


BERIT ELDVIK
PHOTO MATS LANDIN



POWER OF FASHION
300 YEARS OF CLOTHING



MAKING DEMANDS OF THE BODY

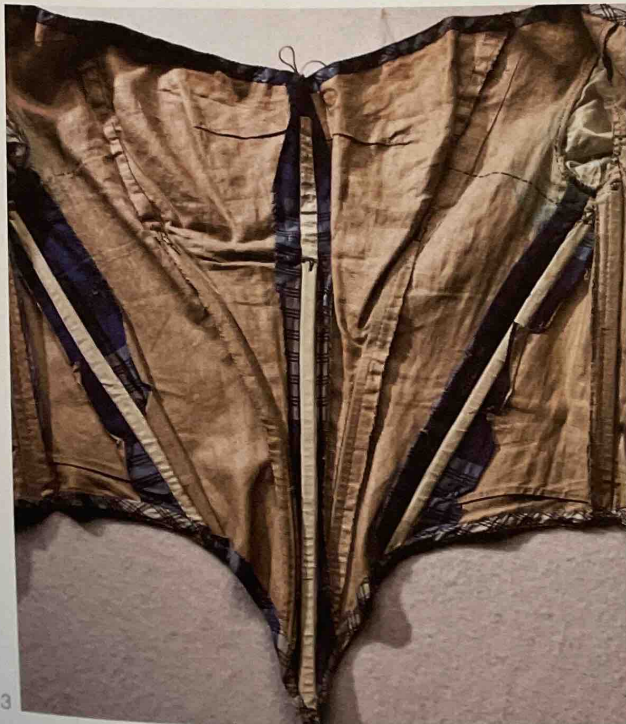
Every period has its ideal of style that is displayed in the form of the things surrounding us. We ourselves become a part of this ideal. Our eyes get used to long, narrow forms alternating with wide, curvaceous shapes, to a body with a flat stomach giving way to a fashion with bulging stomachs, and so on. Each stylistic ideal tends to stress its characteristics to the point of exaggeration. When that has been reached, fashions become a rewarding subject for caricaturists, who open our eyes. The way clothes reshape the body also affects the ability of people to move, and the fashion of any age can therefore be said to have its typical patterns of movement.

Fashions have constantly made demands of the body, especially women's bodies. These have to adapt to a given form that rarely corresponds to the natural shape. Every fashion has created aids and corrective undergarments to achieve the right look. Differing ideals of beauty and also new materials and technical innovations have meant a great deal for the development of the shaping underwear.

Stiffening devices have been sewn into clothes to give the body the correct posture, and garments have been tied tight to the body to give the desired silhouette. To shape the lower part of the body, various pads or frames have been used to carry the skirt. A large volume over the hips and the bottom has been an ideal indicating prosperity and fertility. The hooped skirts of the eighteenth century, the crinoline and bustle of the nineteenth century are all examples of this. Necessary for wearing fashionable clothes but highly impractical and hard to wear, in their extreme forms they were ridiculed in cartoons and caricatures.



Previous page. Silk stays (detail). 1. Chamois leather stays (detail). 2. Corset (detail). 3. Part of bodice 4. Crinoline 1860, and fashion dress 1910.



2

3

4

IN STAYS

The stays that were developed from the stiffened bodice of the sixteenth century created a body that was conical above the very narrow waist. Stays became a separate garment which was subsequently essential for upper-class women for a couple of centuries. It was visible in the seventeenth century, but during the eighteenth century it became an undergarment to which the dress was attached. It was made by special stay-makers and was available in different materials, not infrequently leather. The finest ones were of silk, and it was the most expensive garment in a woman's wardrobe. The stiffening elements were made of whalebone, the baleen plates from whales, which were suitably resilient and durable. Hard iron rods ran along the front edges. Stays were worn with a protective linen chemise underneath.

From a very early age, upper-class children in the eighteenth century, both girls and boys, had to wear stays when they were dressed up in miniature versions of adult fashions. This was considered necessary for maintaining a straight posture. It was important for girls, partly for the sake of beauty but also because much of their adult life was spent sitting bent over needlework, which could easily spoil their posture. It was not until around 1800 that children

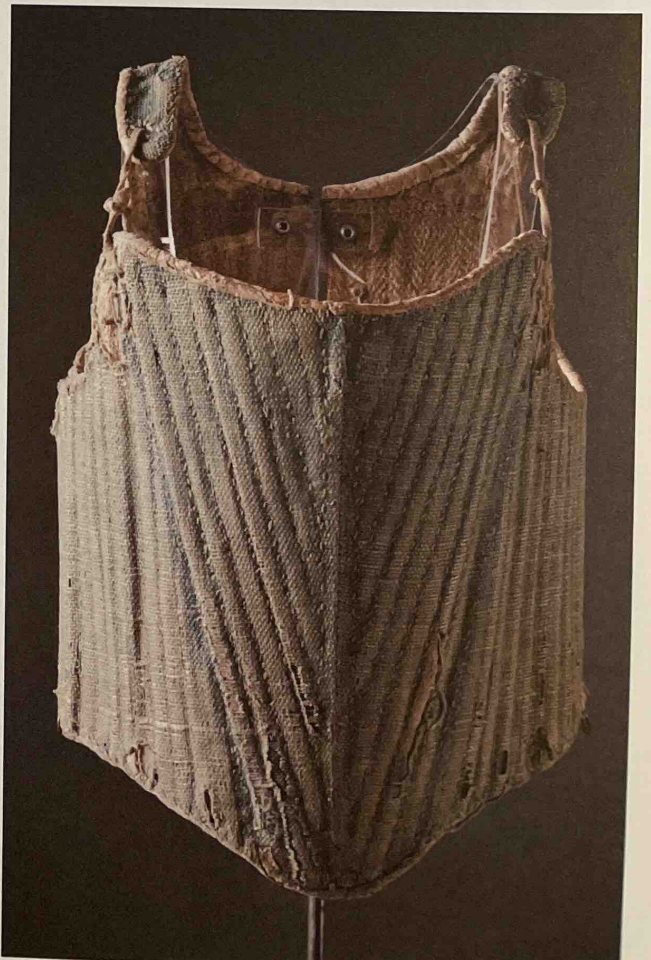
were viewed as something other than miniature adults and were given clothes that were adapted to their need to move and their growing bodies.

The harmful effect of stays on the physique was pointed out by doctors and dress reformers almost throughout their whole existence, yet women persisted, despite the illness and the physical deformities. It was only when fashion itself changed around 1800 that stays disappeared. The ideal then became the classical Roman and Greek body draped in thin white cloth around a slim but natural body, without any accentuation of the waist.

1. The stays that disappeared around 1800 are back. Photo Jessika Wallin 2009. 2. Child's stays from the eighteenth century. **Next page.** Hand-coloured mezzotint. Bowles & Carver after John Collet.



1



2





RETRACT AND EXTEND

When the waist had to be emphasized once again in the 1830s and the ideal body looked like an hourglass, stays returned, this time in the form of the corset. This differed from stays in the way it separated the breasts. More and more women were able to wear corsets thanks to more modern and cheaper manufacturing methods. The hourglass shape also meant that the volume of the skirt grew, with a growing number of petticoats under it. The resulting weight exerted pressure on the hips and was a strain on the back.

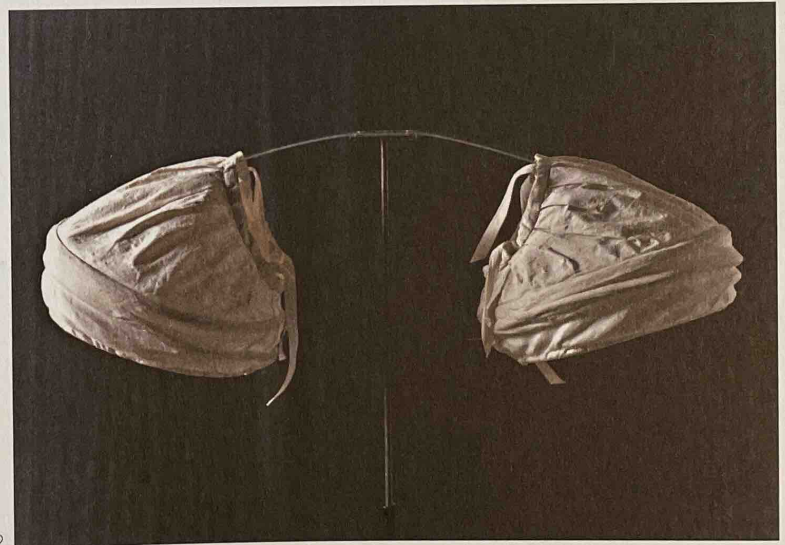
It was therefore a relief when the crinoline came in the 1850s. Narrow steel hoops held together by vertical cotton tapes held the skirt out. The crinoline could also be folded up. It saved metres of material for petticoats, and it became very popular even though it took up a lot of space. In the 1870s the skirt ceased to be equally wide all round; instead the extension was gathered at the back, with a heavy emphasis on the bottom, which protruded with the aid of the bustle, a frame attached to the waist, which held the

drapes of the skirt outwards and upwards. Frames like these in the form of cages of cloth-covered cane (panniers) had also been used in the eighteenth-century, with one on each hip, to give the skirt greater width. The same design was used for the sleeve pads of the 1830s, which supported the leg-of-mutton sleeves that were in fashion at the time. Extremely wide skirts could be obtained using hooped petticoats, but these needed so much cloth that they were banned.

Previous page. Panniers to give the skirt greater width
1. Corset from the late nineteenth century. 2. Sleeve pads.

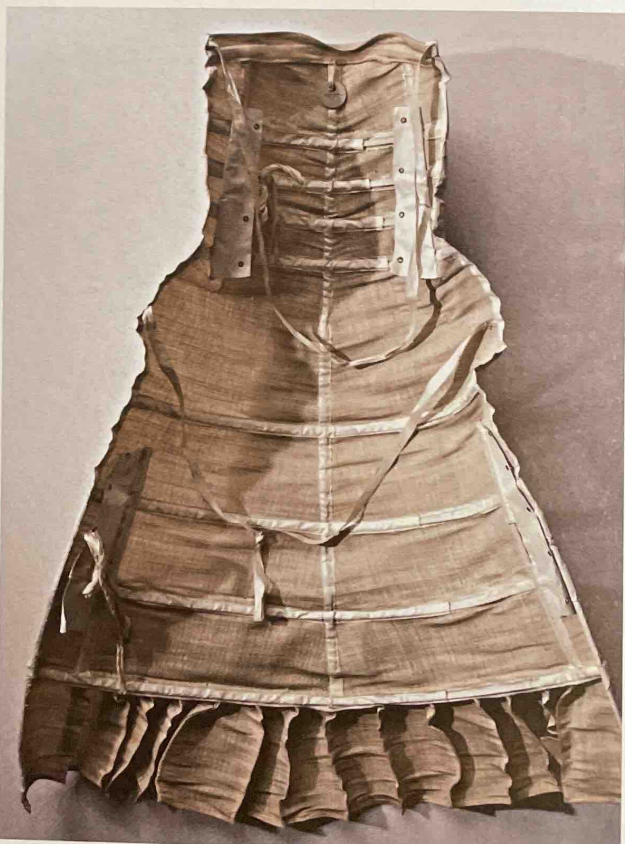


1



2

1. Princess Pauline de Waldeck et Pymont wearing a bustle-dress. Photo Gösta Florman, Stockholm.
2 and 3. A bustle from the inside and the outside.
Next page. Woman in a crinoline-dress
Photo W. A. Eurenus & P. L. Quist, Stockholm.





FASHION PICTURES IN REALITY

How could people know what was the latest fashion before there were newspapers, radio, or television? How did a seventeenth-century lady, for example, know what a dress should look like?

We do not know exactly, but in groups of the population where mobility and travel were part of the lifestyle, this kind of information was spread. This was also the group that set the fashion in the places where they lived. There was a great deal of letter writing, and people who were abroad would write home and tell in detail about the clothes they saw, because clothing was so significant. They could also send samples of cloth and lace in the letters.

Dressed mannequins could be sent from Paris to prospective customers at the court, and this was still done during the nineteenth century. Towards the end of the eighteenth century there appeared magazines with hand-coloured fashion pictures and sometimes pasted-in cloth samples to display qualities and colours.

When printing techniques developed in the nineteenth century, the flow of fashion pictures increased, weekly and monthly magazines had fashion supplements with drawings of garments, cutting patterns, and descriptions. Now even the country seamstress could keep up to date with what was fashionable in town. Fashions did not change as quickly as they do today, when each year has many seasons.



1



2

Previous page. Fashion plate with hats from *Journal des dames et des demoiselles*, January 1876.

1. Hat from the 1880s.
2. Fashion plate with bustle-dresses from 1876.
3. Fashion plate with empire styled dress from 1820.



3



1

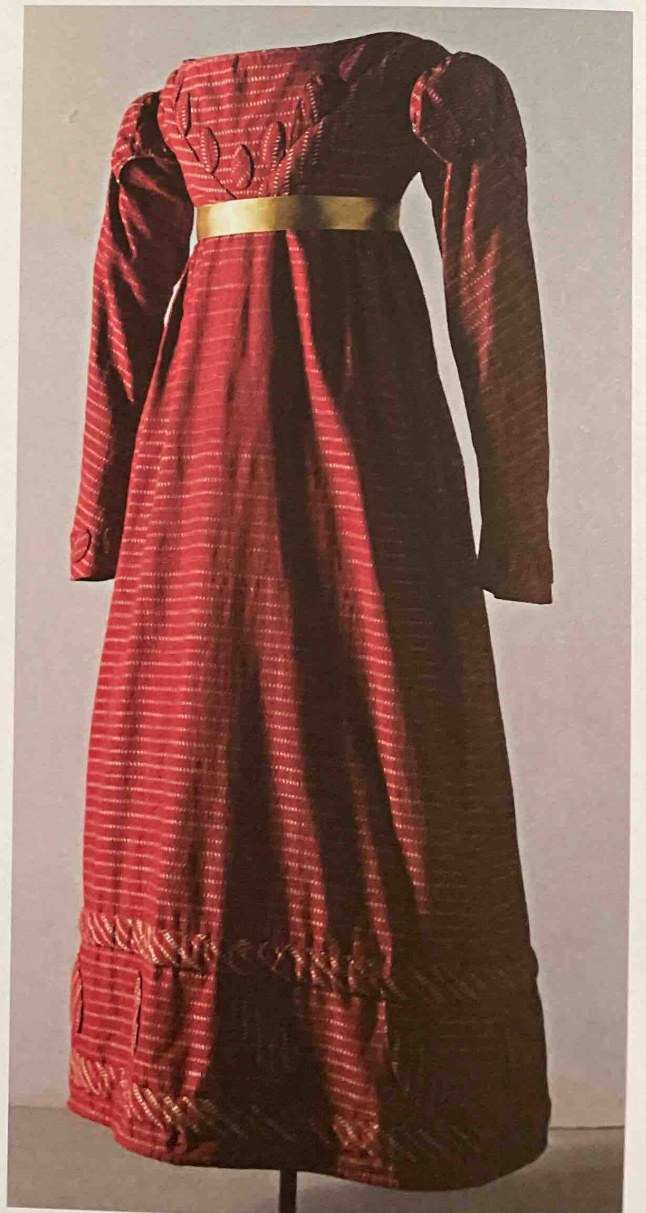
2



3



1 and 2. Silk dress with short sleeves from the beginning of the 1820s.
3 and 4. Simple home-woven dress with silk threads from the beginning of the 1820s.

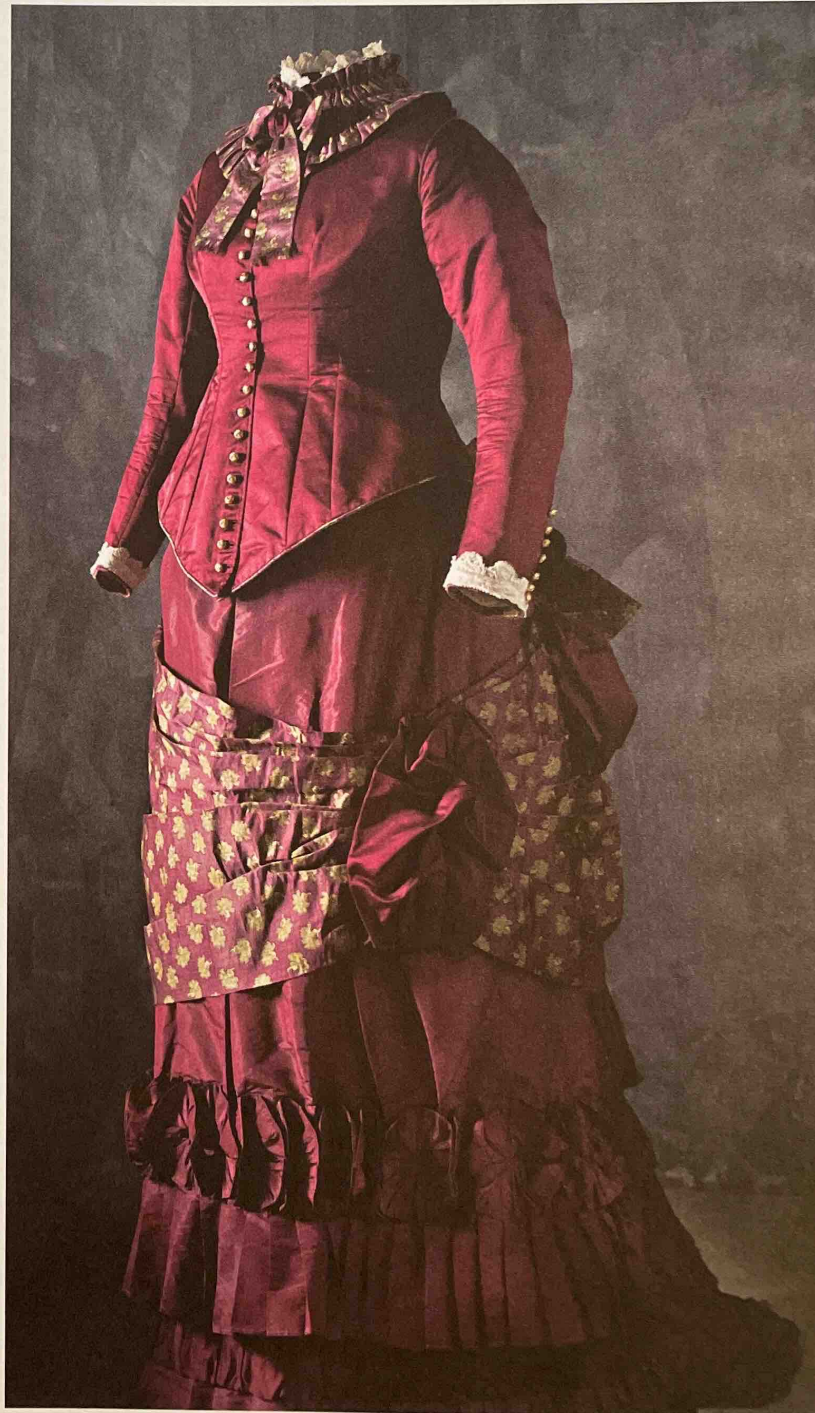


4

Fashion plates display an ideal; what the garments looked like in reality can be seen from surviving clothes. Just as today, the picture is a vision that must be modified to suit bodies, minds, and wallets. The pictures are interpreted and recreated in clothes depending on the wearer's economic and social status, access to material, and dressmaking skills. Most people aspire to be up to date if they can, and if they are reached by the right impulses. Even when simplified and stripped of all adornment, what was perceived as essential in the dress remains. Following the fashion means being able to apprehend and embrace the prevailing form and body line, to see the fashion style.



5 and 6. Simple home-woven bustle-dress from the 1880s.
3 and 4. Silk bustle-dress from the 1880s.



6

8