers and lots of lace. The hats were also designed to sit partially covering one side of the ladies' face. In the early 1900's hats without the brim were the most fashionable, these were known as 'toques'. However, as the years progressed to the 1910's-1911's hats were at their largest before world war one, where women would have to wear as large as eighteen-inch hairpin to secure their hats to their heads. Due to hair being less extravagant the hats seem to lay closer to the head.

Moving through the 1900's where all the styles for woman were based around the 'S shaped' silhouette this changed towards the end of the decade and into the 1910's. The silhouette moved from the 'S shape' to the 'empire line'. This was a much more natural shape where woman looked straighter and all clothing was less fitted and forced. The waist was loosened, and a straight line was adopted. Everything changed within this decade due to the solemn atmosphere of world war one. This means all frills and extravagant features of women's clothing were quickly taken and replaced for the commonly known hobble skirt. The hobble skirt was floor length and a plain straight style. As women's fashion became more modern towards the later years of this decade new styles were starting to come into trend. A main characteristic of these years was 'fuller skirts' these skirts were not only cut above the ankle but also they were more casual. Also, another thing which a drastic change in this decade was that hats were almost the complete opposite to the 1900's. The hats almost had no decorative style to them and were very plain and small, if hats were too over the top and dramatic this was disrespectful due to the depressive mood as of the war.

In the evening unlike in the 1900's women were growing tired of the bulky evening dresses which caused severe discomfort by wearing restricted corsets. However, this didn't stop new styles progressing and

creating other innovative ideas. The French were the first to decide to banish the trains on their dresses and start to embrace the new empire line. The hobble skirt, as previously mentioned, started to transform into a tubular form of a dress this was an odd affair and restricted women's movement around their knees. The hobble skirt was classed as so dangerous that it was even barred from some work places, as time went on they came up with more practicalities to these skirts putting slits on them and hidden pleats. This again was created by a French couturier Paul Poiret although it has known to be dated back to the early 1880's. As clothing changed style and women's clothes were less demanding to be feminine, they became more boyish and this was the start of the more masculine look of 1920's.

Moving through this decade we look at the start of the 1920's fashion, a very memorable decade for fashion where women started to lose classic traits of femininity and started to explore masculine styles. This was very exciting for women and a lot more comfortable too; classic designers began to rise and one of the most memorable which contributed to this decade was Coco Chanel. Chanel was one of the first to create the easy elegance looks with loose fitting smart frocks, cardigan dresses and the memorable wide and roomy pockets. Coco was also the woman which brought the jersey material to light, this was liberating for women who were used to being pinned in to tight corsets now to be freed in jersey materials which draped beautifully and effortlessly. The simplistic styles seemed to travel through the countries and everyone seemed to embrace this new and attractive way of life. Jean Patou also contributed to this fashion forward, modern take over and she embraced this look and started the rising of the length in skirts and frocks, it was known to rise even to the daring mid-calf length. Alongside the rising length of skirts, the waistline was dramatically dropped to the hip creating a simple luxurious look. Two pieces started to become the new trend, which consisted of a blouse or jumper combination or a matching dress and jacket. These would usually have a blouse which was completely unfitted and lay on the hip level, it could be adorned with a wide sash or loosely fitted belt. The matching dresses and jackets were a common look and are always reappearing even now within fashion. When wearing these ensembles, it would usually consist of one item of the outfit featuring a vertical pattern alongside a plain jersey material. To help give these dresses more of a rebellious streak the bateau neckline was usually matched with the dress or blouse, these were simply slashed from one shoulder to the other, or if this was not what the women wished to wear V-necks and scoop necklines were still very in fashion through this decade. I believe this decade was the beginning of females exploring their bodies and different styles they could wear to compliment it, it was very interesting and a lot of style which were bought out within this decade are still elements within our clothes now.

Switching to the females evening wear in this decade it was very reckless, women even taped down their breasts to stop unwanted curves creating the flat board look. This was predominately the age of the flapper. The key characteristics of the flapper look was a low waistline even falling below the hip and towards the later years, vanishing all together, not forgetting the extremely short hem which was forever daring. Flapper dresses were straight and loose creating a masculine take on showing of their feminine bodies. Challenging old Edwardian views with this new style females often had their legs, arms and backs exposed creating a seductive style with a manly edge. Another feature these fabulous dresses had were attractive geometric designs and were often decorated with beads and sequins. Contrasting with Edwardian corset style dresses which had no room for maneuver these new flapper dresses usually had large pockets for comfort and small bags were no longer needed. As the decade progressed on so did much less fabric needed, women were more free and expressive with their bodies.

Now for the 1930's the decade known for the era of Hollywood glamour. This era was for the stylish work woman who wanted to feel sexy yet be in a practical garment, and that is exactly what this decade was about. Outfits grew more provocative and designers started to adapt their previous boxy cut to dresses

which followed the body outline closely. In the 30's the first bias cut dresses were invented, not only this, shoulders were bared in the first halter necks. Although this all sounds very glamorous unfortunately, this was due to falling between the two world wars, so times were hard, and designers had to work with cheaper and less materials. Even though times were tough women remained as striking as ever within their choices of fashion.

Elsa Schiaparelli became very well-known and admired for her designs in this era and I believe she created some of the key characteristics which contributed to this unforgettable time. Her signature to her garments was shockingly bright colors and groundbreaking textile designs. Schiaparelli's specialty was knitted jumpers, which are still a current element in our fashion today as well as her idea of using zips in a decorative use. One of her most daring designs was her full length harlequin wool coat which contained the primary colors with blue and white. Elsa's designs were the opposite to her main competition Coco Chanel who was sporting the jersey two pieces and classic designs. Having these two incredible designs creating at the same time made for the thirties to become a fantastic era for style.

As the thirties was very free with women's style the forties were not and fashion became very strict, it was dictated by social trends due to war and rationing. The materials used in the forties were cheaper this was because of more expensive materials like wool and silk being in demand for the war. This was the decade where manmade materials started being used within all classes of women and most garments were made of rayon due to this being the cheapest to produce. As you can imagine, the war had a negative effect on fashion and women started to slip into dressing in military styles to match the men.

The wartime silhouette came into trend and all elaboration was out. This silhouette was almost like a backwards step to the 1920's where women had their boyish figures back due to the style of clothing. Women looked very simple and pristine and any dramatic outfits could even be a sign of disrespect and colours didn't get more exciting than blue red and grey. Females would be seen wearing military style jackets which were cut short usually 25 inches in length this was because of rationing, they would also be unlined for this reason. Like men these jackets would have padded shoulders however, this was the only luxury. The military jackets would have only three buttons and the maximum and cuffs and pockets were even banned in America, the rule was 'no fabric on fabric'. Women would wear a pair of low platform heels either made from cork or wood to go with this outfit. These strict rules would last until the end of the war and even after that fashion was slow moving. Although it was slow, towards the end of the decade things were changing and women were starting to feel free and bringing fashion back again. Gathered and curved waists were starting to creep in and become a new style. Another characteristic of the late forties was coat frocks with high standing collars.

Evening wear was changing and becoming more extravagant slowly but surely. The only thing which wasn't rationed when it came to evening wear was sequins and everything seemed to be covered in them. They would usually be used instead of jewelry as it was a cheaper option, they could also be embroidered onto dresses where jewelry would fall creating the expensive illusion. However, besides this the fashion was quite plain and dresses usually consisted of one colour and were floor length. This doesn't sound very exciting, but it did look very classic and is still featured in high end fashion magazines now. These dresses would've been made of out rayon too until the late forties where you may have been lucky and got to wear some hard to find silk. Everyone was still in the mind set of being resourceful, so females would usually mix and match with their outfit to save money. Although as times passed women were starting to try new trends and allowing themselves to be free. Dresses began to be more exaggerated and the 'poured in look' became a stylish look usually falling over an Edwardian inspired fitted bodice.

Outfits in this era did not feature many interesting factors and the colour palette was usually plain however, small characteristics peaked through with their chosen textiles. For instance, geometric designs were taken up in the war time as well as plaid and gingham. Although towards the end of this decade patterns started to become more playful using military motifs as their inspiration for example, aero planes would shoot across plain fabric. This was the beginning of the American style, in 1946 the victory suit dominated which was a lot less grim then the British victory suit. This suit was based on pristine tailoring and design detailing the accentuated bust and waist. The American designers Vera Maxwell and Claire McCardell started to create popular ready to wear separates, these garments were unadorned and uncluttered styles. An example of these classic garments are the drawstring waist dresses based on comfort and effortless style, following the natural lines of the feminine body. This style moved through the decade and brought a feeling of hope and euphoria to the beginning of the 1950's.

With the victory of world war two looming over everybody fashion was in full swing. Make Britain great again was the slogan people were living by now and women had a new sense of liberation and equality this was due to hundreds of women being freed from domestic housework and sent out to work as land girls. Fashion now intending to now take a step backwards and show femininity with the padded bosom and nipped in waist was something most women were simply not prepared for.

One of the most memorable designers of the 1950's was of course, Christian Dior. Dior created luxurious feminine clothes and he beamed sheer extravagance this set the atmosphere of a new-found confidence. However, not everyone agreed with Dior's new point in his creations the extravagance was frowned upon, some people believed that Dior's creations (which could need up to 18 meters per garment) was a luxury that should've been banished alongside the war. Dior's creations have the characteristics of a severely small waist and an exaggerated bust usually created with a V-neck or off the shoulder style, this was creating a very feminine silhouette with hints of the 1910's vintage fashion.

Fashion was self-conscious in the fifties and women remained in rigid clothing, although the styles were more feminine they were extremely tight fitting and with the strict nylon corset pushing the breasts upwards, there was an air of sophistication still being upheld from the post-war atmosphere. Accessories were a bold characteristic in this era and the key to making a woman look and feel fabulous. Smart women were seen in cautious hats matching shoes and handbag, this was considered 'well-dressed'. However, evening wear was much more impressive, it was essentially show stopping. Heels became higher, earrings became longer, and the hair was never this glamorous. New silhouette's starting to seep through in Dior's and other fashion designers looks, being more adventurous came the A-line silhouette, the H-line silhouette and the princess line silhouette. The A and H silhouettes were a quick success. The A line dress was a simple shape which started at the shoulders and fell outwards to mid-calf length, this was made from stiff fabric to create the shape.

As fashion was becoming very innovative and forward thinking, skirts were becoming full and creative, applique and embroidering were starting again alongside daring colours. Some had the opinion that Dior's corset designs were backwards thinking, and they needed to change however, Cristobal Balenciaga had new ideas which were about to take the fashion world by storm. Balenciaga created looks for efficient women, his most famous creation was the perfect semi-fitted suit which was greatly appreciated through the female population. These suits consisted of a slimline pencil skirt cut below the knee alongside a long straight jacket, now this may sound very strict 1940's although compared to the military look this was a whole new take on a woman's suit. These jackets had new rounded shoulders and cropped sleeves, underneath this jacket would lie a new favourite, a collarless blouse.

The fifties were just the beginning of elevating fashion and the swinging sixties came with a bang. Fashion was now motivated by London with Yves Saint Laurent releasing his final collection, the main characteristic of this collection was the leather jackets and knitted caps which shocked their audience into realizing 'formal' fashion was out and 'casual' fashion was the new trend. This was an amazing era where young people were finding their passion for fashion and styles were becoming fresh and savvy. Biba was a known designer for taking the spotlight in the sixties creating head to toe looks including a makeup range. These clothes were cheap and exciting and designed for the youthful fashionable audience. They were created using vibrant colored items and the garments were unique often with droopy collars, gathered in sleeves, longline waistcoats and flared skirts. Clothes were ideally made for freedom and expression, so they were commonly made from soft wool jersey or crepe and designed with all over small prints. These outfits would be accessorized with faux fur coloured tippets.

With this, designers started to take risks and become more outrageous, this led to the space designs. Space designs were created out of a new palette of colours, silver was the predominant shade, this was eye catching and women were excited with this new elevation of fashion. These designs were futuristic and was their take on what the 21st century fashion would be like. Heels were banished, and flat leather shoes beamed with a youthful essence, clean cut lines were embraced falling around minimal and straight shapes. Simplicity was the key, boxy shapes reappeared with no frills in sight. Trousers were straight and were cut through the middle to show off the shimmering flat boots. Coats were boxy, and detailing was out the window, double breasting was nowhere in sight and pocket tabs were the only detail which peaked through.

Paco Rabanne started to embrace this new wacky style and created his own individual take on these new designs. Rabanne took his designs to a whole new level and started to be daring by using resistant materials for his clothing. Plastic discs, pieces of scrap metal and chainmail were all used to create half sculpture and half fashion styles, if this isn't a fantastic take on fashion I don't know what is. His unusual approach to fashion carried through in his shows, models were seen in his slightly unwearable dresses dancing down catwalks barefoot. As the quirky fashion propelled through this era the mini skirt was produced and through the years it got shorter and shorter ending as no more than a hipster belt which just covered the bottom. Overall, the characteristics of the sixties was the weirder the better.

As the sixties faded away the seventies rolled in, they carried a natural and 'rootsy' feel with them. The sixties cheap hippy vibes were reworked into a folksier looks and materials like knitting, weaving and dying came extremely fashionable. 'Back to Nature' was the slogan of this era and no one wanted to look like their parents, with youth having a renewed interest in fantasy, magic and spirit new looks started to spiral into fashion. It all originated from The Beatles taking a trip to India and bringing the ethnic looks back with them, people felt closer to mother nature by wearing naturally dyed heavy cottons from India. Eastern inspired clothes became the rage and small boutiques saw a gap in the market, creating their own prints in cottons and silks, these prints would be clashing and flamboyant. Soon the kaftan came into the spotlight creating a comfy, free look with a touch of bohemian fashion. Collections which were successful in this era were ones with natural themes and which were wild and colourful.

Whereas in the sixties detailing and accessories were a big no, in the seventies a lot of thought went into how to detail in a flamboyant but nature friendly way. Knitting was now seen as chic and cool, and people were creating fantastic prints and colours within their knitted garments. A unique piece which was very memorable was created by a Scotsman called Bill Gibb, a long-knitted waistcoat which would hang over a long evening dress, this gave a knitted waistcoat a whole new meaning. Arts and craft looks were accepted for a first and the more different coloured yarns in a garment the more acceptable they were. Fringing

became fabulous and was loved by a variety of ages, this would be up the sides of jacket sleeves of accessorizing the bottom of a colourful camisole. A lot happened in the seventies and a variety of styles were worn moving through the decade Vivienne Westwood's true styles started to arise, and they made quite the impression.

Teaming up with Malcom McLaren, Vivienne Westwood bought out some outrageous garments which were to shock the nation. To give an overall summary of what a classic Westwood style which was worn in the seventies was a pair of skin tight leather jeans, matched with a ripped-up vest which had been carelessly pinned back together to form a loose layered look. Other garments which were a must have was mini kilts, leather jackets which started the punk looks off. Soon flared trousers were a thing of the past and drainpipe trousers and customized Wranglers were everything.

This led on to the eighties, this was a memorable era for many and the fashion which loomed then is constantly re-inventing itself and reappearing in the 21st century. During the beginning of this decade money was extremely tight although with broke times creates crafty fashion students. This was the start of the street fashion and was invented with nightclub fashion in mind. Nightclubs were the rage and looking good for them was extremely important. With this sense of wanting to look fashion forward and aware of how you dress tailoring came back in although, this would be completely different to the strict forties. Tailoring was classic and was easily a success however, this was where menswear on a woman really took off. Women were seen in oversized men's suit jackets usually in a plaid or tweed. They would twin this with a big pair of trousers with a tight belted waist and flat lace up brogues or doc martins, this rebellious take on a classic look was extremely loved and often still used. Females would have a whole masculine outfit and would accessorize with a French beret or a pair of braces.

As this decade moved on women started to become very conscious and the fashion was styled around this. Sexy and form fitting clothes were made out new fabrics like velvet and denim which were pulled around the body as tight as possible. Designers were starting to create corsets with pointed conical breasts creating the illusion and start of underwear as outerwear. This was the beginning of lycra which was previously used for lingerie and swimwear only now it was a fashion phenomenon and made into new shapes. New low scoop neck dresses were tight and teamed with a classic pair of opaque tights fashionistas went crazy for this look and it sold out of stores instantly. In the mid-eighties skirt shapes went wild this is when the puffball and ra ra skirt were invented, this was Westwood's memorable piece which put her on the international fashion map. A key characteristic from the eighties was the 'mini crini' Which was a short-hooped skirt, teamed with cotton over the knee socks and flat clumpy shoes. Women would usually wear these out-there skirts with a short-fitted blazer in stripes or wool patterns.

Street fashion was up and coming still and it was inspired by hip hop and punk rock music. A classic piece of streetwear was oversized coloured jackets with graffiti style shapes and words on them. The graphic word prints made dramatic statements on catwalks and could be used for politic issues and the key slogan printed on garments was 'Worldwide Nuclear Ban Now'. Oversized t-shirts were a simple fashion statement which became a trendy choice. The amazing thing about street fashion was that it was hard to locate, and you couldn't find this from common fashion retailers and you could usually by one of pieces only.

Finally, to be discussed is the nineties and what a decade it was. Rocking the nineties trends was a must for teenagers in this era and you were spoiled for choice. A characteristic of the nineties were buffalo shoes which were seen on celebrities such as Emma Bunton and Victoria Beckham these shoes were show stopping and a must have, basically they were sky high trainers ideally white and very fashionable at the

time. Skirts over trousers became popular too but thank God, we left the trend behind. In my opinion a memorable trend was backless tops and tight-fitting camisoles with asymmetric cuts teamed with a belly button often hid by the point of the cut. To accessories this look a tiny back pack would be a stylish look