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Final Research Paper

One has seen throughout the years the impact historic events could have on people and on societies, but they have also done so to fashion. There have been many fashion designers in time who have changed the fashion industry in many creative and new ways over the last years, but none like Christian Dior. Although he had died unexpectedly at the peak of his fame for the exquisite work he was providing to the fashion world, in that short amount of time, he would create silhouettes that would lead to the inspiration of many more silhouettes in the future that are still being used today. For this research paper, I chose a Christian Dior evening dress, which belonged to his Spring/ summer 1954 "Muguet" Line. It is made of ivory silk satin with silk and metallic embroidery. I believe one could learn more about the social and cultural factors surrounding the dress and the moment in time when it was made and worn by the details the dress provides and by researching where the historical inspirations Dior had.

There were many major events going on in the 1950's in the United States and around the world. World War II had just ended in 1945, the Cold War which started in 1947 was still going on, and the Korean War had just begun in 1950. After the years of restraints, rationing regulations, and economizing, life after the war encouraged consumption in many areas of society. Dior helped to restore a beleaguered postwar Paris as the capital of fashion. During this time, Christian was defining the silhouette of the 1950's with his "New Look" silhouette. It featured his iconic hourglass suit with voluminous skirts with heavy pleating, nipped waists,

padded hips and soft shoulders. He had launched his very first collection which had introduced the “New Look” in 1947, which is when his reputation as one of the most important couturiers of the twentieth century came about. In 1950, Vogue wrote “Dior is the dynamic meteoric showman of Couture. In all his collections, there is something of the sensational - importantly - something that is sure to forecast a trend. The New Look, officially named the “Corolle” line, was intended to revive the lavish fashions of the 19th century and the French Belle Èpoque. It represented a return to extravagance and luxury in a time of ration cards and meagre clothing coupons. Since he had created the silhouette right after the war, there was some controversies surrounding it. People didn’t like the amount of fabric used in his circle skirts which was considered a shameful waste by those who had saved during wartime. In Britain, clothes were rationed from June 1, 1941 which limited the amount of new garments people could buy until 1949, four years after the war ended. Others thought his designs were impractical and that they were the “absolute antithesis of feminism”. Some women feared that it’s femininity would set back the progress women had made working outside the home during the war.

In the 1950’s, women returned to their traditional role as homemaker and housekeeper. The post-war economic recovery facilitated an increasingly affluent and consumerist society. This is when the “New Look” exemplified this time in history. The garment could be conveying a message that women in the 1950’s were ready to get out of the clothing that they were became very use to wearing during the war, and to find clothing that was more trendy, stylish, elegant, and classy. It could also convey that Christian Dior was willing to help women come out of the fashion they were in and design new and exciting silhouettes for women. In the 1940s, simple lines and ready-to-wear clothing dominated women’s fashion. The war impacted men and women to wear their uniforms or their clothing styles were subjected to clothing rationing and

Utility clothing. Utility clothing had adopted identical design elements as uniforms. They were simple but stylish proportion and lines, with padded shoulders, nipped in waist, and hemlines just below the knee. Women's suits tended to be boxy with rounded collars. Old but popular trends from the 1930s came back with the use of tweeds, plaids, bright colors, and patterns that would help offset utilitarian pieces. Dior produced designs that followed the feminine line by also incorporating new elements like the structured collar.

According to (Cole & Deihl, 2015) , distinctive fabric was an important part of fashion at all price levels, from the luxurious silks of couture evening gowns to bright printed cottons on simple daywear. Since this was a time evoking the luxury of the 19th century, silk brocade, warp-printed taffeta, ciselé velvet and lace were used in garment making. Evening dresses were usually made with embroidery or beading. Fabrics came from France, Switzerland, Italy, and Britain. Man-made fibers were a part of the post-war aspiration to a life made easier through technology. Polyester, the newest synthetic in 1955, had been commercially produced on both sides of the Atlantic. Color prints were seen on everything from couture gowns to mail-order house dresses. Full and wide skirts being used in fashion at the time had provided a perfect space to place interesting prints. Some of the inspiration from these prints came from contemporary art. The dress chosen as a primary source is an even dress made of silk satin, and contains silk and metallic embroidery on the outside of the dress. From looking at the picture of the dress, one could tell that a sewing machine was used to make the dress. Upon further evaluation of the embroidery on the dress, it seems that some threads of blue, brown, beige, pink, and white could have been other materials used. As for the bodice of the dress, it doesn't seem like there would have been a use of a bra cup that would've been sewn inside the dress, rather the bodice of the dress is made of thick fabric to provide comfort and structure.

The indicators we see that would tell us when the clothing made and who might have worn it could be the silhouette, design, and fabric used in the dress. Because of the historic background of 1950s fashion and the impact World War II had on it, clothing of this decade was specific to time of day and event, and it was important to be properly dressed for all occasions with the proper clothes, shoes and accessories. In 1953, Harper's Bazaar stated "It's a matter of immaculacy – of being well-turned-out, from smoothly shaped head to admirable shod toe". In this decade, the two silhouettes that were popular for day and evening wear would be a full skirt created by gores or gathers and a fitted bodice, and the other combined the same bodice shape with a narrow pencil skirt that molded to the hips. Looser styles were encouraged for the day, some evening clothes showed more of a geometric approach, and gowns became a series of architectural forms often in taffeta and stiff satins. Bubble hems were also often seen on cocktail dresses. A "modern impression" from *L'Officiel* in 1958 showed dresses for day and evening would all have hemlines at the knee and skirts that stood away from the body, ranging from A-line to bubble-shaped. Many dresses for evening featured trains or uneven hemlines that were much longer in the back. Evening and ball gowns were usually long and dramatic and were often draped with treatments that would bring to mind the 19th century. Shorter styles for evening clothing became options at the beginning of the 1950s. Social rituals of cocktail parties became important socially, thus making cocktail dresses as important to one's wardrobe. Men would arrive at cocktail parties from the office in their business clothes, while women would dress up in elaborate short dresses in dramatic fabrics, often beaded, and with elegant jewelry. One could see the trending a-line structure being incorporated in the 1954 dress for an evening dress. Floral designs had also been something that was becoming a trend in the 1950s and is also seen in the embroidery design. Dior had recurring themes of a garden in his work such as embroidered,

appliquéd, flocked, and printed flowers, and the *muguet*, or lily of the valley. The use of what could've been considered an expensive fabric at the time, which was silk, also indicates who could worn the dress. Since it is also meant to be worn in the evening, the dress could've been worn by a woman that belong to a upper class that had attending occasions at night like dinners and parties.

This fashionable clothing could tell us a lot about the moment in time when it was made and worn. Since the dress is designed by Dior, we know that Dior epitomized luxury. Dior's work had made lavish use of exquisite fabrics and embellishments which had often resembled gowns of the great fashion houses of the late 19th century which referenced the shepherdess styles of Marie Antoinette. This would've meant that he indented women at that time of the century, who had just been through years of war, to finally have a sense of luxury and style from what they were wearing. It could also tell us a lot of where the inspiration of today's fashion has been coming from. Dior's new look could be seen today in every almost every aspect of the fashion world to the way garments are popularly fitted, to the shape of evening dresses, and also to the way women feel when putting on a dress that makes them feel stylish.

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