Engaging the past to fashion the future: the use of early nineteenth-century bespoke tailored men's coats and gender narratives to shape contemporary womenswear.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the cut, construction, and silhouette of early nineteenth-century men's coats as a methodology for the development of contemporary womenswear. This practice-based research focuses on aspects of bespoke tailoring between the late eighteenth and twenty first centuries, with a specific interest in the period between 1820 and 1845, examining how the forms and shapes of the garments were achieved through methods of construction, and how these, in turn, helped to shape discourses surrounding gender narratives. Christian Dior and Vivienne Westwood designs have been selected as examples of womenswear that were shaped by historical forms, tailoring and notions of gender. In order to explore how the techniques of men's tailoring can be translated into a contemporary women's garment, a woman's jacket, drawing on elements of historical design, construction, and bespoke tailoring methods was produced by the author. Its very feminine form, with an emphasis on sharp shoulders, narrow waist, and wide skirt, captures the hourglass shape found in men's tail and frock coats of the early nineteenth century as well as Christian Dior and Vivienne Westwood's tailored garments. The past and the present are thereby brought together through bespoke tailoring.

Keywords: bespoke tailoring, nineteenth-century men's coats, dandyism, gender, Christian Dior, Vivienne Westwood, contemporary womenswear, practice-based research.

INTRODUCTION

The research, analysis and reinterpretation of historical garments has proved to be an important approach adopted as part of their creative process by a number of modern and contemporary fashion designers; it informs the development of forms, materials and techniques of garment

making. Designers who have been inspired by the past to develop contemporary women's fashion, include such names as Alexander MacQueen (1969-2010), who, having learned traditional tailoring techniques on Savile Row and pattern cutting as a theatrical costumier, produced innovative combinations 'of contemporary and historical material'.[1] Similarly, Rei Kawakubo (1942-present) for Comme des Garçons in the early 1990s, deconstructed the idea of the historic male tailcoat for modern women.[2] While Vivienne Westwood (1941-2022) —in one of many works informed by fashion history—was inspired by nineteenth-century tailoring to create a woman's Harris Tweed 'Savile' jacket in her *Voyage to Cythera Collection* of Autumn/Winter 1989-90.[3] Indeed, a long list of contemporary designers who have explored such strongly tailored garments may be compiled, including Jean Paul Gaultier (1952-present), John Galliano (1960-present), Coco Chanel (1883-1971), Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972), Anna Sui (1964-present), Nicolas Ghesquière (1971-present), and Raf Simons (1968-present).

This article will explore such practices through an initial focus on a close examination of surviving historic men's frock coats and tailcoats alongside a study of secondary sources relating to the history of fashion and gender in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain, especially bespoke tailoring skills in the period 1820 to 1845.[4]

My scope, however, extends the analysis into the twenty-first century by exploring select case studies in which designers have been inspired by historic tailoring skills as a means to help define femininity through garments for the modern age. The primary aim is to engage critically with British nineteenth-century bespoke tailoring skills and discourses surrounding gender narratives and how these can be applied effectively to modern womenswear through the making of a woman's modern garment – in this case, a jacket - as informed by the construction techniques and forms of surviving examples of historic men's coats.[5]

In this way it is possible to critique approaches used historically to combine aspects of period tailoring with modern designs and suggest through the production of a structured jacket

new ways in which the craft of tailoring as fashion influence may be sustained. Additionally, this study can help to demonstrate how 'clothing does more than simply draw attention to the body… [accentuating] bodily signs of [male or female similarities and] differences…to imbue the body with significance, adding layers of cultural meaning'.[6]

NINETEENTH CENTURY TAILORING

For at least the first half of the eighteenth century, the fashionable Englishman found Paris the centre of fashion; however, 'by the 1780s English tailoring and sober English country clothing had come to be widely esteemed all over Europe, even in France'.[7] At the turn of the nineteenth century, a specific look had emerged in which a fashionable man would typically wear a cut-away coat, breeches fastened below the knee, stockings, and shoes (Figure 1).[8] Fundamental to the production of such coats was the skill of a tailor.

The art of bespoke tailoring in this period was recognized as a means for showcasing social status, one that could be 'apprehended and appreciated through the same kind of visual effort that all art demands…'.[9] This craftsmanship may be said to have evolved especially in the products of London's skilled tailors, a male profession that included renowned figures such as Henry Poole (1814-1876), who specialized in military tailoring.[10] These West End tailoring businesses developed a sartorial signature style suited to the demands of English aristocrats who required practical items for the equestrian pursuits of the rural landowner alongside a form of dress appropriated for the rounds of court ceremonial, commercial transactions, and leisured display expected of the gentleman in town.[11]

In the early 1800s, tailoring was employed to establish a unique identity among the fashionable and wealthy elite of London. This was demonstrated through a use of high-quality, expensive fabrics and intricate craftsmanship.[12] Additionally, a set of social rules was

developed to govern how these outfits should be worn, further restricting access to a designated high social class. The pioneer in this style 'transformation' was George Bryan 'Beau' Brummell (1778-1840) with his 'personification of freshness and cleanliness and order' (Figure 2).[13] He cleverly adopted and promoted an existing trend towards better fit and construction in tailoring, as well as plainer colours, minimal ornamentation, and improved hygiene, aligning with a sartorial philosophy.[14] Indeed, wearing a 'coat padded at the breast and shoulder to give the impression of strength', complemented with his neat, fitted and uniform-like silhouette that stressed subjective notions such as taste and beauty—rather than family connections or economic power— made him the epitome of the so-called 'dandy'.[15] A figure immortalized in literature by Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) in his famous *Treatise on Elegant Living* of 1830 which stressed not only that 'Clothing is how society expresses itself' but that 'The boor covers himself, the rich man or the fool adorns himself, [but] the elegant man gets dressed'.[16]

The construction of a fashionable identity by 'London style' dandies such as Brummell began to be challenged with the opening of Paris to British aristocrats following the ending of the Napoleonic wars in 1814. By 1830 Paris had regained its status as a centre for luxurious living and this left those who still favoured the London style looking anachronistic or viewed as failing to dress as a 'gentleman'.[17] Dandyism, already a source of mockery for its focus on clothing at the expense of other more 'manly' activities, was ridiculed even more in both written and visual descriptions (Figure 3). Such images helped to vulgarize the dandy as not only effete but, given their focus on appearance, also as people lacking in character and intelligence.

The decline of early nineteenth-century dandyism did not see the end of finely tailored clothes. By the close of 1830s the foundation of modern tailoring had been established, something considered 'a magical time in the history of tailoring'.[18] These developments have

been explained as a result of the socio-political transformations of the French Revolution (1789-1799) which resulted in a shift away from flamboyant colours and materials such as satin, silk and velvet to more sober clothing, denoting a turning point in the history of dress, described famously by John Carl Flügel (1884-1955) as the 'Great Masculine Renunciation'.[19] This phenomenon contrasted with developments in women's clothing, particularly during the succeeding Victorian era, that saw a move towards increasing fussiness. [20]

This change is most clearly reflected in the use of male corsets, which 'were occasionally worn by army officers, fops and dandies to promote a smart appearance, as well as to attain the correct fashion posture'.[21] The corset had helped to create the smooth lines of men's clothing fashionable in the early 1800s, but this became increasingly unnecessary with the structure of tailored garments.

Although in the eighteenth century a practical single- or double-breasted coat with full skirt, flapped pockets, and vent at the back was worn by men, it was from 1816 that the frock coat became an important garment in gentleman's style.[22] This new silhouette of the frock coat had its origins in the military great coat and was worn first as informal daywear buttoned from neck to knee.[23] By the 1820s a waist seam had been introduced.[24] This allowed tailors to cut a full and flared skirt that maintained a defined waist shape, as well as releasing the strain on the tailored upper half of the coat that had been created by the weight of the garment's skirt.[25] It resulted in a silhouette with a markedly slim waist and an exaggerated flare of the skirt.[26] By the 1830s, the skirts of men's frock coats matched closely the width of women's skirts (Figure 4); this male hourglass silhouette persisted into the 1840s but returned to straighter lines in the succeeding decades.[27] By 1850 the frock coat was being 'accepted as formal wear and achieved its loose, straight, undecorated appearance in the 1860s'.[28]

The characteristics of women's dress during the early nineteenth century had also changed dramatically; colour and elaborate shapes were increasingly associated with feminine

fashion. Thus, the very high neo-classical waistline seen in women's fashion of around 1800, was gradually lowered so that by the 1820s it reached its natural position resulting in a move towards a more fitted upper body and an increasingly full bell-shaped skirt. These developments produced a change in women's silhouette that is comparable with that for men's frock coats across the same period. Skirts were made fuller using pleats and gathers radiating all around the waist, with the addition of petticoats. By the 1850s the steel crinoline was introduced to women's dress replacing the early heavy layers of petticoats.[29]

This change in style was also partly driven by developments resulting from the Industrial Revolution which had introduced new manufacturing processes during the eighteenth century. Throughout this period of industrialization, there was a noticeable increase in the distinction between genders in both public and private spheres. While many working-class women entered the workforce, 'respectable' bourgeois women were confined to the home, taking on the traditional roles of wife and mother.[30] The gender differences influenced fashion choices of both men and women of the nineteenth century.[31] The resulting differentiation between male clothing (featuring straight lines, practical materials), and female clothing (featuring soft, flowing curved lines, rich colours and textures, intricate structured and shapes) was a significant aspect of gender segregation in the nineteenth century.[32] 'Thus women's fashion and dress has historically been regulated along the lines of gender and sexuality as well as the lines of social, i.e. class, distinction'.[33]

These changes were also influenced by shifting social and cultural behaviours towards what forms of masculinity and femininity were considered in the public sphere as well as how fashion style was perceived and diffused; a guide book to male etiquette of 1860, for example, advises gentlemen to 'follow fashion as far as is necessary to avoid eccentricity or oddity in your costume but avoid the extreme of the prevailing *mode'*.[34] As explained by the historian Anne Hollander (2020): 'by the turn of the [eighteenth century], elegance had shifted entirely

away from wrought surfaces to fundamental form, and away from courtly refinement to natural simplicity'.[35]

Many fashion historians have traditionally neglected menswear after 1830 on the misapprehension that fashion and dress were exclusively of feminine interest. Christopher Breward, however, has led the way in exploring menswear of the period after this date, clearly demonstrating that Victorian men also consumed fashion. His work reveals that throughout the nineteenth century, male sitters in portraits displayed a self-conscious and highly individual interest in cut and style.[36] Analysis of such evidence by other investigators such as Jay McCauley Bowstead also reveals that 'even a cursory exploration of historical men's dress...would demonstrate that men are no way intrinsically less interested in clothing than women'.[37]

This male interest in clothing helped to drive advances in the art of men's tailoring and by the early decades of the nineteenth-century English tailors who were developing new approaches became highly sought after. Combining scientific approaches to the body with the art of tailoring, they used studies in anatomy to create intricate measuring and cutting techniques. With the introduction of the tape measure at this time and a newfound focus on standardized measuring and cutting, tailors were eager to demonstrate the superiority of their own system often by publishing the details in affordable books or patenting a measuring or pattern cutting tool for sale.[38] This popularised and to some extent democratised the art of tailoring.[39] It is important to recognise that the skills of male tailors also contributed to the wardrobe of women who could afford them. Indeed '[w]ealthy women had been wearing personally fitted tailored, woollen riding habits made by their husbands' tailors certainly from the seventeenth century'.[40] Tailored garments for a range of sports—such as croquet, archery, golf, tennis—in which women participated became especially in demand as the century progressed, as exemplified, for example, by the outfits made by John Redfern (1820-1895).[41]

Although the combination of cheap machine-woven cloth and the start of modern approaches to retailing meant that by 1860 men's clothing manufacturers could supply the market with ready-made suits, bespoke tailoring remained the norm for middle- and upper-class consumers. It is important to note that tailors held social significance as well as contributing to the economy, not least as a vital part of the industrial revolution 'rather than the legacy of a less commercial past'.[42] The industrialization provided these professionals not only the opportunity to adapt their craft to the market, but more exactly integrate 'the male persona into industry's ceaseless striving for system and predictability without forcing [them] to consciously surrender [their] uniqueness'. [43] Furthermore, industrial development brought new social meanings where 'the distinction between custom and ready-made… was synonymous with the chasm between refined and coarse, between bourgeois and proletarian'.[44]

As with the dandies of the early nineteenth century, attention to detail might also be taken to extremes, as exemplified by the outfits of the so-called 'aesthetes' of the 1880s. Soon after, the dandy, or fop became a figure popularized by Oscar Wilde (1854 -1900). Wilde's dandy paid close attention to his appearance, dress, and lifestyle, but through charm and wit pointed out society's hypocrisy and double standards. This was embodied by Oscar Wilde himself through his posture, hairstyle and clothing which helped him to project an air of superiority (Figure 5); as Breward notes, 'Wilde had adopted the refined wardrobe of the English upper-middle classes'.[45] His claim that 'nothing succeeds like excess' is an interesting contrast with early nineteenth-century dandies where 'The man of taste must always know how to reduce need to a minimum'.[46] In wider society, dandies' interests in clothing continued to associate them with women's consumerism and thus with effeminacy, although such understandings were only conflated with homosexuality after the criminal trial of Wilde in 1895.[47]

Furthermore, from the 1890s dandyism was related to sexual nonconformity, decadence, and extravagance. Its expression through clothing and different aspects of material culture—e.g., interior designing—, was commonly recognized as part of 'the preserve of homosexual, artistic, and bohemian subculture'.[48] Clothing had developed unmistakable masculine and feminine qualities, as evidenced in an article written in Godey's Magazine of 1893: 'Herein may be found an invincible argument against the development of mannish tendencies in feminine costume. The influence of clothes is so strong, so irresistible, that women can wear masculine garments without losing something of the charm of womanliness, while on the other hand, effeminacy in man's attire has nearly always proved indicative of a corresponding emasculation of character'.[49]

It is recognized that the 'use of clothing reinforces gender roles culturally assigned to men and women by emphasizing individuals' biological sex and encouraging them to behave according to specific character traits associated with their specific sex'.[50] However, it is also possible to manipulate clothing and the body—that can be 'subjected, used, transformed and improved'—to define and/or challenge gender roles traditionally assigned to them.[51] In this way, the shapely male silhouette with their attire that was designed to highlight the soft, curvy lines of their physique by wearing fitted trousers that emphasized the round hips, exaggerated wide lapels given an illusion of additional width to the chest with the addition of a wide skirt of the frock coat, which in turn contributes to the impression of extra slim waist—even after the abandonment of the corset—, defined masculinity until around 1840s. However, by the late nineteenth century this accentuated hourglass figure would come to be considered as feminine in appearance. In 1898, for example, the journalist William Connor Sydney (1869-1931) wrote that 'In 1819 the dress of the Bond Street dandy was partly male and partly female, for his pantaloons being gathered into his waistband presented the appearance of a petticoat under the waistcoat, while the coat itself was made full before, tight in the waist, and with very wide

gathers about the hips'.[52] This becomes clear when comparing male and female silhouette in the period (Figure 6). Contemporary historians recognize that men's fashion of the first half of the nineteenth century barely left anything to the imagination according to modern standards.[53] As explained by the fashion historian Lydia Edwards: '[the] raised waistlines and long legs encased in light-coloured, close-fitting breeches or pantaloons…emphasized every manly feature'.[54]

TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

Arguably, the most significant examples of the manipulation of garment shape, body and gender narratives during the twentieth century were the designs of Christian Dior (1905-1957). The social disruptions of the First World War had resulted in women's clothing becoming less restrictive in both sculptural shapes and the use of corsets. Dior challenged this by reinventing the later nineteenth-century feminine silhouette by adorning the body with a fitted jacket, padded hip, and wide A-line skirts creating a rounded, sloping shoulders, tight bodice, and thin wasp-waist that exaggerated the hourglass silhouette.[55]

His first collection in 1947, which he called 'La Ligne Corolle' but was dubbed by the press as the 'New Look', was an enormous success. Drawing on historical examples of women's fashion, and the skills of haute couture in textiles, embroidery, cutting and sewing techniques he produced designs that captured a mood of optimism following the Second World War.[56] Dior explained that he 'revived traditional techniques of construction using solid fabrics whose weight was reinforced with taffeta or cambric linings. Firm underpinnings in the form of underwired bustier and girdles and tulle and horsehair petticoats, padded hips and bust created a smooth womanly figure'.[57] It is perhaps inevitable that these designs met with some criticism, not least that they were 'a sartorial expression of the Feminine Mystique, "elegance as bondage". Long skirts and clinched waists hindered the free movement of the female body,

while the nostalgia of the style looked backwards toward the nineteenth century'.[58] Although the New Look was a great success, Dior was criticized by some, such as the French newspaper *L'Humanité* which published an article declaring 'capitalists are squandering resources while poor children go hungry' in relation to his growing fame.[59] Nevertheless, Dior's designs took the fashion world by storm; his renown spread fast, with the press and buyers packing the salon.[60] It was, however, his breakthrough in America that transformed his both Dior's reputation and his designs, especially after Carmel Snow (1887-1961) —editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazar* in New York—termed the collection as 'the New Look'.[61] 'By the time of his launch … many Americans had already placed their season's orders and left Paris, after reading…[the] reports they returned, to be followed in subsequence seasons by European, South American, Australian and eventually even Japanese buyers'.[62] In a short period of time the House of Dior' became a business with ninety employees, attaining a turnover of 1.3 million francs, and reported 75% of all French couture exports.[63]

One of the most successful designers who has built on the traditions of Dior is Vivienne Westwood, drawing on 'her intense love of historical costume … [with] no fear of the body, of shoulders, buttocks, hips or breasts'.[64] With the rebranding of her Chelsea-based boutique in 1979 as *Worlds End*, Westwood's designs began to take a nostalgic turn, looking back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for inspiration. The past is never far from Westwood's designs and her approaches to cut and construction, as she herself explained: 'When you look into the past, you start to see the standards of excellence, the good taste in the ways things were done, put together, formed. By trying to copy technique, you build up your own technique'.[65] Westwood made extensive use of the work of Norah Waugh (1910-1966), a British dress historian who devoted her career to researching historical clothing with the aim of providing a clearer understanding of its making. Waugh championed detailed research into historical dress, both the styles and the methods of cut and construction, producing a series of books that

included accurate sewing patterns.[66] Westwood reinterpreted these historical designs to make them relevant for the twentieth-century, reintroducing the corset of the early eighteenth-century, for example, but with reduced boning and adding elastic side panels and a zip which pulled in the waist and emphasized the hips. By taking the corset, crinoline and bustle, she was 'moulding and displaying the body to create a shape that customers find ultra-feminine, sexually empowering, and absolutely appropriate for the present day'.[67] As Westwood herself put it: 'I've never thought it powerful to be like a second-rate man. Femininity is stronger, and I don't understand why people keep plugging this boring asexual body'.[68] Alongside her debt to the past lies an enormous respect for traditional British tailoring and menswear and this has been an important source of inspiration: 'the central model of excellence for men is still Savile Row tailoring. Women always found a reason or an excuse to wear a masculine look'.[69] However, Westwood's work extended beyond simply dressing women in tailored men's clothing or conventional attire borrowed from a man's wardrobe. Instead, she took bold steps to blur boundaries of gender by creating ambiguity that subverts traditional notions of femininity and masculinity in dress. So, for example, in her Gold Label Winter Fall collection of 2010, female models wore dark lip liner and drawn on facial hair.[70] As a result, Westwood addressed, or perhaps better, equalized the power imbalance that exists between female and male gender.

METHODS AND MAKING

Just as Savile Row tailoring helps to inform some modern designers of womenswear, my own PhD research investigating the influence of early nineteenth century men's tailoring on the cut and construction of women's riding habits of the same period provided a point of departure to explore how these revolutionary tailoring techniques might be effectively utilized in the creation of a contemporary woman's jacket.[71] It seemed appropriate for this purpose to draw

on designs from almost exactly a century later with Christian Dior's similarly revolutionary work. For this I have adopted a methodological framework comprising research that is both qualitative and practice-based. This ensured that my observations and conclusions are based on clothing as objects rather than developed through theoretical models and concepts alone. The analysis of historical men's coats established the basis for an investigation of bespoke tailoring techniques used in the early nineteenth century and how it could be applied in contemporary womenswear. Consequently, this expanded on our understanding of dress history and the importance of designers 'engagement with the history of clothing and fashion'.[72] The approach adopted here concerned itself with offering a paradigm that integrates dress history, and how the analysis of these could be a useful means to create a modern women's jacket. In this way I engaged through practice and theory to create a body of work that implemented a reflective practice, as well as '"reflection on action", [which] is a particular activity of professional practitioners and involves thinking about what we are doing and reshaping action while we are doing it'.[73] Furthermore, research was undertaken of primary (nineteenth-century illustrations in books and magazines, archival garment patterns) and secondary sources (histories of fashion, body and gender), adopting an interdisciplinary approach.

APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL DRESS

The study of material culture and object-based analysis, is widely recognized as an important means of investigating fashion history, and was therefore applied to identify characteristics of men's tailoring of the nineteenth century.[74] The aim was to explore through detailed reflection the creation of a woman's jacket and how this could relate to techniques found in the contemporary world of womenswear that construct particular notions of gender. It also

examined the value of using traditional processes of sewing and garment construction in a modern context.

Although the research touches on elements of nineteenth-century tailored menswear in general, my focus is on the period 1820 to 1845, which represents a transformative time in the history of fashion and tailoring (both male and female). In order to explore techniques of tailoring and construction, I have examined a number of historical tail and frock coats in three UK museum collections: the Museum of London, the Fashion Museum Bath and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A selection of coats designed by Christian Dior and Vivienne Westwood have also been studied. In addition, contemporary versions of tailored frock coats, jackets and patterns have been investigated at the London College of Fashion Archive collection, London, UK.[75]

The intention of these analyses was to make formal descriptions of the artefacts as well as a close study of specific features that could serve as possible sources of inspiration for their application to a contemporary garment. In recording the techniques of construction for all these garments the focus was on types of stitching, padding, fabrics used, as well as silhouette and design. In addition, specific aspects of construction, such as side-bodies, skirts, and forms of collars, as well as details, for example pockets and garment fastenings were examined. Having gained an understanding of the historical garments, these aspects were compared with selected Christian Dior and Vivienne Westwood garments to identify any similarities, especially around tailoring techniques, and construction. This data formed the basis for developing the design and patterns for a woman's jacket.

APPROACH TO PATTERN-CUTTING AND MAKING OF A CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S JACKET

Although not trained as a tailor prior to undertaking this research, tailoring and pattern cutting has always played a large part in my work in the fashion industry, enabling me to acquire skills in this field. However, to ensure that my ability was sufficient to undertake the making of a tailored woman's jacket I engaged with professional tailors at the London College of Fashion, as well as close study of contemporary and historical instruction books.[76]

The basic form and structure of the garment was developed from this initial museum grounded and literature research. For the early versions a spacer fabric was selected because it is both light weight and enabled the desired construction of the garment.[77] Using the historical garments as inspiration, I employed cross stitching to keep the seam allowance open and flat inside, and also introduced tailoring chest canvas. Initially a fusible canvas was to be used on the inside of the jacket but in order to highlight nineteenth-century tailoring techniques, it was applied to the outside collar and the main body. This helped to provide structure and create an original jacket. However, in this early garment the hourglass shape could not be achieved (Figure 7), and it became apparent that an alternative fabric would be necessary, as well as new solutions found to create the desired shape.

Furthermore, a mannequin with a clear hourglass shape was essential to mirror that found in early nineteenth-century men's coats as well as in the designs of Christian Dior and Vivienne Westwood, all of which formed the inspiration for the silhouette of the new jacket. A tailor's mannequin was adjusted accordingly by adding paddings to the bust, and double shoulder-pads on the shoulders to create a sharp structure—this began to accentuate the narrowness of the waist (Figure 8). The method adopted to make the coat pattern was draping (Figure 9); this gave me a straight vision of shape and

proportions of the garment as it developed.[78] After some trial and error, the desired shape/silhouette was achieved.

It became apparent that in order to attain the ideal silhouette it was necessary to introduce a front-side panel with darts. The inspiration for this came from Vivienne Westwood's 'Wheat Jacket' where a bias-cut side panel ensured a close fit and emphasized the bust and waist.[79] The back of the coat is divided into three parts: the centre back, back side-body and skirt. In addition, the pattern of a double-breasted dress coat of 1840 was fundamental, since by this date a back side-body panel had been introduced and would become part of the conventional design of a dress coat.[80] The seam between side-body and centre back finds parallels on men's tail and frock coats of the early nineteenth century, as well as the waist seam placed lower than the waistline to help accentuate the curve of the back waist, and the pleat introduced on the back skirt to give volume to the hip area.

The front has a long low 'V' neckline with pointed lapels and medium notch. This long V-shaped form at the front helps to emphasize the hourglass shape. This characteristic was informed by the lapels of a number of historical coats and the Vivienne Westwood jacket.

Similarly, the collar draws on the structured form of historical coats. When draping the collar on the stand, it was quite challenging to achieve since it required both shape as well as height (depth). The technique used to achieve this was to introduce a number of small darts on the collar-stand. How could this—the collar pattern—be achieved without darts in the collar stand? After experimentation, the solution was to manipulate the darts and transfer these to the seam between the collar-stand and the collar.

From the draped form, a prototype flat pattern was traced, and the lines and measurements smoothed and checked before a first toile was sewn. In order to help create a sharp shoulder, in addition to the inclusion of double shoulder pads to give structure—and

thereby emphasising the hourglass shape of the jacket—the shoulder-seam was removed forming one continuous pattern piece without the need for a separate shoulder seam.

The sleeve was created by using flat pattern technique. However, at first, the result was not satisfactory as the sleeve was neither sufficiently fitted nor was the elbow curve sufficiently prominent—as found in historical garments—, so more curve was inserted on the sleeve-elbow to exaggerate the form.

The first fitting of the toile demonstrated that adjustments to the lapel and the seam that runs from the armhole to the waist were needed. After making corrections, a second toile in wool fabric was produced. Finally, the completed garment pattern was digitized and plotted on Gerber AccuMark computer CAD software (Figure 10).[81]

Before sewing the final jacket, a range of fabrics, canvases, and embellishments were explored through testing and producing samples, such as: different types of stitches, laser cutting, dry cleaning, material care and strength. These tests are usual practice in the fashion industry and can identify problems that may occur during the making of the garment, as well as the way into the garment should be cared after made, for example: should it be washed or dry cleaned? During the process of cutting and dry cleaning it was observed that the main fabric of the jacket frayed, requiring the use of fusible tape at the seam allowances edge before sewing and manipulating the fabric.

Having decided to use the fringe selvedge of the fabric as part of the sleeve hem, the pattern was then laid out onto the fabric to be cut on the cross-grain. This strategy was discussed beforehand with a professional tailor in order to anticipate any problem with fitting to the body after completion. To achieve the ideal structure of the garment and create a connection with the nineteenth-century coats, a series of different interlinings and canvas was used on the inside and outside of the jacket (Figure 11), such as the horsehair canvas placed at the outer front and

back of the garment, that not only assist in establishing the structure, but which I had decided to make a design feature (Figure 12).

CONCLUSION

Through the process of research, pattern development and the construction of a contemporary woman's jacket, this research explored relationships between the classic craft of bespoke tailoring and the ways in which clothing can reinforce and challenge gender narratives culturally assigned to men and women. The investigation took as its starting point the construction and design of men's coats during the nineteenth century. Through the modification of the body achieved by wearing tightly fitting, narrow waisted coats—initially created by wearing corsets and a clearly articulated waistline—, emphasising broad shoulders and tight pantaloons (with tailcoats) or wide skirts (frock coats), especially in the period 1820-1845, a silhouette was achieved that appears very feminine to a modern viewer. When combined with an acute attention to detail—as exemplified at its best by the skilled sewing techniques of Savile Row tailoring—clothing, 'does more than simply draw attention to the body and emphasize bodily signs…[and gender] difference[s]. It works to imbue the body with significance, adding layers of cultural meanings, which, because they are so close to the body, are mistaken as natural. It is therefore the case that items of clothing do not neutrally reveal the body but embellish it'.[82] For instance, in women's fashion, a fitted dress with nipped waist—or indeed a fitted jacket such as the one developed in this research—does not only emphasize female bodily features, but rather add femininity to the body.[83] Dior's New Look can be taken as an example here, since the hourglass silhouette that he created highlighting women's figure was 'about looking, being gazed at—specially by men'.[84] Additionally, clothes are extremely important to interpret the body, so they are objects which stands for sexual differences in the

case of non-existence of a body: 'Thus a skirt can signify a 'woman' and, indeed, is sometimes used (in an insulting way) to refer to a woman, while trousers signify 'man'.[85]

As explained above, a body can be gendered through clothing, making dress one of the most straightforward ways of representing male and female gender. Considering this, the hourglass shape of structured clothing shifted from men to women around the mid-nineteenth century. A much straighter silhouette for fashionable womenswear emerged between the First and Second World Wars but this was challenged by Christian Dior who reasserted the hourglass form in finely tailored and structured outfits that were understood as expressions of ideal beauty and elegance. Dior's success has played a significant part in shaping modern perceptions of a feminine body form. Designers, such as Jean Paul Gaultier (1952-present), John Galliano (1960-present), Coco Chanel (1883-1971), Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972), Anna Sui (1964-present), Nicolas Ghesquière (1971-present), Raf Simons (1968-present) have all explored the strongly tailored, sharp waisted silhouette for women's fashion. Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen have further challenged many of these ideas, often by drawing on historical garments, including the nineteenth-century tailcoat, to fashion looks that have woven together masculine tailoring and fabrics for a feminine audience. In doing so they have also highlighted the traditions of bespoke tailoring, provoking a resurgence of interest in the craft —such as the method and technique of making garment patterns and the precise cut the clothing to shape the body—, at the high end of fashion.

The woman's jacket developed in this research incorporated elements that are suggestive and associated with men's tailored fashionable coats of the early nineteenth century. The use of luxurious fabrics (the wool cloth has a weight and thickness indicative of quality), elegant styling (fitted sleeves with 'lacy' hem) and fine details of the construction (high, stiffened collar) recapture notions of men's bespoke tailored coats of the early nineteenth century, highlighting the tradition of Savile Row tailoring through stitched embellishments.

The grey colour gives the jacket an appearance that is both severe and luxurious which is heightened by the interplay between the wool and the outer canvas. While it follows the lines of a man's tail and frock coat—invoking formality, dressing up, and social standards—it does not follow the blurred gender lines of dress in contemporary fashion but rather highlights a very feminine form with its emphasis on sharp shoulders, narrow waist, and wide skirt, infusing cultural and historical aspects of nineteenth-century men's fashion.

The historical models thus provide the inspiration, but it was necessary to be responsive to the physical materials with which I was working. Modifications and adjustments were necessary, so that the final tailored garment was arrived at through a mixture of historical research, practical knowledge of tailoring and design decisions made on the dress stand. The approach therefore does not replicate the past but expresses in its structured form key elements of two periods of significant developments in the history of high-end fashion: the 1840s and the 1940s.

What links the fashionable clothes of these two decades, which are separated by a century, —and is emphasized in the embellishments and silhouette of this jacket—is the craft of bespoke tailoring and pattern cutting. With its particular attention to detail and quality, it is no longer associated solely with the exclusivity of Savile Row menswear but is an important aspect of contemporary fashion design. While Kevin Almond suggests that technological advances in the development of pattern cutting have the potential to make bespoke more widely available, it seems more likely that the craft will be sustained through its continued association with the luxury market underpinned by its unrivalled heritage.[86] In this way historic garments as well as the techniques of their construction and form will continue to be important sources of inspiration for designers into the future – an approach described by the German philosopher, writer and art critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) as Tigersprung, fashion's leap into the past to create an ever-changing present.[87]

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[29] This among other changes in fashion—such as corsets—altered the outline of female fashion. Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body,* p. 155.
[30] Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2002).
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APPENDIX

List of historical garments examined at the museums

Institution	**Object**	**Date**	**Accession Number**	**Brief Description**
Museum of London	Tailcoat	1840	57.127/3	Brown wool tailcoat
Museum of London	Tailcoat	1820	39.5/16	Blue wool tailcoat
Museum of London	Frock coat	1830	39.5/19	Single breasted frock coat
Fashion Museum Bath	Tailcoat	1830-1840	BATMC 11.05.20	Wool tailcoat
Fashion Museum Bath	Tailcoat	1820	BATMC 11.05.41	Wool tailcoat
Fashion Museum Bath	Tailcoat	1840-1845	BATMC 11.06.16	Wool tailcoat
Fashion Museum Bath	Frock coat	1830-1840	BATMC 11.06.48 (Loan)	Linen frock coat
Fashion Museum Bath	Frock coat	1830-1849	BATMC 11.24.13	Green wool frock coat
Victoria and Albert Museum	Tailcoat	1820	T.359.1920	Blue woollen tailcoat
Victoria and Albert Museum	Tailcoat	1800-1820	T.742.1913	Linen and Velvet tailcoat
Victoria and Albert Museum	Women's Jacket	1947-1948	T.109.1982	Christian Dior New Look wool jacket
Victoria and Albert Museum	Women's Suit	1954	T.499:1, 2-1997	Christian Dior wool with silk, skirt suit
Victoria and Albert Museum	Women's Jacket	1995	T.396:1-2001	Vivienne Westwood Erotic Zone jacket
Victoria and Albert Museum	Women's Jacket	1988	T.26:1, 2-1991	Vivienne Westwood Time Machine jacket
London College of Fashion Archive	Frock coat	1863 style		Black wool frock coat
London College of Fashion Archive	Jacket	1895 style		Black wool jacket, partially completed