Dress is both a historical and a sociological object if ever there was one. Dress is, in the fullest sense, a ‘social model’, a more or less standardized picture of expected collective behaviour; and it is essentially at this level that it has meaning.

Roland Barthes

From the earliest texts to the most recent, it is clear that clothing and adornment have been used by societies to signify rank, power, and social status. They have been an integral part of the social construction of gender and the visual sign of personal identity, but the boundary between ‘clothing’ and ‘fashion’ is also polymorphous and permeable. When does clothing become ‘fashion’ or is it always fashion, but defined differently at different times in different places.

Our goals in this course are two-fold. First: to examine the use of clothing in a set of canonical early texts. For this we will need to combine a literary approach with that of the fashion (clothing) historians. Second: we need to develop a critical and theoretical paradigm for our discussions and writing.

One of the things that make personal adornment so interesting to us today is the major role it plays in our society and in our lives. For that reason we will also extend our discussion through student presentations to include contemporary designers and fashion issues.

Obviously we cannot cover more than a small percentage of what has been written and what is currently being written on this topic. Still, our readings will provide material for the beginning of a discussion that for many of you will continue well beyond this single course. In addition to the early texts and commentaries, our readings will take us through the growth of mass consumerism in the late nineteenth century, into the French fashion houses of the mid-twentieth century and on to the increased role of American designers in the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Fashion has many voices, some of them speak in unison, some as part of a continuum of history and many of them are in discord. In the weeks that follow we shall listen to some of these voices. We will also be looking at images of the clothes that appear in the texts and form the basis of the histories and commentaries. And, as time permits, we will also consider how various periods have been re-presented in paintings, theater, and film.
The Books and Films

The translators, editors and publishers listed below are the ones ordered for this course. Please note that an * indicates that this is the required edition, chosen specifically for translation and editorial notes. This is especially important for Genesis where Alter’s notes are invaluable.

Required Early Texts Pre-1640s:

- *Gilgamesh*, trans. Andrew George, Penguin
- *Lais of Marie de France*, Penguin
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans./editor Simon Armitage, Norton

This is also available in a highly recommended CD with Armitage reading

- *As You Like It* by Shakespeare, New Kittredge Edition, Focus


Required Texts 1880 - Present:

- *The Language of Fashion* by Roland Barthes
- *Seeing Through Clothes* by Anne Hollander
- *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* by Valerie Steele

Required Viewing Films from Hollywood 1930s and 1940s:

- *The Lady Eve; It Happened One Night; His Girl Friday; Philadelphia Story; My Man Godfrey*

Required viewing Current Films – these are not on the syllabus but are useful points of reference: *The September Issue; The Devil Wears Prada*


Sept. 26 Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, Laver (Greek & Roman); Hollander, II “Nudity” and III “Undress”

Oct.3 Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*  

Oct. 10 No NYU Classes

2 Lennox -----Fashions Fictions  Spring 2011
Discussion Topics: for each class two or three students will bring in a topic inspired by the assigned reading for the class to explore. This can be specific or broad, major or minor, but should be something that interests you. Presentation: in each class there will be student presentations. These may be on any designer or clothing/fashion related issue you wish. Presentations should be no longer than 15 minutes and will be followed by discussion. Summary Reading Reports: to help you keep a file on the texts (very useful later for the colloquium) you are asked to hand in a detailed reading summary report for each early text. The goal is to record every related to reference to clothing and textiles. This ‘archaeological’ works to establish the significance presence of clothing in the text and in its larger social/historical context. For the later texts, the readings response will focus on the major points and issues regarding clothing, adornment, textiles and clothing trade. Please use the report form available on Blackboard. The writing can be informal; the goal is to keep a record of your observations as well as the specific references to clothing. Typed reports are appreciated.

The Paper (this may be submitted at any time during the semester, final deadline is Friday, December 16) This paper can be on a topic of your choice, but must relate in some way or other to one of the class readings or viewings. Ideally the paper would find a way to explore the primary
text/film within either a historical or literary context, or examine further ramifications of one of the text’s major themes. For example: a paper might explore *Utopia*’s idea of uniform dress relation to other societies, such as Maoist China. Another paper topic would be to take the period of one of our books explore how it has been presented in the cinema. Another topic could be an exploration of the history of costumes for Shakespeare’s Rosalind when she is Ganymede. Another paper might take an art history approach and explore romanticized images of shepherds and shepherdesses (as in *Daphnis and Chloe*).

The final paper may either be a research paper or may be an arts project accompanied by a 5-7 page abstract that discusses the project. More detailed guidelines will be provided later.

The choices are many, but no matter what you write about, the depth of the research process, which should include the primary text as well as later contexts, will be an important part of the grade. Individual meetings will be scheduled to discuss your paper topic. Length of ‘traditional’ paper 12 – 15 pages, and the rational is 5-7 pages. Both should use Times New Roman font, double space. Papers should follow standard rules for academic apparatus including in text parenthetical citations (MLA format) and should have both a Works Cited page and a second Works Consulted page for books and articles you looked at but did not include in the paper. Footnotes are encouraged, as are the inclusion of illustrations.

**Blackboard:** Announcements and Suggested Readings will be posted. A brief summary of your presentation should be posted on Discussion Board.

**Final Grade:** Reading reports 50%, research paper: 30%, presentation 10%, class participation 10%.

**About Absences:** Students are allowed a single absence from this class and no excuse is necessary for that absence, (you are expected to hand in the reading reports and a written response to the discussion topic in the next class). However, a second absence is acceptable only if it is excused by the professor. A third absence could result in being dropped from the class. Please note that acceptable excuses for absences do not include the need to prepare for other classes.
Specific Requirements for the reading reports.

The reading report is for the primary text – such as *Gilgamesh* – and not the secondary reading – such as *Costume and Fashion*. Unless otherwise noted – please use the standard response form.

Feb. 2  
*Gilgamesh*

Note every single reference to clothing, remember to write down the page number. Watch for the uses of clothing to establish identity, mark social status, and as an apparatus for inclusion in life in the city, which in this text is praised as the locus of civilication.

If you read Genesis watch for the taboos about being seen naked

Feb. 16  
Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*

Try to summarize Barthes’ arguments

Feb. 23  
Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*

as above for Genesis, but now watch for the celebration of the body. Here think of nudity as another form of dress

March 2  
*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. Simon Armitage

as above – note every reference and include curtains and tapestries, in other words textiles. What elements are most significant and what are the general uses of clothing in this world of an imagined court in the long ago time of King Arthur. Always keep in mind that although the story is set way in the past, clothing is generally imagined – and valued – according to the writer’s own time. An interesting comparison are the paintings of the medieval/Arthurian subjects done by the 19th century pre-Raphaelites.

March 9  
Thomas More, *Utopia*

Note every reference. Consider the role that adornment and clothing play in this utopian world. Note any exceptions to the general rule. Consider what might make this possible to carry out and also what the impediments could be. Also keep in mind the lushness and social-status significance attached to clothing in the court of Henry VIII, where More served as a courtier.

March 23  
Shakespeare *As You Like It*

Note every reference in the language in one act (anyone you chose). And, of course, think about the relation between clothing and gender & class identity

March 30  
*As You Like It* - Summarize the main arguments in each of the two articles you will be asked to read.

April 6  
Zola, *The Ladies Paradise*

This can be a much more general response to issues in the novel relating to clothing & consumerism

April 13  
Valerie Steele, chapters 1, 4, 7
A general response to Steele

April 27
Hollywood Film Style – 1930s – 1940s
Sarah Berry *Screen Style*
This response does not have to follow the usual form. Keeping Berry’s ideas in mind, take one of the films and discuss the costumes in general, or in a specific scene – or the costume of one character