Life and Death of the Wicked Lady Skelton

Contents

Synopsis	4
Concept	6
Research	8
Design Development	12
Final Designs	42
Costume Make	58

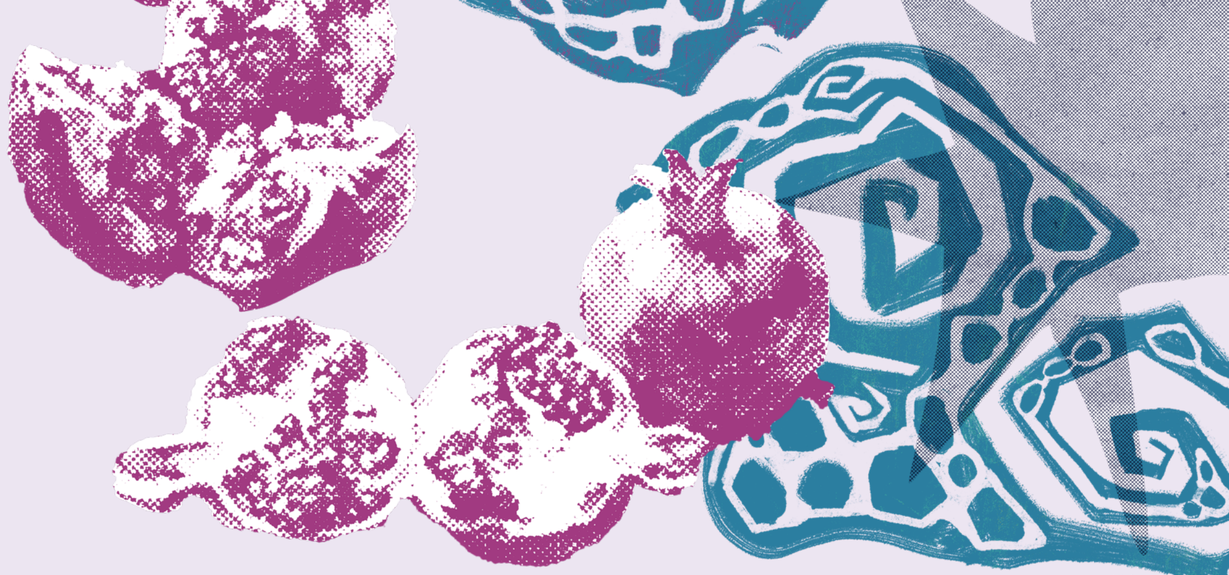
Synopsis

It is February of 1678 and Barbara Worth is soon to be Barbara Skelton; she is a young woman of beauty and intelligence who seeks thrill more so than what's acceptable for women of her time. She has made an exceptional match to the respectable, wealthy Sir Ralph Skelton, and although she doesn't actually love Sir Ralph, the prospect of getting married and delving into a new life of - what she thinks will be - splendour and prestige fascinates Barbara. But, as she is making her way down the aisle, she is met with her new fate and panics thinking how much joy will she really get out of a convenient pairing.

March 1683, 5 boring, long years into her marriage where she is stationed in the Skelton estate of Marriot Cells in Buckinghamshire. Young Lady Skelton has not taken well to the tedium of her married life at all, and despite the house being frequently open to neighbours and guests, Barbara still hasn't found a true friend among the women or a lover among the men! Barbara Skelton longs for excitement, which she knows is something that could have been in her reach had she ended up living a glamourous life in London, among the royal court. This is the life that her sister in-law, Henrietta Kingsclere doesn't hesitate to flaunt in the presence of Lady Skelton, making her all the more jealous of what could have been. On the last day of the Kingsclere family visiting the Skeltons, they are all gathered in the parlour playing cards. Barbara finds the evening to grow more and more tedious, so she decides to up the stakes, putting her precious, ruby heart necklace on the line of their card game. To Barbara's surprise she loses, and more shockingly to Henrietta of all people! Lady Skelton tells Henrietta mockingly that she hopes the thieving scoundrels on the country roads don't take it away from her. Then she thinks to herself, she's tall, has a low voice, a horse and a chest full of men's clothes in the attic, all she needs is a mask- so why doesn't she be that highwayman in question?

Barbara sets out in the night and successfully stole her ruby necklace back from Henrietta. She experienced excitement like nothing before and so began her exhilarating double life, posed as a highwayman ruling the country roads. One night, Barbara crosses paths with another wanted highwayman, 'Captain' Jerry Jackson and they become an unlikely, inseparable pair. She has not only found a lover but someone to teach her the ways of the road. Jerry Jackson hears of a couple who keep fair number of guineas in their house but those people in question are tenants of the Skelton family. Barbara must let go of her remorse and they go ahead with the plan. Sometime after the incident, Hogarth, Sir Ralph's steward confronts Barbara and reveals how he found her silk purse in the house they stole from the same evening it happened. He has since slyly paid close attention to her evening robberies with Jerry and knows everything. Hogarth proposes a deal- if Barbara agrees to never commit highway robbery again and live the rest of her life as an agreeable wife, he will send the knowledge of her crimes to his grave.

Barbara has set out a plan- she must rid of Hogarth and his knowledge of her rebellious secret. So, she secretly meets up with Jerry Jackson and informs him of the situation and states she will have to take time away from him to settle the situation. Barbara also clearly declares that she wishes for Jerry to stay loyal and wait for her return to him, and if he doesn't, she will break their ties, and his part of the secret will be revealed. After many months of slowly poisoning Hogarth all while tricking him into believing she was successfully going down the path to a new, innocent life- he dies, and the threat of anyone finding out about Barbara's secret is removed.



That same night, Lady Skelton makes her way to the Leaping Stag inn, where she and Jerry spent their time when they weren't committing heinous crime. Barbara is ecstatic to be reunited with her lover but on her arrival, she finds him with another woman, completely breaking their promise. In a fit of rage Barbara reports Jerry's whereabouts to the authorities and runs off home- hoping to never see him again. She goes back to life as normal only taking to the road occasionally. She found thrills in other aspects of life in later months and spent more time in London where men fawned over her and her self-interest and narcissism was fulfilled. On her way back to Marriot Cells, she shockingly witnesses the most recent prisoners on their way to the gallows, among them Jerry Jackson. She is shocked, although she reported the man there was a small part of her that hoped he had gotten away.

Barbara's life soon after came to end. She fell in love with another man Kit Locksby, he wasn't a highway robber nor criminal just a caring fellow who she met at a gathering at her estate. Wanting to let go of her deviant past she took to the road one last time, one more rush of rebellious excitement. Unbeknownst to her, the coach she targeted had Kit inside- making his way to see his lover, Barbara Skelton. As she said, 'Stand and deliver', one last time Kit pulled out his sword and lunged for the ruffian, completely unaware it was Barbara, and she quickly flees in hope of him not finding out her identity. She is gravely wounded and, on her way, up to her bed chamber she dies, and her family soon find her laying on the stairs in men's attire with crimson spread across her shirt and lace cravat.

"How she smiled at her own unfamiliar reflection as she dressed herself behind locked doors for the night's adventure, telling herself that she made a very pretty young man, in the long-skirted coat and breeches of dark cloth"

pg 109

Concept

Life and Death of the Wicked Lady Skelton is a book that was written by Magdalen King-Hall, published in 1944. I will be adapting it for screen.

Beginning in 1678, the story follows Barbara, who believes getting married will alleviate the mundane life she has been living up to that point. She wants to live a fashionable life, be admired and at the centre of attention and living in the country isn't doing her any favours to achieve that. Barbara Worth becomes Barbara Skelton after being wed to Sir Ralph, who is a wealthy and admirable man on paper, but after 5 painfully boring years of marriage- Lady Skelton has found out her married life is the opposite of what she imagined or needed for a thrill seeker like herself. One evening, when her insufferably perfect in-laws come to visit her and Ralph, her jealousy and ego get the better of her in a game of cards, and she loses her mother's ruby-heart necklace to Henrietta in a bet. Barbara jokingly thinks to herself how if she dressed up in men's attire, she could steal it back like the infamous highwayman Jerry Jackson roaming the country roads. So, what's stopping her? Lady Skelton has a chest full on men's attire in the attic, a horse and a mask, so she sets out to the road and successfully gets back her pendant, in the process discovering highway robbery brought her the amusement and thrill she had been missing in these tedious past 5 years. Instantly hooked, Barbara's double life as the Wicked Lady begins with her rebellious and thrill-seeking adventures posing as a highwayman during the nights. She ends up stumbling upon Jerry Jackson and fellow highwayman and they become partners in crime until it leads to Barbara's inevitable demise.

Life and Death of the Wicked Lady Skelton explores the idea of rejecting the conventional image of femininity and challenging stereotypes which to its original audience of women in the 1940s, was inspiring and refreshing, especially after women wore men's clothes and took on men's roles and jobs during the second world war. Having a female lead character that defied the norms and showed a strong sense of defiance was and is admired. In Barbara's own twisted way, she asserts her independence and goes through her own version of womanhood and this feeling is something I want to emit through the design of the production.

I want to stay true to the silhouettes of early 1680s English fashion which the bulk of the story takes place in, but I really want to emphasise the melodramatic nature of the story, exaggerating shapes and involving bold textiles and colours to creating a striking cast of characters with costumes that reflect their bold nature, and extravagance that they bring to the story. I am inspired new wave romanticism of the 1980s and the eccentric and flamboyant aesthetic of the subculture alongside the shameless exploration of androgyny which aligns withs the novels' themes. I think combining aspects of this contemporary subculture in combination with silhouettes of the late 17th century will help bring out the audacious, over the top and daring nature to the production. In terms of print and motifs for each character I intend to stray from entirely authentic styles of pattern from the 17th century. Print will be an opportunity to involve imagery in relation to each character's personal themes in a way that isnt entirely historically accurate while still being part of an ensemble that is still recognisable as evoking the late 17th century overall.

Research

1680s fashion

Women's fashion in the 1680s featured structured silhouettes and luxurious fabrics. The mantua, a flowing gown with a full skirt, was commonly made from rich silk brocades, draped elegantly over layers of petticoats to create volume. Bodices were tightly fitted, emphasizing the waist, often fastened over intricately embroidered stomachers. Sleeves, cut to the elbow, framed lace-trimmed chemise cuffs, adding refinement to the outfit. Heavy fabrics like velvet and satin were widely used, with metallic embroidery enhancing the opulence. Long, trailing skirts contributed to the grandeur of the style.
Accessories such as lace, ribbons, and structured stays helped shape the fashionable silhouette, ensuring a polished and sophisticated look. Wide, decorative cuffs and elaborate embellishments completed the ensemble, making every detail an essential part of the overall aesthetic.

Men's fashion in the 1680s was marked by structured tailoring and rich fabrics. The justaucorps, a long, fitted coat, became dominant outerwear, often adorned with decorative buttons and deep cuffs. Beneath it, men wore a waistcoat, sometimes embroidered, adding layers. Breeches were snug at the knee, fastened with buttons or ties, and paired with stockings. Shirts featured wide lace-trimmed cuffs and were worn with a cravat, replacing ruffled collars.
Fabrics like velvet, brocade, and silk were popular in deep colors. Accessories included gloves, decorative sword belts, and ornate shoe buckles. Clothing was tailored to create a refined silhouette. Higher-status individuals incorporated embroidery and metallic embellishments, emphasizing wealth and sophistication. The combination of luxurious fabrics, structured tailoring, and accessories created a polished, stylish look.

Design Development

Barbara Skelton

Highwaywoman Outfit

Barbara Skelton is freshly married to Ralph Skelton where they both live in their country manor ‘Marriot Cells” in Maiden Worthy, Buckinghamshire. She is a young woman with a sharp and thrill-seeking personality, in contrast to her bland husband Ralph who completely bores her, so Barbara’s view on marriage has turned from excitement to disappointment. After losing her precious necklace to a bet, Barbara turned to highway robbery to get it back but in the midst of that she discovered the thrill that comes with her alter ego is what she has been missing this whole time. After meeting a fellow highwayman, Jerry Jackson, they become lovers and spend the nights between prowling the country roads and at the infamous ‘Leaping Stag’ inn.

Barbara’s highwayman alter ego will be a bold combination of men’s silhouettes of the 17th century with a feminine touch, shown through textiles and apporaches to pattern typically seen in womenswear of the time with a contemporary twist. I want to explore symbols of womanhood within Barbara’s pattern development, looking at visuals such a pomegranates which have a wide range of symbolism such as life, death, womanhood and blood which I think reflects Barbara’s ostentatious and ruthless personality. I want her highwayman attire to include embelishment that feels jewel-like and adorn excessive amounts of accessories to make homage to the relentless theft she commits on the country roads of Buckinghamshire.

Jerry Jackson

Captain Jerry Jackson is an infamous highway robber who has been roaming the country roads of Buckinghamshire for many years and is the most wanted criminal in the county.

Captain Jerry Jackson's costume will be one of the more rebellious outfits of the cast of characters, contrasting more modest outfits seen in the day outfits of Barbara's family and housekeepers. Out of the rest of the cast, Jerry will show the strongest similarities to fashion of the New Romantics to help show this stark contrast to his infamous and shocking persona. For Jerry's highway outfit, I'm interested how I can use bugs and insects in his pattern and print, so from afar the motifs seem normal but up-close the shapes will be made-up of insects to add a gruesome and disturbing feeling to his costume to reflect his crimes. (inspire by the image in the top right corner with the ant beading). To reflect the boldness and confidence of his character, I want to put emphasis on a saturated rich colour palette to build on Jerry Jackson's strong presence.

too modest?

Barbara Skelton

Day Outifit

Barbara Skelton is freshly married to Ralph Skelton where they both live in their country manor 'Marriot Cells" in Maiden Worthy, Buckinghamshire. She is a young woman with a sharp and thrill-seeking personality, in contrast to her bland husband Ralph who completely bores her so Barbara view on marriage has turned from excitement the disappointment. After losing her precious necklace to a bet, Barbara turned to highway robbery to get it back but in the midst of that she discovered the thrill that comes with her alter ego is what she has been missing this whole time. After meeting a fellow highwayman, Jerry Jackson, they become lovers and spend the nights between prowling the country roads and at the infamous 'Leaping Stag' inn.

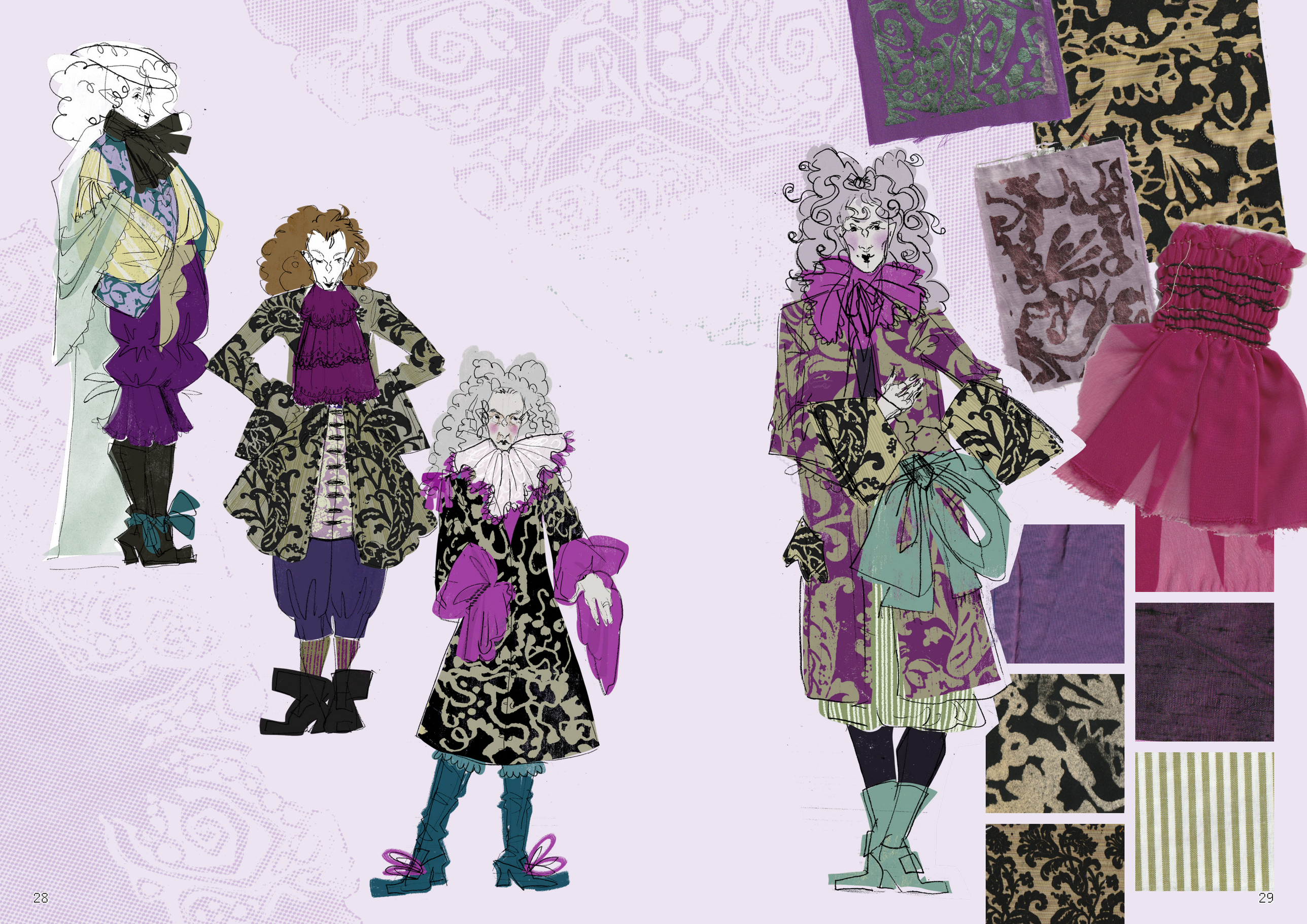
Barbara's highwayman alter ego will be a bold combination of men's silhouettes of the 17th century with a feminine touch, shown through textiles and apporaches to pattern typically seen in womenswear of the time with a contemporary twist. I want to explore symbols of womanhood within Barbara's pattern development, looking at visuals such a pomegranates which have a wide range of symbolism such as life, death, womanhood and blood which I think reflects Barbara's ostentatious and ruthless personality. I want her highwayman attire to include embelishment that feels jewel-like and adorn excessive amounts of accessories to make homage to the relentless theft she commits on the country roads of Buckinghamshire.

mens shirt
under bodice
instead of
a womens
shift
more
androgynous/
rebellious

Ralph Skelton

Barbara Skelton is freshly married to Ralph Skelton where they both live in their country manor 'Marriot Cells" in Maiden Worthy, Buckinghamshire. She is a young woman with a sharp and thrill-seeking personality, in contrast to her bland husband Ralph who completely bores her so Barbara view on marriage has turned from excitement the disappointment. After losing her precious necklace to a bet, Barbara turned to highway robbery to get it back but in the midst of that she discovered the thrill that comes with her alter ego is what she has been missing this whole time. After meeting a fellow highwayman, Jerry Jackson, they become lovers and spend the nights between prowling the country roads and at the infamous 'Leaping Stag' inn.

Barbara's highwayman alter ego will be a bold combination of men's silhouettes of the 17th century with a feminine touch, shown through textiles and apporaches to pattern typically seen in womenswear of the time with a contemporary twist. I want to explore symbols of womanhood within Barbara's pattern development, looking at visuals such a pomegranates which have a wide range of symbolism such as life, death, womanhood and blood which I think reflects Barbara's ostentatious and ruthless personality. I want her highwayman attire to include embelishment that feels jewel-like and adorn excessive amounts of accessories to make homage to the relentless theft she commits on the country roads of Buckinghamshire.



Henrietta Kinsclere

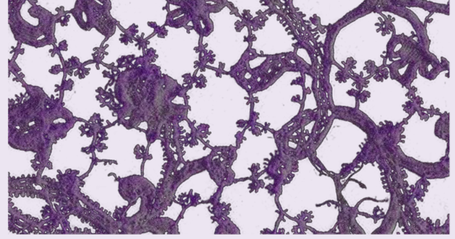
Barbara Skelton is freshly married to Ralph Skelton where they both live in their country manor 'Marriot Cells" in Maiden Worthy, Buckinghamshire. She is a young woman with a sharp and thrill-seeking personality, in contrast to her bland husband Ralph who completely bores her so Barbara view on marriage has turned from excitement the disappointment. After losing her precious necklace to a bet, Barbara turned to highway robbery to get it back but in the midst of that she discovered the thrill that comes with her alter ego is what she has been missing this whole time. After meeting a fellow highwayman, Jerry Jackson, they become lovers and spend the nights between prowling the country roads and at the infamous 'Leaping Stag' inn.

Barbara's highwayman alter ego will be a bold combination of men's silhouettes of the 17th century with a feminine touch, shown through textiles and apporaches to pattern typically seen in womenswear of the time with a contemporary twist. I want to explore symbols of womanhood within Barbara's pattern development, looking at visuals such a pomegranates which have a wide range of symbolism such as life, death, womanhood and blood which I think reflects Barbara's ostentatious and ruthless personality. I want her highwayman attire to include embelishment that feels jewel-like and adorn excessive amounts of accessories to make homage to the relentless theft she commits on the country roads of Buckinghamshire.

Espgarth

Barbara Skelton is freshly married to Ralph Skelton where they both live in their country manor ‘Marriot Cells” in Maiden Worthy, Buckinghamshire. She is a young woman with a sharp and thrill-seeking personality, in contrast to her bland husband Ralph who completely bores her so Barbara view on marriage has turned from excitement the disappointment. After losing her precious necklace to a bet, Barbara turned to highway robbery to get it back but in the midst of that she discovered the thrill that comes with her alter ego is what she has been missing this whole time. After meeting a fellow highwayman, Jerry Jackson, they become lovers and spend the nights between prowling the country roads and at the infamous ‘Leaping Stag’ inn.

Barbara’s highwayman alter ego will be a bold combination of men’s silhouettes of the 17th century with a feminine touch, shown through textiles and apporaches to pattern typically seen in womenswear of the time with a contemporary twist. I want to explore symbols of womanhood within Barbara’s pattern development, looking at visuals such a pomegranates which have a wide range of symbolism such as life, death, womanhood and blood which I think reflects Barbara’s ostentatious and ruthless personality. I want her highwayman attire to include embelishment that feels jewel-like and adorn excessive amounts of accessories to make homage to the relentless theft she commits on the country roads of Buckinghamshire.

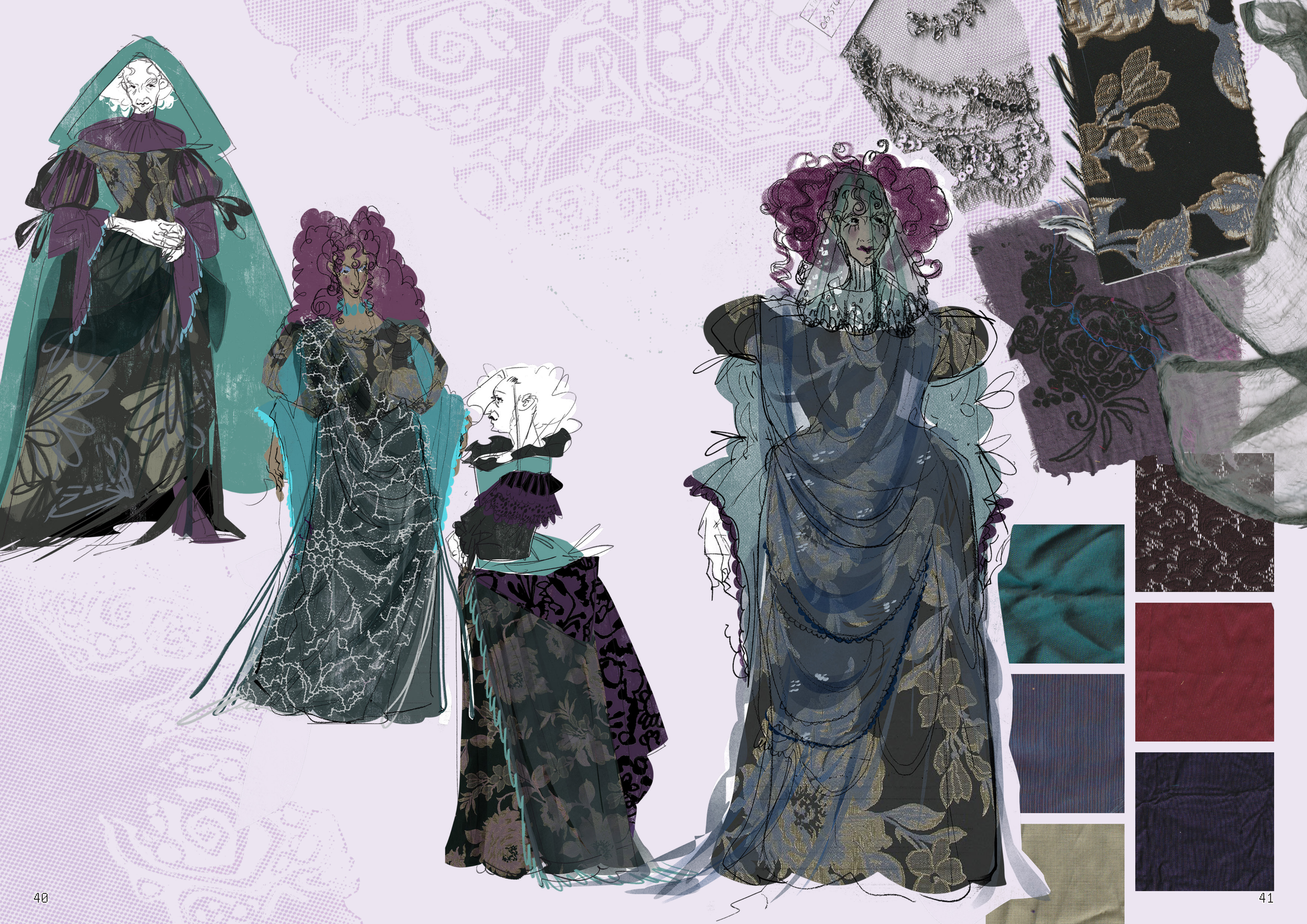


ID: WIM/5440/103
Composition: 56% Cotton 44% Polyester
Price: £8.00

Mrs. Man Munce

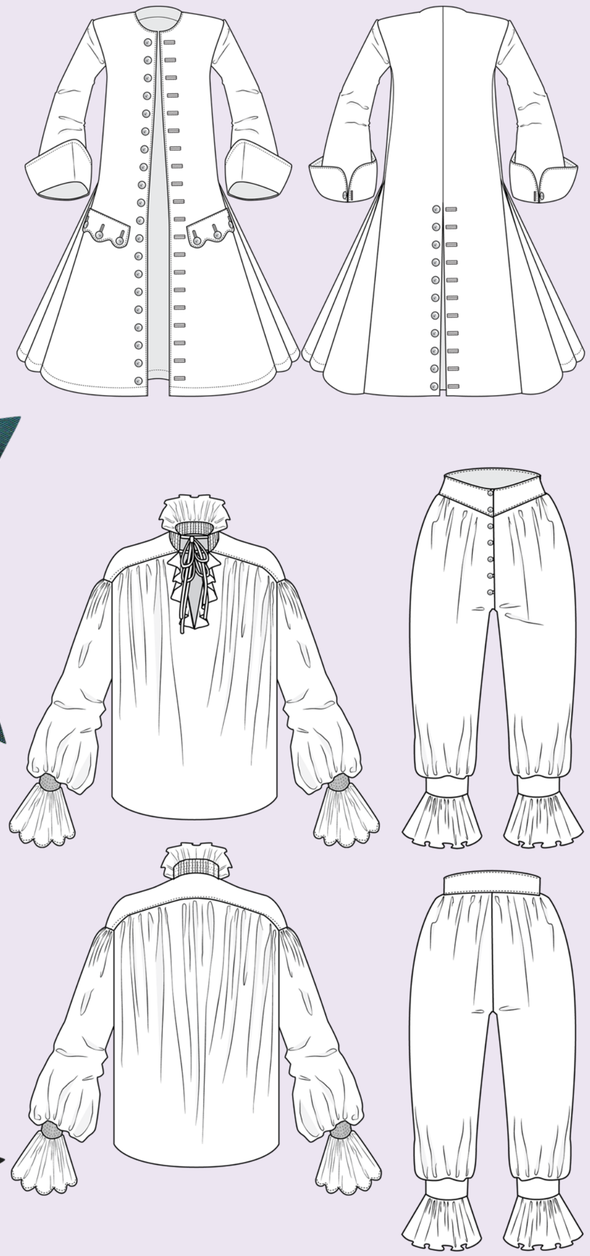
Barbara Skelton is freshly married to Ralph Skelton where they both live in their country manor ‘Marriot Cells” in Maiden Worthy, Buckinghamshire. She is a young woman with a sharp and thrill-seeking personality, in contrast to her bland husband Ralph who completely bores her so Barbara view on marriage has turned from excitement the disappointment. After losing her precious necklace to a bet, Barbara turned to highway robbery to get it back but in the midst of that she discovered the thrill that comes with her alter ego is what she has been missing this whole time. After meeting a fellow highwayman, Jerry Jackson, they become lovers and spend the nights between prowling the country roads and at the infamous ‘Leaping Stag’ inn.

Barbara’s highwayman alter ego will be a bold combination of men’s silhouettes of the 17th century with a feminine touch, shown through textiles and apporaches to pattern typically seen in womenswear of the time with a contemporary twist. I want to explore symbols of womanhood within Barbara’s pattern development, looking at visuals such a pomegranates which have a wide range of symbolism such as life, death, womanhood and blood which I think reflects Barbara’s ostentatious and ruthless personality. I want her highwayman attire to include embelishment that feels jewel-like and adorn excessive amounts of accessories to make homage to the relentless theft she commits on the country roads of Buckinghamshire.

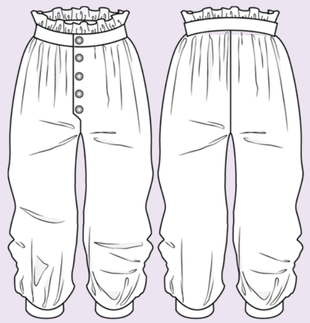


Final Designs

Barbara Skelton

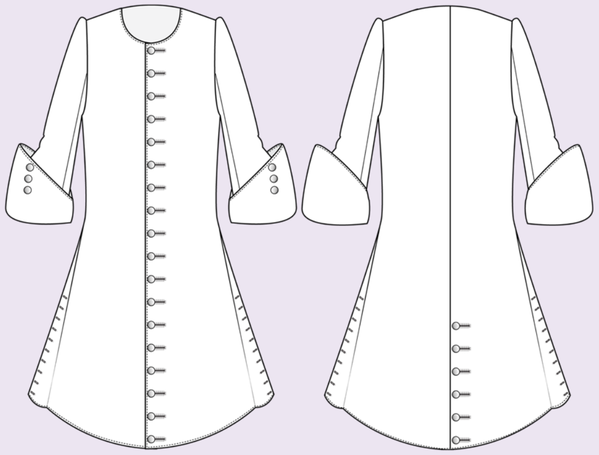


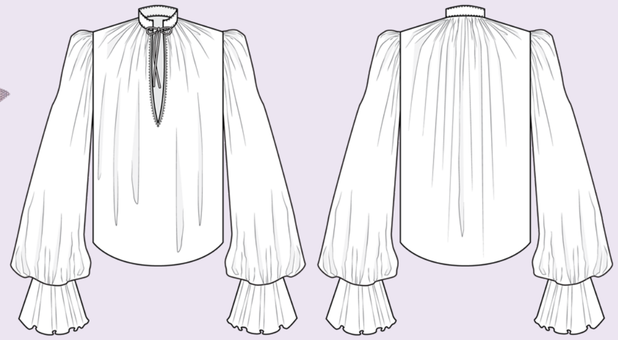
Jerry Jackson

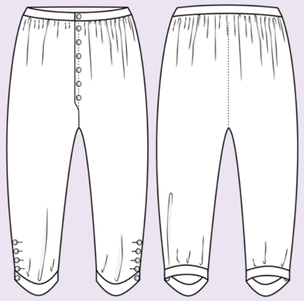


Barbara Skelton

Ralph Skelton

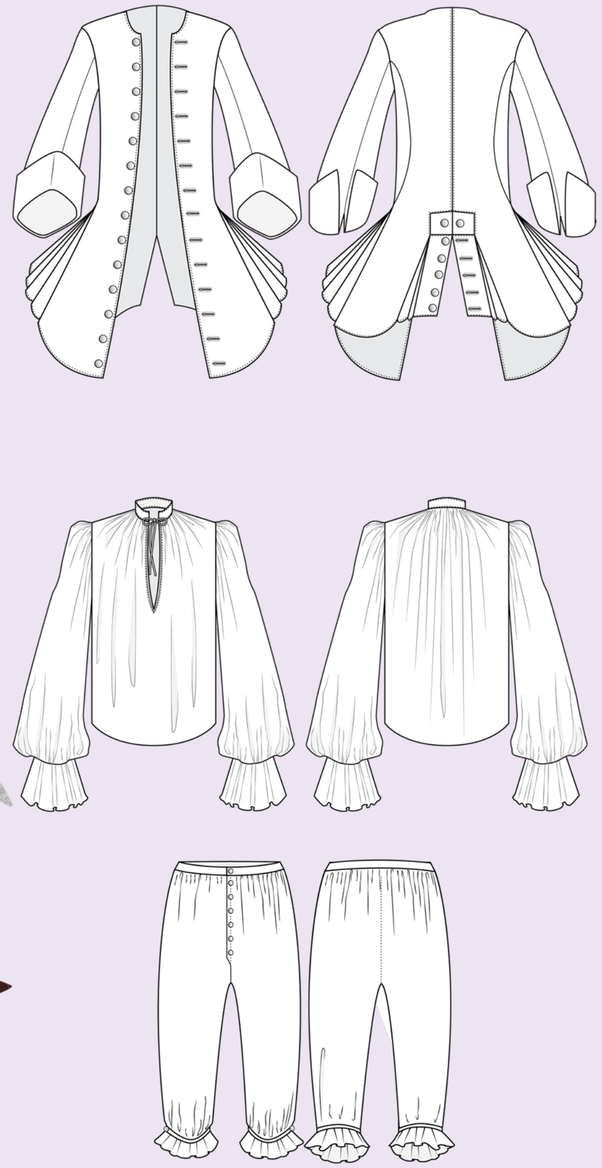




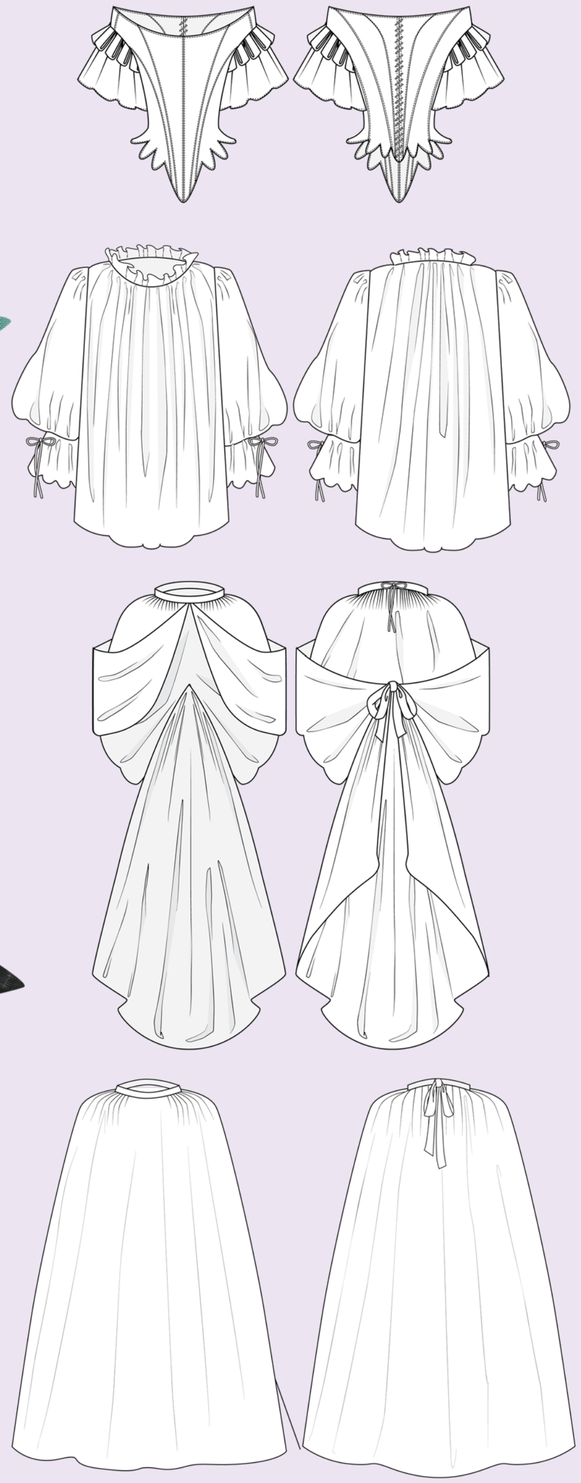


Henrietta Kingsclere

Hogarth



Mrs Nan Munce



Costume Make

- Barbara Skelton (Highwayman outfit)

The End

By Faye Grant