

# *Clothing Culture, 1350–1650*

Edited by  
CATHERINE RICHARDSON



THE HISTORY OF RETAILING AND CONSUMPTION



## CLOTHING CULTURE, 1350–1650

For A.D, fond memories and all love  
17.6.1929 - 21.1.2004

‘And the eyes of them both were opened, & they knew that they *were* naked, and they sewed figge leaues together, and made themselues aprons. And they heard the voyce of the LORD God, walking in the garden in the coole of the day : and Adam and his wife hid themselues from the presence of the LORD God, amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called vnto Adam, and said vnto him, Where *art* thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden : and I was afraid, because I *was* naked, and I hid my selfe. And he said, Who told thee, that thou *wast* naked?’

‘Vnto Adam also, and to his wife, did the LORD God make coates of skinnes, and cloathed them ... So he droue out the man : and he placed at the East of the garden of Eden, Cherubims, and a flaming sword, which turned euery way, to keepe the way of the tree of life.’

A place to begin, Genesis, Chapter 3, verses 7-11, 21, 24,  
*King James Bible*, 1611



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# The History of Retailing and Consumption

## General Editor's Preface

It is increasingly recognised that retail systems and changes in the patterns of consumption play crucial roles in the development and societal structure of economies. Such recognition has led to renewed interest in the changing nature of retail distribution and the rise of consumer society from a wide range of academic disciplines. The aim of this multidisciplinary series is to provide a forum of publications that explore the history of retailing and consumption.

*Gareth Shaw*

*University of Exeter, UK*

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This book has its origins in a conference about Clothing Culture, and the input of both contributors and audience has had an effect upon its eventual shape. The Canterbury Centre for Medieval and Tudor Studies at the University of Kent hosted the conference, and special thanks are due to Lesley Brown for her help with the organisation, and to Andrew Butcher for encouraging me to hold it and, as always, for asking all the right questions. Since then, several of the articles have been given as conference papers in a strand on material culture organised by Cathy Shrank and Phil Withington at the Renaissance Studies Conference in Bristol in September 2003. Our thanks to them because, in addition to being a very enjoyable experience, it gave us a chance to think again about the interdisciplinary nature of our contributions.

The History Department at the University of Birmingham has given generous support to the 'Clothing, Culture and Identity in Early Modern England' project with which Graeme Murdock and I are involved, and this has provided an inspiring environment in which to produce the volume. Peter Holland, now at Notre Dame, and Martin Wiggins at the Shakespeare Institute have also been offered continual encouragement. At times the editorial process has been a frustrating one. Tom Gray and Anne Keirby at Ashgate have helped a great deal, as has the considerable patience of the contributors. This book has been with me through some fairly dramatic changes over the past couple of years, and has contributed in its own way to the troubles and joys which they have brought. I feel very fortunate to have been working on it in supportive professional and personal environments, amongst colleagues and dear friends, and it remains to thank them for their kindness, generosity and inexhaustible sense of humour.

# List of Abbreviations

BL	British Library
CCA	Canterbury Cathedral Archives
CKS	Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone
EETS	Early English Text Society
<i>ELR</i>	<i>English Literary Renaissance</i>
MED	<i>The Middle English Dictionary</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
SA	Society of Antiquaries

# Chapter One

## Introduction

Catherine Richardson

Certainly, such as delight in gorgeous apparel, are commonly puffed up with pride, and filled with divers vanities. So were the daughters of Sion and people of Jerusalem whom Esay the Prophet threateneth, because they walked with stretched-out necks and wandering eyes, mincing as they went, and nicely treading with their feet, that Almighty God would make their heads bald, and discover their secret shame. *In that day, saith he, shall the Lord take away the ornament of the slippers, and the caules, and the round attires, and the sweet balls, and the bracelets, and the attires of the head, and the slops, and the head-bands, and the tablets, and the earrings, the rings, and the mufflers, the costly apparel, and the veils, and wimples, and the crisping-pin, and the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the lawns.*

An Homily Against Excess of Apparel<sup>1</sup>

This series of essays investigates the uneasy relationship between the discourses of control and excess, regulation and sensual abandon, in which clothing was figured in the medieval and early modern periods. Between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, sumptuary legislation repeatedly attempted to define the proper and fitting way in which clothing should demarcate social status, thereby representing dress as a crucial tool in the delineation of social order. Simultaneously, however, moralists decried the sins of pride and vanity which were daily flaunted upon the body by those who, unwisely following the Biblical precedent discussed in the homily, ‘walked with stretched out neckes and wandering eyes, mincing as they went, and nicely treading with their feet’. In social, economic, political and religious terms, the years 1350–1650 were ones of enormous change. Nevertheless, although the precise nature of sumptuary preoccupations altered, there remained an

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<sup>1</sup> *Certain Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory*, London: S.P.C.K., 1851, p. 328.

enduring interest in the significance of what people wore which often seems to have bordered on obsession.<sup>2</sup>

*Clothing Culture* begins from the premise that a society which could anticipate the sudden and potent intervention of a God who will discover ‘secret shames’ through the removal of a range of ornament as generalised as ‘costly apparel’, and as precise as ‘crisping pins’, took clothing considerably more seriously than its more recent commentators. Lipovetsky opens his consideration of the meaning of fashion within society by stating that, ‘The question of fashion is not a fashionable one among intellectuals’<sup>3</sup> and, in 1984, Margaret Spufford recalled that,

... at a recent European conference on the use of probate inventories, it was agreed that of the four basic needs of the human species for procreation, nutrition, shelter and clothing, historical research has concentrated only on procreation and nutrition, while shelter and clothing have gone relatively unexplored. Clothing has received even less attention than shelter.<sup>4</sup>

Historians of the period, however, have not been quick to take up her implicit challenge. In common with domestic life, clothing has developed firm connections with practices, behaviours, and interests pejoratively gendered ‘female’, and therefore not a fitting subject of historical enquiry. In addition, clothing has been and continues to be embroiled in highly moralised debates. As the opening quote suggests, attitudes to medieval and early modern clothing were coloured by its connection to the sins of pride, lust, and other sensual indulgences. Today, a high-profile high fashion market attracts negative comment for the conspicuousness of its consumption, the vacuity of its contribution to culture, its dislocation from the

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<sup>2</sup> For an investigation of the relationship between continuity and change in material culture across the medieval and early modern divide see, for example, Frans Verhaeghe (1997) ‘The Archaeology of Transition: a continental view’ in David Gaimster and Paul Stamper eds, *The Age of Transition, the archaeology of English culture 1400–1600*, The Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 15, Oxford: Oxbow Books, where he lists ‘new phenomena and social, socio-economic or socio-cultural frameworks, among them the flowering of Humanism, the emergence of Protestantism, the advent of new forms of art, the changing socio-economic environment, the decline of feudalism and the growth of capitalism, the emergence of states, the spread of printing, the arrival of new commodities’ as important elements of cultural change, p. 27. See also the third section of this introduction.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky (1994), *The Empire of Fashion: dressing modern democracy*, trans., Catherine Porter, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Spufford (1984), *The great re-clothing of rural England: petty chapmen and their wares in the seventeenth century*, London: Hambledon, p. 105.



lived experience of the majority, its traffic in sexuality and sexual stereotypes, and its promotion of gendered body images which are, like the garments themselves, at one aspirational remove from reality. It is perhaps partly this context of moralised attacks on the contemporary clothing industry which makes historians wary of considering dress a fitting subject for serious study of the past.

In medieval and early modern society, however, production and consumption were themselves essentially moralised areas, embroiled in ethical notions of 'honesty'. Wrightson identifies the position of economic activity within the categories of medieval moral philosophy, where it 'was treated not as a phenomenon to be analysed in its own terms, but rather as a branch of personal and social morality'.<sup>5</sup> While striving to maintain one's household was commendable, the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself was still uncomfortably connected to concepts of covetousness and avarice in the early modern period. This contemporary discomfort about the moralisation of financial and aesthetic choices should centralise, rather than marginalize, the scholarly attention paid to the study of a clothing culture imbedded within it.

The overlap between individuals' economically productive capacities and the earth-bound sins of consumption was also mirrored, in the matter of clothing, in the centrality of the cloth trade to the national balance of payments. Cloth was a vital component of domestic production and international trade for many countries 1350–1650 and beyond. Woollen cloth represented around two-thirds of English exports in 1500, rising to a peak in 1549–50. Despite the demise of the broadcloth industry in the mid sixteenth century, the final quarter of the century saw the development of new markets for the mockadoes and perpetuanas of the New Draperies, for Spanish reds, and fustians.<sup>6</sup> For some historians, the late fifteenth-century movement of the textile trades to the countryside, and their increasing organisation on the 'putting out' or 'domestic' systems, were the seeds which would blossom into a capitalist-organised, market-orientated economy. In any case, it was with domestic cloth that the merchants of Elizabeth's reign traded for the luxury textiles of the rest of the world. While it was the desire for clothing itself which motivated import markets and domestic productions, however, it is the nature of those markets and the control of their commodities which have received the overwhelming majority of scholarly attention: tailors' raw materials have been investigated in a detail which overwhelms our conception of their finished products.

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<sup>5</sup> Keith Wrightson (2000), *Earthly necessities: economic lives in early modern Britain*, London: Penguin, p. 149.

<sup>6</sup> N.B. Harte ed. (1997), *The New Draperies in the Low Countries and England 1300–1800*, Pasold Research Fund, Oxford University Press.

## Writing about Cloth and Clothing

This volume represents a contribution to the formation of medieval and early modern clothed experience as a topic in its own right. Many of its contributors do not work exclusively on dress. Their research interests stretch from international Calvinism to gendered ritual practices, and the academic departments within which they conduct that research are as diverse as Anthropology and Art History. The resulting set of perspectives on the topic gives access to the various historical debates in which clothing is important in pre-modern society, and to the diverse ways in which different kinds of scholars account for and assess such evidence. The contributors share a conception of dress as a material form and a sensitivity to the connections between garments and their wearers. This situates the approach taken here within developments in the study of dress which need to be briefly outlined.

Scholarship of the previous century has made it possible to situate the consumption of clothing in relation to the more traditional historical subject of the production of cloth. Its role in European internal and overseas markets has been fully detailed in a wealth of historical works.<sup>7</sup> Historians have also traced local involvement in clothmaking processes in an effort to explore the everyday life of clothmakers, and the relationship between their production and consumption in the marketplace.<sup>8</sup> Individual guilds and companies which dealt in cloth have been investigated in relation to urban trading networks;<sup>9</sup> and the development of

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<sup>7</sup> Useful summaries include David Jenkins (2003), *Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Harte and Ponting eds (1983), *Cloth and Clothing in Medieval Europe*, London: Heinemann Educational; R. Davis (1973), *English Overseas Trade, 1500–1700*, London: Macmillan; Wolf-Rudiger Baumann (1990), *The Merchants Adventurers And The Continental Cloth-Trade, 1560s–1620s*, Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter. See also information about overseas trade in individual town studies, e.g. D.M. Palliser (1979), *Tudor York*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; David Harris Sacks (1991), *The Widening Gate, Bristol and the Atlantic Economy 1450–1700*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Michael Zell, *Industry in the countryside: Wealden society in the sixteenth century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Ronald M. Berger (1993), *The Most Necessary Luxuries, The Mercers' Company of Coventry*, Penn State Press; Elspeth M. Veale (1966), *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, Oxford: Clarendon Press for the role of the Worshipful Company of Skinners; A.H. Johnson (1914–1922), *The history of the Worshipful Company of the Drapers of London*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

different methods of marketing cloth and clothing, from chapmen to fairs and shopkeepers has been examined.<sup>10</sup>

The history of clothing itself has seen a relatively recent explosion of methods and approaches. More ‘traditional’ histories of dress catalogue changes in cut, cloth and the construction of clothing across the period.<sup>11</sup> Focusing on the materiality of actual garments, either as preserved or excavated artefacts or as manuscript illuminations, portraits or sculptural representations, this work makes it possible to date items accurately, and hence to relate them to a specific historical context. In addition it often stresses the subtle differences between individual garments in which personal choices are made manifest and, at its best, displays the dynamics of the relationship between garments and bodies.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview of this literature see Berger (1993), ch.1; Spufford (1984); Margaret T. Hodgen (1942), ‘Fairs of Elizabethan England’, *Economic Geography* Vol.18, No. 4 Oct, 389–400; Samantha Letters (2000), *Gazetteer of markets and fairs in England and Wales to 1516*, London: CMH; Dorothy Davis (1966), *A History of Shopping*, London & Toronto: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Derek Keene (1990), ‘Shops and shopping in medieval London’, in L.M. Grant ed., *Medieval art, architecture and archaeology in London*, London: British Archaeological Association, 29–46; Christopher Dyer (1989), ‘The consumer and the market in the later Middle Ages’, *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 42, 305–27.

<sup>11</sup> Representative examples include, for general surveys, Jane Ashelford (1988), *Dress in the Age of Elizabeth I*, London: Batsford; CW & PE Cunnington and Charles Beard (1960), *A Dictionary of English Costume: 900–1900*, London: Adam & Charles Black; CW & P Cunnington (1962), *Handbook of English Costume in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Faber & Faber, see also their volumes on medieval and seventeenth century dress. The following examine garments and their construction: Janet Arnold (1985), *Patterns of Fashion: The Cut and Construction of Clothes for Men and Women 1560–1620*, London: Macmillan; V&A Museum (1998), *Historical Fashion in Detail: The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries*; Norah Waugh (1964), *The cut of men’s clothes: 1600–1914*, London: Faber and Faber, and (1968), *The cut of women’s clothes 1600–1930*, London: Faber and Faber; Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland (1992), *Textiles and Clothing 1150–1450, Medieval finds from excavations in London 4*, The Boydell Press for the Museum of London. For a contemporary source see Juan de Alcega (1979), *Tailor’s Pattern Book 1589*, trans. J. Pain and C. Bainton, Carlton, Bedford: Ruth Bean. For painted representations of clothes see Aileen Ribeiro (2000), *The Gallery of Fashion*, National Portrait Gallery Publications; Anne Hollander (2002), *Fabrics of Vision, dress and drapery in painting*, National Gallery Company.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the disciplinary divisions between dress historians and economic, social and cultural historians, and the potential for fruitful collaboration, see Lou Taylor (2002), *The Study of Dress History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. For an example see Désirée G. Koslin and Janet E. Snyder eds (2002), *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress - objects, texts, images*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Clothing histories have also begun to develop in different directions. In 1998, John Styles said, ‘No longer is it possible to sustain a history of dress that considers its principal tasks to be those of establishing the time line of high fashion, or the chronology of changes in the construction of clothing. Questions of meanings and interpretation now dominate the intellectual agenda.’<sup>13</sup> Such questions have been addressed in new types of histories of dress which are sensitive to the disparities between representation and experience, and which immerse clothing fully in its context of ideological, social and economic change.<sup>14</sup> Historians investigating, for instance, the social reception of religious ideas, gender identity or social status, have also begun to see the value of the evidence of clothing consumption.<sup>15</sup> Literary scholars have become interested in the conceptual and metaphorical significance of clothing and its related practices, an interest which springs partly from their awareness of the significance of theatrical costume in the construction of roles within the theatre.<sup>16</sup> These works have begun to attend to the social and cultural meanings of clothing as a material form which is linked to the development of identity, and whose study must therefore bridge conventional academic disciplines. Exemplary here is *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, which explores the changing relationships between memory, personal identity and social forms through source material which includes ‘literary texts, paintings, textiles, [and] theatrical documents’, tracing the role of dress as a site at which society can ‘think through’ important issues.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Fashion Theory*, vol.2, issue 4, 1998, 387.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Breward (1995), *The Culture of Fashion*, Manchester University Press; Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane (1997), *Dress in the Middle Ages*, Yale; Caroline Collier Frick (2002), *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Hunt (1996), *Governance of the Consuming Passions*, New York: St. Martin’s Press; Christopher Dyer (1990), *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; John Harvey (1995), *Men in Black*, London: Reaktion Books; David Kuchta (1993), ‘The Semiotics of Masculinity in Renaissance England’ in James Grantham Turner ed., *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Berg’s *Fashion Theory, the journal of dress, body and culture*, has made a significant contribution to the history of clothing culture, although it does tend to focus on later periods.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Jean MacIntyre (1992), *Costumes and Scripts in the Elizabethan Theatres*, University of Alberta Press; Valerie R. Hotchkiss (1996), *Clothes Make the Man, female cross-dressing in medieval Europe*, New York and London: Garland Publishing; Laura Levine (1994), *Men in Women’s Clothing, Anti-theatricality and effeminization, 1579–1642*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass (2000), *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Susan Crane (2002), *The*

Theories and methods for the study of modern fashion systems are increasingly well developed along just such interdisciplinary lines. Christopher Breward's article for an edition of *Fashion Theory* dedicated to the diverse approaches taken to the history of dress and fashion ties this change of emphasis to the development of the New Art History and Design History.<sup>18</sup> The former, 'which drew on ideas from Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis and structuralism or semiotics, encouraged a fresh prominence for debates incorporating problems of social identity, the body, gender and appearance or representation', and the latter concentrated on the 'relationship between production, consumption and the designed artefact'.<sup>19</sup> Breward sees cultural studies' main contribution to dress studies as its insistence upon the study of objects as systems, which facilitate an examination of 'the social specificity of representations and their meaning across different cultural practices'. This focus on systems of objects is potentially very significant for a largely pre-literate culture in which material culture was used to articulate a vast range of meanings. In practice, however, this type of analysis has often focused on an integrated fashion system, organised on a global scale within a mass-media culture. It is necessary to temper such an approach with a sensitivity to the particular functions of clothing in pre-modern societies.

Anthropology offers methods and insights which are in many ways appropriate to such societies. Recent work has focused on the category of the material through the social processes by which it is structured.<sup>20</sup> It has attempted to rediscover 'the phenomenological and somatic effects of material culture beyond textuality', in order to 'reach' those groups within society which leave little textual trace, but whose physical imprint is left in the marks of wear on the objects they owned and used.<sup>21</sup> This sense of pragmatism and attention to daily life in relation to social groups without access to the written word is particularly pertinent to the study of medieval and early modern society, of course. Patriarchal organisation created an administration, an education 'system', and an aesthetic field which privileged elite men to a significant degree. Although accessing the practices of the non-elite and women is not simply or unproblematically achieved through any type of source, the study of material culture offers an important complementary perspective to the analysis of written material.

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*Performance of Self, Ritual, Clothing and Identity During the Hundred Years War*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>18</sup> *Fashion Theory*, vol.2, issue 4, 1998, esp. Anthea Jarvis, 'Introduction'.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, A. Weiner, and J. Schneider eds (1989), *Cloth and Human Experience*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press; Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher (1992), *Dress and Gender, making and meaning in cultural contexts*, Oxford: Berg.

<sup>21</sup> Victor Buchli (2002), *The Material Culture Reader*, Oxford: Berg, p. 9.

In particular, perhaps, it is the attention paid by anthropologists to the relationships between objects and individuals, and the circulation of items within specific social contexts, which has particular significance for medieval and early modern societies. Janet Hoskins has argued for the importance of objects in subjects' attempts to articulate their own identities. Highlighting the way possessions are used to produce personal narratives, her work draws attention to the heightened significance of objects within non-literate societies.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the essays in *The Social Life of Things* investigate the intersections of economic and affective value, and focus upon 'things-in-motion', on transfer of ownership as a moment at which the social contexts which give objects meaning are clarified. Kopytoff's essay advocates the production of biographies for things, insisting on the importance of following individual objects through their various contexts of commoditization and singularity: the moments at which they are given an economic value and the times at which they are reserved from the marketplace.<sup>23</sup>

The essays in this volume share several basic assumptions with such views of material culture. First, that materiality is a socially-produced 'reality', rather than an empirical one, and that the terms in which it is fashioned are productive of 'various forms of social inclusion and exclusion'.<sup>24</sup> Second, that identities and subjectivities were mediated and constructed through material objects in the medieval and early modern periods; and third that the languages (visual and linguistic) in which individuals describe and represent the world around them construct the meaning of the material, organising and mediating our understanding of reality.

Clothing, however, functions as a particular aspect of the material, with its own circumscription and particular qualities. It is the supremely material form of material culture - and that is not merely a play on words because it is the quality of fabric and cut, the intrinsically tangible properties of the garment, which are the grounds of (often contested) meaning in this period. The visceral connection which clothing has to the body gives it its peculiar prominence in social interaction and moral distinctions. It is also the facility of clothing to cover and to uncover, to stand prominently in the way of others' ability to see the body, which makes it a vehicle for the representation of the self within society. Clothes are a part of visual as well as material culture in the sense that they represent individuals as 'total

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<sup>22</sup> Janet Hoskins (1998), *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*, New York and London: Routledge.

<sup>23</sup> I. Kopytoff (1986), 'The cultural biography of things' in A. Appadurai ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Buchli (2002): 'materiality is by no means a non-negotiable and unquestionable empirical reality, it is a produced social one', p. 15.

images’; they articulate the human form as a series of different elements which make ‘body’ into ‘person’.

Studying visual or material culture necessitates looking at super-categories - the ‘whole’ material or visual world. It also means studying systems of perception and of relation to the world through the senses. Looking at specific groups of objects or images within those ‘worlds’ is a different exercise, however. Smaller than material culture, but larger than, for instance, books, clothing as a subject cuts across social categories as one of the essential features of human existence in cold climates. Within Christian thought, clothes do not only keep bodies warm, they also distinguish a fallen and therefore self-knowing humanity from the beasts with whom they share God’s world. It is this fundamental function, and the status medieval and early modern society accorded its Biblical origins, which makes it possible to talk about such a disparate set of objects and their surrounding practices as a coherent category in the first place.<sup>25</sup>

This ubiquity means that clothing can be followed through many different types of human experience and event, from washing to getting married, from darning to embroidery, and from the cottage to the palace. In archaeological terms, clothing is a part of ‘mobile’ material culture, and this physical mobility is interestingly linked to its social transferability.<sup>26</sup> As a category it transcends both social status and the textures of individual lives, importantly permitting connections between its mundane use in daily events where it remains largely unnoticed, and its prominent function on occasions where dress is self-consciously displayed. The materiality of clothing made it the basis of social comparison and distinction at the time, and following it as it circulates in society gives us insight into the organisation and quality of lived experience in medieval and early modern England.

## Clothing Contexts

As the essays in this volume cover such a wide range of periods and geographical locations, it is clearly impractical to try to tie them all into a coherent pattern of historical change. Nevertheless, it is vital to consider them in relation to the social, economic, cultural and political factors which shape the meanings of dress within society. The pace and quality of change in these areas and the interaction between them will be different in each case, but the issues are significant as a context which informs and is informed by the studies presented in the following pages. Clearly

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<sup>25</sup> For the origins of clothing see Genesis, Ch. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Frans Verhaeghe (1997), p. 38, which can be related to Kopytoff’s notion of the changing biographies of objects moving between different social and economic phases.

the social and cultural dynamics addressed here are not exhaustive, but they are central to the concerns raised in the various sections of the volume.

A number of essential changes took place between 1350 and 1650 across Europe, changes which altered the nature of social life, and of the commercial, economic and cultural patterns which it produced and which shaped it in turn. As Hugh Tait has argued, on a fundamental level, anyone living ‘around 1400 would have experienced a culture very different from that prevailing in the decades around 1600’.<sup>27</sup> These transformations have been broadly articulated as characterising the move from a ‘medieval’ to an ‘early modern’ way of life.

In terms of economic structures, such a shift involves a movement towards commercial patterns indicative of capitalism. The important unit of medieval production and consumption was the household, mainly rural, and supplying the majority of its own needs. Wrigley estimates that the proportion of the English population living in cities of more than 5,000 inhabitants was only 5.25 per cent, even by 1520,<sup>28</sup> and the rural population wholly engaged in agriculture was 76 per cent. The vast majority of people gained their living from the land, and, with 80 per cent of English farming output consumed within the household,<sup>29</sup> consumption was not ‘orientated towards the market’.<sup>30</sup>

There was a market, however: systems of exchange on local, regional, national and international levels which were to a certain extent integrated across the country. The interconnections between these different markets made it possible for some levels of society to experience what we might call the consumption of regional difference. In Wrightson’s instructively imaginative example, ‘a fish caught off Anglesey, salted with Cheshire salt, and packed in barrels made of Irish barrel staves, [might be] eaten by a Bristol merchant clothed in a gown of Norwich cloth and a shirt of Dutch linen. He might well have cut his food with a Sheffield blade and accompanied it with a French wine drunk from a pewter goblet made locally from Cornish tin and Mendip lead.’<sup>31</sup> Thinking through this example situates the clothing of men of this social level within a wider system of individual consumption. It also makes it possible to conceptualise the significance of

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<sup>27</sup> Hugh Tait (1997), ‘The Great Divide?’, in Gaimster and Stamper eds, p. 1. He is discussing English culture, but the broad changes he sees generating this new culture suggest that the comment is more widely applicable.

<sup>28</sup> E.A. Wrigley (1985), ‘Urban Growth and Agricultural Change: England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XV, Table 2.

<sup>29</sup> M. Overton (1996), *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy, 1500–1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Wrigley (2000), p. 109.

<sup>31</sup> Wrightson (2002), p. 108.



provenance in relation to the status of cloth: the distinct meanings of clothing made from foreign (extra-domestic) fabric.

By the middle of the seventeenth century methods of consumption had moved further in the direction of the market. Rural households were more closely linked to urban markets, for both the sale of their surplus crop and the purchase of goods they did not produce. In practice, this meant a very different attitude to the relationship between domestic production and commercial purchasing. In the Lutterworth area of Leicestershire, for example, households gradually stopped taking their home-produced yarn to weavers within the village. Instead they bought their cloth directly from the drapers of Lutterworth.<sup>32</sup> Such changes in consumption patterns suggest altered attitudes to garments: they were no longer generated from within the household, rather, when different families used the same cloth, they became part of a competitive market for purchased property which facilitated direct comparison. Simultaneously, historians have noted radical changes in consumption patterns which meant, on a prosaic level, that people owned more goods and greater numbers of garments. Different attitudes towards purchasing items, and the changing significance of those items when they were owned in larger numbers, can be traced across the period.<sup>33</sup>

Differences between urban and rural living also have an effect upon clothing cultures, and this period saw a huge explosion in the percentages of national populations who lived in towns. From the middle of the sixteenth century, urban growth was significant across Europe, and particularly vigorous in Italy and the Low Countries. Changes in rural agricultural practices provided the food required to fuel towns, and the countryside also supplied a steady flow of immigrants. Rural areas completed the circle of dependency through the kind of increases in demand for urban products demonstrated by the Lutterworth example. Urbanisation was increasing both in general terms and in particular, dramatic, instances. The proportion of European populations living in towns and cities had risen from 3.5 per cent to 8.8 per cent by the seventeenth century, and the population of London

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<sup>32</sup> J. Goodacre (1994), *The Transformation of a Peasant Economy: Townspeople and Villagers in the Lutterworth Area, 1500–1700*, Aldershot, p. 189–90.

<sup>33</sup> For a summary of the considerable literature about consumption see John Brewer and Roy Porter (1993), 'Introduction' in John Brewer and Roy Porter eds, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, London: Routledge. For the origins of such changes see Chandra Mukerji (1983), *From Graven Images, patterns of modern materialism*, New York: Columbia University Press; Cordelia Beattie, Anna Maslakovic, and Sarah Rees Jones eds (2004), *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe, c. 850–c. 1550: Managing Power, Wealth, and the Body*, Turnhout: Brepols.

rose from 70,000 to nearly 400,000.<sup>34</sup> Of the countries studied in this volume, only in Russia did this process take place outside our period, with a mere 2.5 per cent of the population living in towns by 1630.<sup>35</sup>

Towns provide a unique context for clothing because the density of daily living within them brings individuals from all social groups into close physical proximity with one another. Visual familiarity with other peoples', often vastly different, dress compels citizens to make sense of their own clothing choices in relation to a comprehensive range of possible cloths and cuts. This is not about full economic participation in the markets of opportunity so much as a very precise ability to place each choice on an all-embracing scale. Renaissance Florence provides an instructive example in its combination of production and consumption contexts. Frick argues that 'everyone, from sottoposti (labourer) to magnate, knew cloth and could easily evaluate the worth of its wearer'.<sup>36</sup> The city economy was 'founded on fortunes in cloth', but the textile merchants of the city 'exported their most exotic cut-and-figured silk velvets and brocades to the harems of Turkey - silks with names like 'pink sapphire' ... 'throat of the dove', and 'peach blossom''.<sup>37</sup> Within the community of meanings constructed by the city's successful trade, the Commune passed sumptuary legislation which prevented the wearing of the most opulent garments. That which was worn had visual meaning in relation to what was produced and consumed within Florence as a whole.

The prodigious growth of towns also brought social problems, however, and these are crucial to an understanding of the operation of clothing within community structures. The changes in economic practice and opportunity which took place between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tended to polarise society, and the development of capitalist methods of production made some men very rich at the expense of their wage-dependent workforce. Ironically, the success of the textile industry in particular was built upon such practices, and its inherent social inequality did not go unnoticed at the time: 'While it was not unusual for Colchester clothiers to have net assets of a thousand pounds at death, it was reported of their workmen in 1629 that their "wants are so great that they cannot be without worke one weeke" and that many had "not soe much as a poore flock bedd to lye upon, but are forced to lye only upon strawe and can hardly gett

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<sup>34</sup> For the population of London see A.L. Beier and R. Finlay eds (1981), *Population and Metropolis: The Demography of London, 1580–1650*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For the growth of towns generally in this period see Peter Clark ed. (1976), *The Early Modern Town*, London: Longman; Peter Clark ed. (1995), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>35</sup> Braudel, 'Pre-modern towns', in Clark ed. (1976), p. 55.

<sup>36</sup> Frick (2002), p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Frick (2002), p. 3.

that.”<sup>38</sup> Across Europe, urban expansion was followed by social polarisation and a different kind of poverty which was integral to the new economic practices. Medieval attitudes towards poverty, focused upon the esteemed choice of denial of the material world in favour of a life of the spirit, began to change. Although, as Davis argues, the spiritual primacy of a life of poverty was already being questioned in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (and being translated into an ‘inner’ as opposed to a literal ‘detachment from material goods’), the changing circumstances of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century life demanded a movement from the indiscriminate giving of alms as a part of Christian charity to the establishment of urban welfare projects like the Aumône-Générale of Lyon.<sup>39</sup>

Historians have also seen the competitive proximities of urban life as intensifying the sense of competition between social groups across a period increasingly characterised by social mobility. Social transformation was given a dynamic energy amongst those who filled the wide space between the landed elite and the poor, and this focused attention on the extent to which they attempted to emulate the cultural practices of their superiors.<sup>40</sup> Within the hyper-visibility of urban space, participation in a shared rhetoric of domestic, leisure and clothing cultures could be displayed, judged and refined. These changes in the economic and social relationships between groups within the community affected the way they viewed each other, and the level and quality of the competition between them altered their clothing strategies. A polarising early modern society clearly used clothing in a different way to its relatively more stable and cohesive medieval counterpart.

The bonds of kinship, mutual obligation and credit governed all areas of medieval social life from the choice of marriage partners to the purchase of beer.<sup>41</sup> Such bonds were largely based on stable societies with low levels of migration, as they relied on a longstanding personal knowledge and trust between individuals and families which was built up through repeated contact and numerous interactions as minor as the lending of tools and the sharing of food and as major as the administering of wills and joint involvement in guild practices. The economic changes which took place in this period must have eroded such established patterns of behaviour. London needed somewhere in the region of 6,000 migrants per

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<sup>38</sup> Wrightson (2002), p. 195.

<sup>39</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis (1975), *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Stanford, California, ch.2.

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks eds (1994), *The Middling sort of people: culture, society and politics in England, 1550–1800*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

<sup>41</sup> Craig Muldrew (1998), *The Economy of Obligation, the culture of credit and social relations in early modern England*, Basingstoke: Macmillan; Felicity Heal (1990), *Hospitality in early modern England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

annum in order to replace its losses and continue its expansion, and the communities these men and women joined, and those they left, would have been profoundly altered as a result. Urban disorder was perceived to be a considerable problem, partly generated by the anonymity of this new kind of urban life.<sup>42</sup>

Towns attempted to combat these feelings of dislocation through a proliferation of administrative units. The personnel involved with the government of wards and parishes overlapped and interacted with the wardens and officers of city companies, and clothing cultures developed within all such administrative bodies. Public displays of civic structures, designed to strengthen the perception of hierarchies of government and the right ordering of society, necessarily employed visual spectacles of allegiance. The strength of identification with or exclusion from such groups was frequently negotiated and expressed through what people wore, particularly on extraordinary communal occasions.<sup>43</sup>

The capacity of clothing to reflect these complex social distinctions frequently made it the target of more or less formal regulation. Alan Hunt identifies a variety of motivations for the sumptuary legislation which was a feature of many different types of society, stimuli which include hierarchical, moral, economic, and public order imperatives.<sup>44</sup> Combinations of these motives led to attempts to control what people wore on the part of diverse types of government: the centrally-administered nation state, the dispersed urban administrations of individual cities, and a whole range of permutations in between.<sup>45</sup> Hunt's reading of Foucault also leads him to consider the connections between such legislation and the expansion of urban life and the rise of capitalism: 'In the course of the extension of commodification, discipline - apparently so essential for production oriented to the market - is always at risk of being undermined by the hedonistic culture of consumption.'<sup>46</sup> Such assertions place individual clothing choices at the vital point of connections between new types of both production and consumption.

Such more or less centralised methods controlled outward appearance externally, as a feature of communal stability, but different forms of morality

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<sup>42</sup> For concerns about migration see A.L. Beier (1985), *Masterless Men, the vagrancy problem in England 1560–1640*, London & New York: Methuen.

<sup>43</sup> For civic rituals and processions see Gordon Kipling (1998), *Enter the king: theatre, liturgy, and ritual in the medieval civic triumph*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson eds (1994), *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. For an introduction to the relationship between English mystery play cycles and craft guilds see Richard Beadle ed. (1994), *The Cambridge companion to medieval English theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>44</sup> Hunt (1996), p. 179.

<sup>45</sup> Hunt (1996), p. 212.

<sup>46</sup> Hunt (1996), pp. 189, 192.

simultaneously produced distinct levels of sartorial self-regulation linked to concepts of self-control. This dual attention to dress from within and without has led to it being seen as one of the defining boundaries between the personal and the communal. There is also, arguably, a relationship between sumptuary legislation and private life: over time, 'regulatory reach was being expanded', and the policing of the body complicated the distinctions between personal, domestic life, and communal political and economic interests.<sup>47</sup> Such changes in the boundaries of legitimate public concern have been linked to a predominantly Protestant interest in the worryingly unsupervised private activity of others.<sup>48</sup>

The differences between Catholicism and Protestantism impact on our understanding of clothing contexts in important ways. It is possible to draw a very broad distinction between Catholicism's emphasis on images, on ceremony and on the performance of religious meaning through public action, and Protestantism's concern with word, text and an individual and private faith experienced and monitored through internal thought. These two very different aesthetics have consequences for clothing cultures because they suggest different moralisations of display, of luxury, and of the connections of both to the representation of status.<sup>49</sup> The shifting dynamic between the inner and the outer, and between different forms of the display of piety, alters the focus on the fundamental connection between the material and the spiritual - this much is made abundantly clear in iconoclastic impulses.<sup>50</sup> The rejection of liturgical splendour in Protestant cultures led to a wider focus upon the relationship between inner states and outer expression, and on the way in which clothes marked distinctions between priest and bishop,

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<sup>47</sup> Hunt (1996), pp. 186–8.

<sup>48</sup> Joy Wiltenburg (1992), *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany*, London: University Press of Virginia; Robert von Friedeburg (1990), 'Reformation of Manners and the Social Composition of Offenders in an East Anglian Cloth Village: Earls-Colne, Essex, 1531–1642': *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.29, No.4, 347–385.

<sup>49</sup> For an example of the medieval debate about the artistic representation of religious figures in the rich robes of the worldly elite see Priscilla Heath Barnum ed. (1980), *Dives and Pauper*, Early English Text Society, Oxford University Press. For a specific example see Maria Hayward (2002), 'Reflections on gender and status distinctions: an analysis of the liturgical textiles recorded in mid-sixteenth century London', *Gender & History*, Vol.14, No.3, November, 403–425, where she discusses the small clothes made for the images of Catholic saints in parish churches, 419.

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, Lee Palmer Wandel (1995), *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands, Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg and Basel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Margaret Aston (1988), *England's Iconoclasts*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Phyllis Mack Crew (1978), *Calvinist preaching and iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1544–1569*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

between clergy and lay, between sacred and secular occasions.<sup>51</sup> Different kinds of religious excess: extreme zeal on the one hand and elaborate display on the other, divided social practice and focused attention on the appropriate form which public action should take. Even differences as seemingly unconnected to clothing culture as the relationship between the living and the dead, as defined by the doctrine of purgatory, must have had a considerable effect upon the significance of garments as personal possessions passed from one generation to the next.

The two fundamental social divisions of gender and status altered individual experiences of and attitudes towards the broad changes outlined above (and much more besides) to a considerably greater extent than even national differences, and clothing was a primary tool in the social organisation and display of both. Gowing insists upon gender as a division more fundamental than social status: ‘the binary, immobile category of gender is visibly rooted in the body, and the multiple, potentially mobile division of class is not.’ But clothing complicates the clarity of immutable gender because, as she recognises in a footnote, ‘in a society in which clothes were to some degree a marker of class, and people rarely changed their clothes, the difference between a category marked by the body and one marked by clothes needs to be construed with care.’<sup>52</sup> The slippage between ‘the body’ as a set of anatomical distinctions, and the distinguishing clothing which paradoxically hides and advertises physical difference, is essential to the function of dress in medieval and early modern society.

Gendered clothing operates differently to status-defining dress partly because of the contemporary preoccupation with the potential of garments to form and reform the wearer’s sex. Clothes might take away an essential masculinity, but they could not affect status in the same way because the body of a lord was essentially no different to that of a labourer. In addition, women’s clothing could be significant in ways that men’s could not. The description of honour as ‘highly gender specific’ underlines a widely-applicable double standard of gendered identity: ‘For all women, honour was a sexual matter.’<sup>53</sup> The convoluted

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<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, the English Vestiarian controversy over the dress of officiating clergy. Henry Bullinger commented that ‘our forefathers ... did wear a cloke cast over their common garments’ rather than following ‘the example of Christ or the apostles’, a practice which he considered to have led to ‘that heretical massing apparel’, quoted in W.W. Phillips (1981), ‘Henry Bullinger and the Elizabethan vestiarian controversy: an analysis of influence’, *Journal of Religious History*, 11, 363–84.

<sup>52</sup> Gowing (1996), p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Merry E. Wiesner (2000), *Women and gender in early modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.40. See also, Ferguson, Quilligan and Vickers eds (1986), *Rewriting the Renaissance, the discourses of sexual difference in early modern Europe*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

connections between female gender, moral weakness and clothing had been fixed in the Garden of Eden, where dress became essential to hide a sinfully self-knowing shame often seen in misogynistic discourses as women's 'fault'.<sup>54</sup> Dress had a clear role in regulation of the female body which linked it quite explicitly to appropriate feminine behaviour, and the concerns which lay behind such a connection were considerably more fundamental than the corresponding unease about status-defining clothing conduct.

Finally, it is important to say something about changing perceptions of fashions in clothing 1350–1650. Clothing underwent huge changes in the medieval period. In the century before 1400 the so-called 'tailoring revolution' radically altered the way clothes reflected the shape of bodies and this made it possible for them to reveal gendered differences much more fully.<sup>55</sup> New types of cloth and changing styles in clothing fuelled a different concept of 'fashion' as a particular quality of change which increased its capacity to reflect the complexities of economic distinctions and aesthetic choices on which social status could be judged with an increased precision.

The development of fashion-as-change across the medieval and early modern periods has been seen as primarily fuelled by the significance of visual display for court society and politics. Smuts assumes a continuity between the different elements of courtly display - paintings, sculptures, masques, clothing and banquets - which situates dress within an overarching aesthetics of power.<sup>56</sup> This aesthetic context for elite fashion gives it an extra set of meanings which explicitly define privileged status and power. Royal and aristocratic clothing was able to move from the materiality of changing fashions in garments to the monumentality of the representation of the painted body in contemporary portraiture. Such images related clothing to other art forms and divorced it, to an extent self-consciously, from its function as a cover for the body, focusing instead on the stuffs from which it was constructed. Very expensive cloths, locked into the relatively static values of sumptuary distinctions, had a permanent significance which was in tension with the whole notion of fashion. The relative cultural importance of cloth embellished with jewels or embroidery and rapidly changing cuts offers a very different definition of clothing, one where stability and change are complexly patterned. The

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<sup>54</sup> See Wiesner (2000), esp. pp. 15–19, 26.

<sup>55</sup> See Stella Mary Newington (1980), *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer. For a reappraisal of the evidence for such an abrupt change, see Kay Staniland (1997), 'Getting There, Got It: archaeological textiles and tailoring in London, 1330–1580', in Gaimster and Stamper eds.

<sup>56</sup> R. Malcolm Smuts (1996), 'Art and the material culture of majesty in early Stuart England' in Smuts ed., *The Stuart court and Europe: essays in politics and political culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 86.

orchestration of fashion into a system which extends it beyond elite status has been ascribed to a theory of emulation in which styles move down the social scale by imitation. Such a system, hard to prove in practice, is clearly altered by attitudes towards social mobility and by contact between different status groups.

This volume considers items of clothing as diverse as the pair of shoes which William Hunte provides for four honest men to bear him to his grave in Sweetinburgh's essay, and the 'spanish cloak of black frizado with a border of goldsmiths work' that Henry VIII was given by his queen in Hayward's essay. It deals with people who had one outfit in which they worked and another which they wore when they were not working, and individuals whose wardrobes generated complex inventories. If we are looking for a fully synthesised fashion 'system', it is necessary to be able to identify a movement of styles which has influence, or at least meaning, across such a vast social scale. The purchase of cloth and clothing in urban markets as opposed to their production within the home was, of course, a crucial shift in the formation of a shared set of meanings. Even by 1650, however, there remains a fundamental distinction between elite and non-elite clothing - its nature, its function, its relation to the market and to a wider notion of aesthetics and artistic production.

We need to know much more about non-elite fashion in order to be able to identify the level of its interactions with such attitudes towards dress.<sup>57</sup> More broadly, however, we can trace the relationship between developing markets and the broader concept of fashion within which clothing was now operating. Fashion is about change, about an appetite for novelty, and that links it in complex ways to all the innovations and developments outlined above. The rise of the (essentially courtly) concept was 'associated with the use of more diverse types of cloth and other materials that became available as a result of the expansion of eastern Mediterranean trade',<sup>58</sup> a growing fascination with imported luxuries which led to a corresponding 'nationalisation' of trades. This interplay between foreign delights and domestic deficits, the new in direct comparison to the old, is graphically illustrated in the invitations issued to foreign workers skilled in the manufacture of the lighter-wearing new draperies to settle in English towns.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> John Styles' work has begun this task for the eighteenth century; see for instance his (2003), 'Custom or Consumption? Plebeian Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England' in Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger eds, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century, Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, Macmillan.

<sup>58</sup> Hunt (1996), pp. 44–5.

<sup>59</sup> Joan Thirsk (1978), *Economic Policy and Projects, The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Jones and Stallybrass (2000), Ch.3.



Braudel has characterised towns as 'so many electric transformers. They increase tension, accelerate the rhythm of exchange and ceaselessly stir up [peoples'] lives',<sup>60</sup> and this view of the urban experience clearly implicates the production and consumption ethics of towns in a wider notion of fashion. Keith Wrightson identifies a medieval 'mentality which valued security and stability over growth and change; a preference for the tried and reasonably true over innovations which might promise much but might also threaten to increase vulnerability'.<sup>61</sup> This fundamental dynamic between stability and change within markets, and its connection to mentalities therefore inclined or disinclined towards fashion, is central to our understanding of the place of different types of cloth and clothing within local and national economies.

The dynamic of change was beginning to filter down through society by 1650, then, not only as a possibility, but also as something desirable, rather than threatening, for the first time. The study of fashion in its broadest sense makes it possible to investigate such shifting scales of excitement about objects, and the garments described below relate either positively or negatively to a developing sense of a whole world of potential pleasures.

### **The Sections of this Volume**

The essays in this volume are grouped around medieval and early modern preoccupations with dress: nationality; social distinctions; the circulation of clothes; and the function of metaphors of clothing. These categories are obviously permeable, and there are connections between them in terms of source material,<sup>62</sup> historical subjects<sup>63</sup> and themes.<sup>64</sup> Some sections include papers which develop a similar argument in relation to different material therefore, and others demonstrate a diversity of opinions about the same issue. It is possible to trace threads between them, through the use and reuse of sartorial symbols: cloth of gold lavishly displayed at the meeting of two kings, and slipped on and off seductively by the prostitutes of Rome.

The essays in 'Fabrics of Nation' investigate the complex connections between clothing and nationality. They all begin from the premise that clothing is capable of articulating a national, as well as a personal, identity.

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<sup>60</sup> Braudel (1976), p. 53.

<sup>61</sup> Wrightson (2002), p. 56.

<sup>62</sup> Hentschell and Bartram.

<sup>63</sup> Salter and Hayward.

<sup>64</sup> For instance gender, luxury or sumptuary legislation.

Ulrike Ilg's essay traces the development and cultural significance of the costume books which originated in the second half of the sixteenth century. Such volumes illustrated 'typical' fashions from all over the then-known world, arranging their material in topographical order. Ilg connects this method of sartorial organisation to analytical habits which strove towards the production of universal histories and world atlases, and she examines the relationship between image and accompanying descriptive text as a semiotics of dress.

Roze Hentschell investigates the contemporary critiques of the fashionable men and women of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England who, dressed in continental silks and satins, were accused of disturbing the notion of what it meant to be English. Her interdisciplinary analysis allows her to read such satires against a background of changing economic fortunes in the English cloth trade. Asking just where national identity was perceived to be materially present: in the cut of clothes, in the type of cloth from which they were made, or in the provenance of that cloth, reveals the problematic dynamic between English social status and foreign fabric.

Elizabeth Wincott Heckett's essay sets the timelessness of the clothing displayed on sixteenth-century monumental architecture against the very particular political circumstances of its design and production. Concentrating her analysis on the tomb of Piers Butler, eighth earl of Ormond, and his wife Margaret Fitzgerald, she considers the contradictory nature of their engagement in cultural fashions: founders of modern schools and pioneers of tapestry and carpet weaving in Kilkenny, she connects their decision to be depicted in clothing typical of the previous century to the contested nature of Irish identity under the rule of Henry VIII of England.

Oksana Sekatcheva's essay focuses on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the period during which Russian clothing consolidated its image to become 'traditional Russian costume'. Analysing the evolution of costume and headgear shapes and their correlation with textiles and decoration, she identifies an image of monumentality and mass in women's clothing which she links to the specific moral and climatic conditions of Russian life. Russia's relative isolation from European culture led to a particularly static national dress, one which was violently disrupted by the intervention of Peter the Great who forcibly cut long garments and beards in an attempt to free the nation's mind along with its body.

Together, the essays in this section deal with several common themes. Prominent amongst these is the uncomfortable relationship between a national identity expressed through clothing and the restless concept of changing fashion. Wincott Heckett presents an appeal to a politically distinct past as a way of securing identity in a space ideologically invulnerable to time, and this recourse to the solidity of the past is interestingly related to Sekatcheva's arguments about the significance of monumentality in the history of Russian cutting techniques. The

dual function which Ilg identifies for her costume books is also related: their claim to secure a uniform, standardised reading beyond individual interpretation, whilst simultaneously involving themselves in a regulative project of defining those 'fixed' meanings.

Importantly, it is the image of the body as a whole which denotes Russianness and fails to signify Englishness in Hentschell's sources - the interrelationship of the individual items of dress with fabric, cloth and cut. And the distinction which Ilg makes between 'clothing' and 'dress', the latter being 'also a representation of certain abstract qualities of the wearer' demonstrates the development across this section of the theme of clothing as a medium capable of articulating identity. National identities are necessarily particularly extreme exaggerations connected to geographical prerequisites and group behaviour. They are not about personal choice, they rather encapsulate general traits and predispositions, and they make meaning only in contrast to one another. Ilg's costume books, for instance, do not permit doubling of dress or mentalities, they insist upon firm distinctions between countries.

The second section, *Marking Distinctions*, focuses on the ways in which clothing functions to create and demarcate social groups. These essays are interested in the centrality of concepts of recognizability as a social tool, and therefore in the relative visibilities of social actions.

Tessa Storey's investigation of courtesans aims to contextualize their clothing in relation to what other women were wearing in Rome, and in terms of the local economy. She acknowledges the importance of garments as 'tools' of the prostitute's trade, both in terms of their significance in allowing the women to blend in with or stand out from the crowd, and in their operative importance in dressing and undressing - the paraphernalia of seduction.

Sheila Sweetinburgh investigates how bequests of clothing to the poor formed a boundary between social groups. 'Clothing the naked' worked differently to other kinds of charitable giving because of the continuing visibility of cloth within the local community. Sweetinburgh sees clothing gifts to those specifically identified as the poor as part of a reciprocal process where they were exchanged for prayers for the donor's soul, thereby offering a way of underlining social difference through the formation of social interconnection.

Graeme Murdock's argument is concerned with the relationship between aesthetics and social structure; with bodily aesthetics as a method of social separation. For the Calvinist communities which he describes, the visualisation of their moral distinctiveness is a supremely important social project. Through the regulation of revelation, the bodily appetites are seen to be constrained, working ideologically from outer appearance to inner state and back again.

Claire Bartram analyses a 1560s debate between a pair of cloth breeches and 'a very passing costlye payre velvet breeches'. In the course of the argument between

the armed trousers, and the ensuing court case, Bartram identifies the author's preoccupation with ways of gauging gentility and 'worthiness' in a society beset by social mobility. She sees the text as giving access to a fundamental paradox of Protestant gentry identity: its dual imperative to display the worthiness of status whilst eschewing conspicuous consumption.

The essays which form *Marking Distinctions* insist upon the interrelationships between different clothed identities within the same society, and in this way the section builds upon the notion of distinctions within the whole with which Ilg's costume books began the volume. Understanding the impact of these different identities means reconstructing them in relative terms of binary opposition, the terms, indeed, in which they were constructed at the time: courtesan and honest woman; rich and poor; Godly and profane; worthy and worthless. This oppositional form of identity is generated in response to the threat of obscurity, of the muddying of distinction and the inability to recognise the inner from the outer - the very motivation for sumptuary legislation.

Also common to these papers is the centrality of a variety of moralised discourses of social organisation to the formation and maintenance of the boundaries between categories. Sweetinburgh points out the explicit relationship between testamentary language and events and the corporal acts of mercy. Both Bartram and Murdock's authors investigate sumptuary legislation's effectiveness in regulating the relationship between material identity and social identity. The notion of boundary, so familiar from anthropological writing about groups and communities, is here cast as a visual and visualising form, inherent in the materiality of garments.<sup>65</sup>

If *Marking Distinctions* explicated the importance of clothing in structuring social categories, *Material Movements* focuses on its fundamental transferability - the ways in which the transmission of garments was used to create connections between groups which confused the boundary lines. Developing a series of contexts at different points on the social scale for the employment of clothing in the formation of social alliances, the section as a whole challenges the notion that patronage links are easily separable from affective ties. The capacity of clothes to hold emotion within their materiality intersects in interesting ways with the language of status which is inherent in cloth and cut.

Joanna Crawford analyses the evidence for grants of clothing as a part of the system of payments within household service. She focuses upon its capacity to bind individuals and groups together as it moves through society, and on the relationship between the form of a garment (its gradations of cost and cloth) and

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<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, A.P. Cohen (1985), *Symbolic Construction of Community*, Chichester: Ellis Horwood.

social hierarchies and structures. She sees the anxiety which these material movements could generate as symptomatic of the tension between the two meanings of an identity represented in clothes: their capacity to illustrate an individual's social status and their use as a demonstration of his ties and allegiances to others.

Maria Hayward considers a mid sixteenth-century inventory of Henry VIII's possessions and the books of 'charge and discharge' of his Yeoman of the Robes, examining in detail the quantity and variety of the king's clothes. Hayward sees Henry giving articles of clothing for reasons which are inherently political, and examines the composition of court factions through the patterns of distribution of these gifts. Fashion and power are seen to be disseminated through items of clothing which form an important part of the political climate of Tudor England.

Elisabeth Salter analyses the wills of the inhabitants of the town of Greenwich, whose links to the royal court gave it a very particular concept of fashion. There are connections of personnel with Hayward's evidence, as some inhabitants worked within the royal court, and Salter considers how the king's servants used the dispersal of clothing in the formation of group identity. However, Salter is interested in uncovering the ways that individuals perceived their clothing, insisting that the way clothing bequests are described should be analysed in the context of all bequests: a more extensive discourse of symbolic capital into which they are integrated.

Material Movements identifies several different dynamics to the strategic deployment of garments, therefore, from the provision of the 'uniform' of livery, to the transmission of old worn garments between friends at death. In all cases, however, the gradations of cloth, colour, cut and status within a wardrobe as a whole are taken to 'map onto' human relationships. Reconstructing the movement of clothing therefore permits access to the material figuring of networks of social relations and the strength and duration of social ties. The contexts in which these gifts are made: within the royal court or as part of the rewards of service or group identity, are also seen to circumscribe their meaning. The papers do not, however, suggest a simple division between 'personal' clothes and 'formal' ones, or between 'private' and 'public' contexts for the giving or wearing of the gift.

The final section on Discourse, Body, Gender considers the contexts in which dress itself is used as a metaphor. These essays cluster around the dynamic of concealing and revealing, working as often with nakedness as with dress, and considering the physical and discursive relationships between garments and bodies. As such they are intimately tied up with an often heavily gendered morality.

Andrea Denny-Brown's argument follows the recurring image of the sartorial tear through the literature, iconography, and fashion of late medieval Europe. She traces it from its associations with knightly violence and therefore adrenaline and danger to the moralised loss of corporeal identity which invites penetration by the

judging eye. From the fashionably cut and feminising male garment to the provocatively pierced body of Christ crucified, this motif was a vehicle for complex discourses of seeing and knowing, of stability and instability, of boundary and of gendered identity.

For Helen Smith, too, the movement of meanings between social practice and metaphors of clothing and dress is instructive. She studies the dedicatory and prefatory material of the early modern book, and finds it full of references to clothing and nakedness which relate printed matter to its consumption in the marketplace. From an initial notion that the physical presentation of the book offered clear indications as to the character and standing of both text and owner, Smith follows the material qualities of print through a trajectory from bindings, to the wearing of texts, to the recycling of clothes to provide rags for the paper trade.

Catherine Richardson identifies the strategic use of descriptions of clothing in ecclesiastical court depositions, where she sees them functioning as one of a series of narrative strategies for translating lived experience into a legally acceptable discourse of proof. Uniquely amongst such strategies, however, descriptions of garments facilitate distinctions between legally discrete kinds of social interaction. They also make it possible to approach the most visceral aspects of human relationships, and to identify sexual transgression through a series of definitions of undress which avoid the impropriety of describing the naked body.

Elizabeth Hallam studies cases of slander in order to identify how speech was used to reveal the female body. Rather than the physical stuff of clothing, Hallam deals with the concept of dress as a social covering which can permit sin to remain hidden, and demonstrates the revelatory power of speech to access the true nature of the immoral body. Popular acts of exposure, conducted through the spoken word, involved a hybrid mixture of images which linked women's conduct to the inhuman impulses of beasts, as 'toad faced queanes' and 'durtie arst sowes'. As clothing separates beasts from humans, Hallam argues, so early modern individuals insist that beastly women must be stripped of their apparel.

Hallam's evidence, like Denny-Brown's, captures a ritualised violence performed on the body. For women, this is linked to their reputations, and caught up in complex ways with the relationship between their clothing and their body. Marking the body is first about true knowledge of the other, and second the punishment for what is discovered. The fluid interplay between what is spoken and what is written, what is material and what is representation and what is metaphor and what is practice is seen to be exploited as part of distinct but related moral projects.

This close relationship between clothes, in particular women's clothes, and moral attributes, can be traced through the sections of this book from the distinct qualities associated with different nationalities to the need to distinguish moralised status groups through dress. Here, however, the essays reveal a frustration with the

deceit which dress makes possible, as a covering which is both essential to morality and obstructive to knowledge. The twin call to metaphorical revelation and physical concealment is shown to be at the heart of much of the uneasiness which surrounds the role of clothing in medieval and early modern society.

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Section One

# Fabrics of Nation

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## Chapter Two

# The Cultural Significance of Costume Books in Sixteenth-Century Europe

Ulrike Ilg

Costume books, that is, books consisting of a series of woodcuts or etchings representing persons in native dress from all over the world, have so far received very limited attention in modern scholarship. The few existing studies consider these books - a genre newly emerging in the second half of the sixteenth century - simply as a historical source: They list the various examples, examine the interrelation between their contents, value them as an early testimony for the interest in non-European dress or use their plates as a means of ascertaining the veracity of other specific representations of dress in the arts. The present essay is an attempt to investigate the function these costume books may have had in their time. How do they link the fabric of cloth to the fabric of contemporary society? How do they generate a general classification of the human race, divided according to criteria such as social status, (presumed) character or origin of the individual? One further question here is related to a topic also explored in the other papers of this section: How does dress work in the context of nation-building and how do costume books help to create or strengthen ideas of national identity? I will attempt to answer this whole complex of issues by a close examination of the 'working order' of these books, i.e. by analysing their inner structure, the way their images are presented and connected with a relative, explanatory text. Before doing so, I should like to make a few general observations about these books and their significance.

In the thirty years between 1560 and circa 1590 ten costume books appeared which declared their pertinence to this category even in their titles.<sup>1</sup> The first

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<sup>1</sup> Most of these books have been catalogued in S. Jackson Jowers (2000), *Theatrical Costume, Masks, Make-up and Wigs. A Bibliography and Iconography*, London. For a discussion of their content see H. Doege (1903), 'Die Trachtenbücher des 16. Jahrhunderts',

examples seem to have been published in France and in Italy: the earliest is by François Deserps and was printed in 1562 in Paris as *Recueil de la diuersité des habits, qui sont de present en vsage, tant espays d'Europe, Asie, Affrique & Isles sauvages* (Fig. 2.1),<sup>2</sup> whereas the other is a work arranged and printed by Ferdinando Bertelli in Venice in 1563 under the title *Omnium fere gentium nostrae aetatis habitus* (Fig. 2.2).<sup>3</sup> It was reprinted in 1569 and re-edited in an extended, three-volume version by Ferdinando's son Pietro as *Diversarum nationum habitus* (Padua 1589, 1594 and 1596).<sup>4</sup> These publications must have met a certain demand in the market, as there followed a large number of similar books which present in their plates a nearly equal number of male and female costumes and also tend to be very specific in showing persons from different social classes of various regions. Amongst these costume books is one by the Nuremberg woodcutter Hans Weigel: *Habitus praecipuorum populorum tam virorum quam foeminarum singulari arte depicti*, (Nuremberg 1577; Fig. 2.3); one by the Cologne publisher Caspar Rutz: *Omnium poene gentium imagines, ubi oris totiusque corporis & vestium*

in: *Beiträge zur Bücherkunde und Philologie: August Wilmanns zum 25. März 1903 gewidmet*, Leipzig, pp. 429–444; J.A. Olian (1977), 'Sixteenth century Costume Books', in: *Dress: the Annual Journal of the Costume Society of America*, 3, 20–47; D. Defert (1984), 'Un genre ethnographique profane au XVI<sup>e</sup>: Les livres d'habits (essai d'ethno-icnographie)', in: B. Rupp-Eisenreich ed., *Histoires de l'Anthropologie (XVI<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Colloque 'La Pratique de l'Anthropologie Aujourd'hui' (Sèvres, 19–21.11.1981), Paris, pp. 25–42; J. Guérin Dalle Mese (1998), *L'occhio di Cesare Vecellio. Abiti e costumi esotici nel '500*, (=Oltramare, 6), Alessandria, pp. 12ff.

<sup>2</sup> See for this book reprinted in 1564, 1567 and 1570: *Katalog der Freiherrlich von Lipperheide'schen Kostümbibliothek*, vol. 1, Berlin 1896, cat.no. 1. R. Colas (1933), *Bibliographie générale du costume et de la mode*, Paris, vol. 2, cat.no. 898. J. Alden & D.C. Landis (1980), *European Americana. A chronological Guide to the Works printed in Europe relating to the Americas*, vol. 1 (1493–1600), New York, nos. 562/26, 564/42, 570/1, 572/45. S. Shannon ed. (2001), *The various styles of clothing. François Deserps. A facsimile of the 1562 edition*, Minnesota.

<sup>3</sup> This costume book by Bertelli contains exclusive prints designed and executed by Enea Vico, probably during his Venetian period (see J. Spike ed. (1985), *The Illustrated Bartsch*, vol. 30 [vol. 15, part 3], New York, nos. 134–231).

<sup>4</sup> See for this book: *Lipperheide* (1896), cat.nos. 3, 20 and vol. 2, Berlin 1901, (supplement) cat.no 2z. F. Borroni Salvadori (1980), *Carte, piante e stampe storiche delle raccolte lafreriane della Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze*, (*Indici e Cataloghi*, N.S. 11), Rom, p. LXVII.

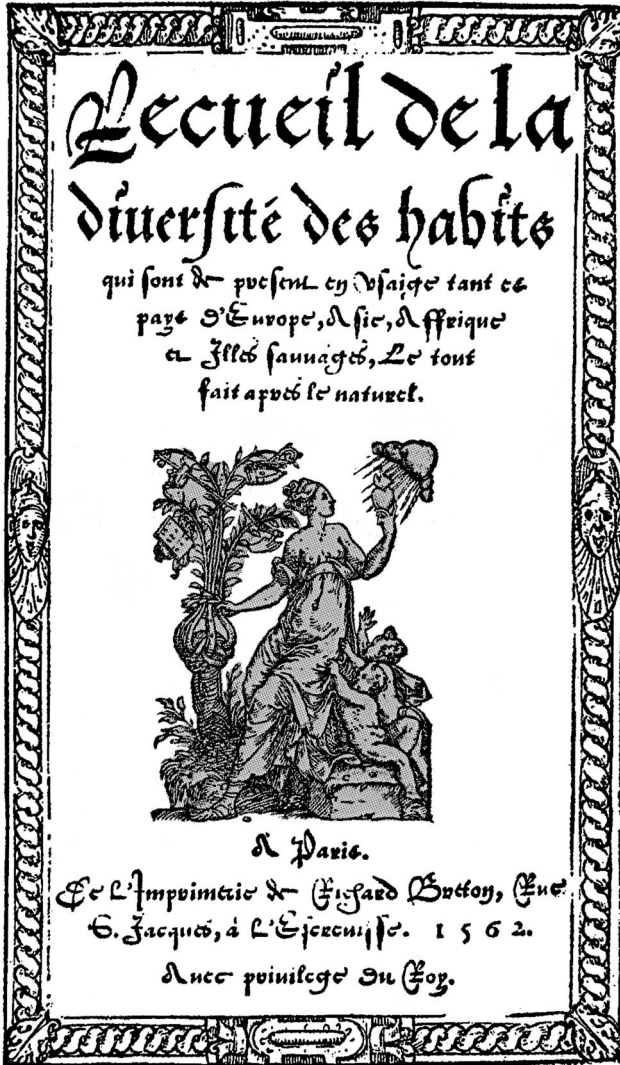


Figure 2.1 François Deserperz, *Receuil de la diuersité des habits, qui sont de present en vsage, tant espays d'Europe, Asie, Affrique & Isles sauuage*, Paris 1564, title page. (Photograph by Ulrike Ilg).



Figure 2.2 Ferdinando Bertelli, *Omnia fere gentium nostrae aetatis habitus*, Venice 1563, title page. (Photograph by Ulrike Ilg).

*Habitus ... exprimuntur* (Cologne 1577);<sup>5</sup> and another costume book composed by the historian Jean-Jacques Boissard and once more printed by Caspar Rutz: *Habitus variarum orbis gentium* (Cologne 1581).<sup>6</sup> The next book of this kind to appear in Italy besides the above mentioned ones by Bertelli was printed in Rome by Bartolommeo Grassi under the title *Dei veri ritratti degli habiti di tutte le parti del mondo* (Rome 1585); and finally, at the turn of the century Cesare Vecellio, a nephew of Titian, published his *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Venice 1590).<sup>7</sup>

Today, the history and make-up of these books is as intriguing as it is complicated because, with the exception of the very first examples, the publishers had to fall back on the most disparate sources: on the one hand, they re-used illustrative material already published elsewhere, or they cited figures represented in paintings. At the same time, the publishers tried to achieve a global mapping of dress, including a wide variety of inhabitants of all four of the then-known continents. This characteristic can be accounted for if one considers several tendencies and phenomena of late sixteenth-century intellectual history. First of all, the rise of the genre of the costume book seems to illustrate the general preference in the sixteenth century for organising knowledge in an encyclopaedic manner. This preference manifests itself very prominently in the revival of encyclopaedic compilations in that period,<sup>8</sup> and costume books indeed share some of the characteristics of the encyclopaedia: they present dress as an object of scientific

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<sup>5</sup> The plates in this book are the major work of the Antwerp etcher Abraham de Bruyn (c. 1538/9–1587; see for this artist: B. Schöller (1996), 'Abraham de Bruyn', in: G. Meissner ed., *Saurs Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*, vol. 14, München, p. 614.). They are preceded by some introductory notes by the humanist Hadrian Damman (1540–after 1604). Living in Cologne in the mid-1570s, he finally settled in Scotland adopting the Calvinist religion (J. Puraye ed. (1969), *Album Amicorum Abraham Ortelius*, Amsterdam, p. 53).

<sup>6</sup> See for these books: *Lipperheide* (1896), cat.nos. 7, 9, 14.

<sup>7</sup> See *Lipperheide* (1896), cat. nos. 17, 21. C. Lozzi (1899), 'Cesare Vecellio e i suoi disegni e intagli per libri di costumi e di merletti', in: *La Bibliofilia*, 1, pp. 3–11. *Vecellio's renaissance costume book: all 500 woodcut illustrations from the famous sixteenth century compendium of world costume*, New York 1977. Guérin Dalle Mese (1998).

<sup>8</sup> R. Shackleton (1984), 'The encyclopaedic spirit', in: P.J. Korshin & R.R. Allen (eds), *Greene Centennial Studies: Essays Presented to Donald Greene in the Centennial Year of the University of Southern California*, Charlottesville, pp. 377ff.

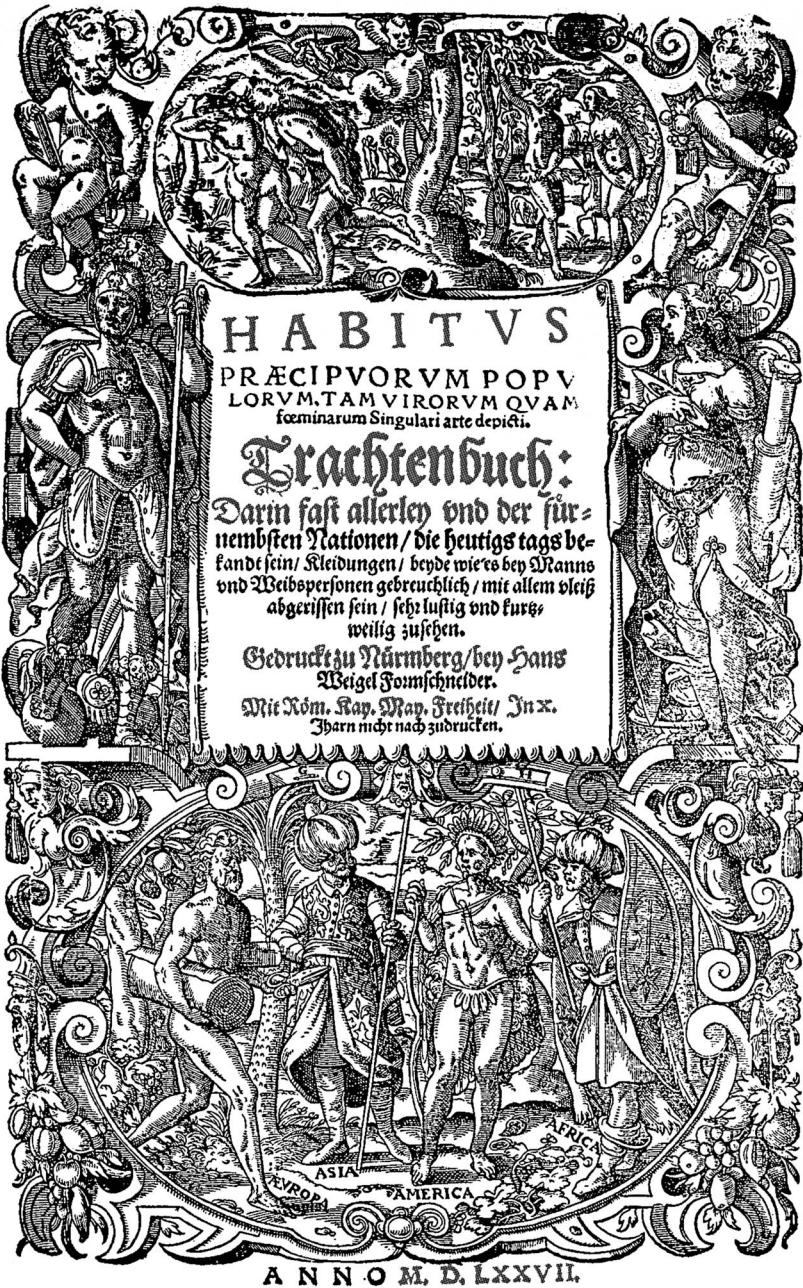


Figure 2.3 Hans Weigel, *Habitus praecipuorum populorum tam virorum quam foeminarum singulari arte depicti* (...), Nürnberg 1577, title page. (Photograph by Ulrike Ilg).



enquiry<sup>9</sup> and thus are another example of the secular approach to the profane world manifest in the encyclopaedic movement of the sixteenth century. This new attitude differentiates costume books from any earlier attempts to represent the global differences of dress, which so far had taken place exclusively within religious imagery. Until the sixteenth century, artists in fact tried to depict the utmost variety of dress only in scenes thematically linked to apostolic prayer and missionary activity such as the *Prayer of St. John the Baptist in the desert* or in representations of the *Baptism* or the *Pentecost* (Fig. 2.4).

The second similarity between costume books and encyclopaedias is their attempt at comprehensiveness, which seems indeed to be the only generally accepted main characteristic of an encyclopaedia even in present specialist literature on this topic. The pretension of costume books to treat their subject comprehensively cannot however be properly explained only by reference to the sixteenth-century encyclopaedic tendency. It must also be related to a contemporary trend towards writing universal histories rather than dealing with history from a national point of view. In the late sixteenth century scholars in fact started to see their own nation as part of a larger entity, and consequently the conviction grew amongst them that phenomena pertaining to one nation's history and culture could be adequately discussed only when looking also at those of other countries.<sup>10</sup> National history thus was not primarily focused on one state, but evolved into a global history which comprised geographic areas that had hitherto been at the margins of the European horizon, such as the Americas or the Orient.

A French scholar, Louis Le Roy (1510–1577), directly commented on this recent change in perspective of historiography and science in his *Consideration sur l'histoire françoise et universelle de ce temps*. Printed in 1567 and dedicated to the French royal family,<sup>11</sup> Le Roy's text states that 'the affairs of this world are linked and correspond with each other. They cannot be understood one without the other

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<sup>9</sup> The beginnings of such a 'scientific' approach in Northern Europe can be seen in some documentary costume drawings by the Bellini circle or by Albrecht Dürer. They show local dress and often also carry titles similar to those in later costume books: W.M. Conway (1889), *Literary remains of Albrecht Dürer*, Cambridge, pp. 110, 120; W.L. Strauss (1974), *The complete drawings of Albrecht Dürer*, vol. 1, New York, cat.no. 1495/4–1495/6, 1495/12–16 and vol. 2, *ibid.*, cat.no. 1500/2–1500/7. F. Anzelewsky, H. Mielke (1984), *Albrecht Dürer. Kritischer Katalog der Zeichnungen*, [=Die Zeichnungen alter Meister im Berliner Kupferstichkabinett], Berlin, cat.no. 95verso.

<sup>10</sup> P.F. Grendler (1969), 'Francesco Sansovino and Italian Popular History 1560–1600', in: *Studies in the Renaissance*, 16, 146ff.

<sup>11</sup> L. Gundersheimer (1966), *The life and works of Louis Le Roy*, Genève, pp. 73, 75.



**Figure 2.4** *Apostles Thomas, Marc and Lucas with people of Asia, Frisia, Panfilia and Egypt, mosaics in the Pentecost Dome of S. Marco in Venice, late twelfth century. (Photograph by Ulrike Ilg).*

if they are not considered as parts of universal history'.<sup>12</sup> It was this opinion which inspired Le Roy to publish the first universal history of culture in 1575, a book reprinted seven times during the next twenty years and translated into Italian as well as English.<sup>13</sup> The humanist's aim was not only to give a survey of present European civilisations, but to describe also those of the past and of non-European origin.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, in the twelve books of his work he analyses the culture of classical Greece and Rome as well as that of the Islamic and Asian world. For Le Roy, the present contacts between the different cultures are characterised by a range of peaceful exchanges, for instance of knowledge, wealth and material goods, for mutual benefit. At the same time, these contacts are a manifestation of the new European spirit to live 'in the same city and world republic' ('en une mesme cité et république mondaine').<sup>15</sup> And it is with this historiographic approach that even the very early costume books such as those of Ferdinando Bertelli and François Deserpz represent the dress of people from Europe alongside those of American, Asian, African or Oriental folk.

At the same time, costume books can be seen as an equivalent to contemporary efforts in cartography to publish an atlas of the *whole* world.<sup>16</sup> The first world atlas, Abraham Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of 1570, was indeed printed in the very same period in which costume books became a more and more profitable subject for the publishers.<sup>17</sup> The preface of the publisher Caspar Rutz, in his 1581 book *Habitus variarum orbis gentium*, can actually be seen as evidence for the affiliation of the costume book with this recent kind of cartographic publication. In this preface of 1581, Rutz explains his intentions and the content of his costume book in the following way: 'As today many books are written and illustrated with copper plates that portray the various regions and the towns of the different regions

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<sup>12</sup> Trans. after E. Hassinger (1987), 'Die Rezeption der Neuen Welt durch den französischen Späthumanismus (1550–1620)', in: W. Reinhard (ed.), *Humanismus und Neue Welt*, (=Mitteilungen der Kommission für Humanismusforschung, 15), Weinheim, p. 107 with note 65.

<sup>13</sup> *De la vicissitude ou variété des choses en l'univers ...*, Paris 1575.

<sup>14</sup> Gundersheimer (1966), pp. 95ff.

<sup>15</sup> Cit. after Hassinger (1987), p. 107. See also Gundersheimer (1966), p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> For the history of the atlas see A. Bonazzi, (1994), 'Per la storia dell'informazione spaziale in epoca moderna: la genealogia della forma atlantica', *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, 101, 217–249.

<sup>17</sup> See for Ortelius' atlas C. Koeman (1964), *The history of Abraham Ortelius and his Theatrum orbis terrarum*, Lausanne, and more recently M. van den Broecke ed. (1998), *Abraham Ortelius and the first atlas: essays commemorating the quadricentennial of his death (1598–1998)*, Utrecht.

for the use of those who have to learn about the world by studying these maps, I am convinced that [the present book] is [also] a useful work. [...] Whereas these maps of the regions represent the ocean and the seas ... together with their fish, ships, mountains and woods as well as with the different animals, [the plates of the present book] show human dress according to the usage of the individual people and in that way ... it can be easily seen not only how one region differs from the other, but also in which way the inhabitants and people differ...'<sup>18</sup>

Rutz's preface demonstrates that the creation of costume books appears to be related to a general 'mapping impulse'<sup>19</sup> which in the sixteenth century extended itself well beyond the field of mere geography: Costume books were meant to parallel cartographic publications and to supplement the atlas, treating a subject normally left out in cartographic depictions. In fact there is only one geographic publication from this period in whose plates the representation of costume and of geography or topography are wedded: the *Civitates orbis terrarum* produced by Georg Braun, responsible for the texts, and Frans Hogenberg, who etched most of the plates.<sup>20</sup> Published in six volumes between 1572 and 1617, the main focus of these plates is on the topographical depiction of numerous European towns. However, nearly every topographical portrait in the *Civitates orbis terrarum* also includes a representation of the inhabitants of the relative area (Fig. 2.5). These persons are sometimes embedded in the townscape and sometimes depicted in a separate section of the plate, but their dress is always rendered very accurately and appears to be in various cases a direct citation of the representations in contemporary costume books. This composite character of the *Civitates orbis terrarum*, which ventures to be both costume book and atlas, underlines the close relationship between the two, as Rutz pointed out in his preface: the observation of

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<sup>18</sup> In the Latin preface this passage runs as follows: 'Cum multi hodie tum scripti tum scalpti libri sint, qui regiones varias, variarumque regionum urbes iis qui ex tabulis pictos [in the German version: 'auß den Cartis oder Mappen'] addiscere mundos coguntur ob oculos ponant, operae precium eos facere arbitror [...]. Si cum eae tabulae Oceanum ac Maria peregrinis cum piscibus tum navibus, montes ac silvas vario tum bipedum tum quadrupedum animalium emblemate ornata exhibeant, hominem [...] eo corporis habitu in scenam producant, qui singulis gentibus peculiaris est. Etenim sic non tantum provincia provinciae, sed homo etiam homini quid intersit ex vario cultus genere [...] in oculos incurret.'

<sup>19</sup> The term 'mapping impulse' has been coined by Svetlana Alpers (1987), 'The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art', in: D. Woodward ed., *Art and Cartography. Six historical essays*, Chicago/London, pp. 68ff.

<sup>20</sup> For the *Civitates orbis terrarum* see L. Nuti (1988), 'The mapped views by Georg Noefnagel: the merchant's eye, the humanist's eye', in: *Word & Image*, 4, 545–570 (with further bibl.).



**Figure 2.5** *Landscape and inhabitants of the Biscaya*, etching in Georg Braun/Frans Hogenberg, *Civitates orbis terrarum*, Cologne 1572–1617. (Photograph by Ulrike Ilg).

costumes helps to sharpen geographical notions, because the differences in dress have to be read as a direct sign of a difference in place. And in the same way in which an observer learns to distinguish the various regions of the world by studying the maps of an atlas, he also learns to distinguish the clothing style of the relative inhabitants by looking at the plates depicting dresses.

Let me now turn to the second part, that is, to my analysis of the structure and layout of sixteenth-century costume books. A sifting of them soon reveals that several criteria have generally been followed in their makeup. Considering their dependence on sixteenth-century cartographic collections as a model, it is not very astonishing that costume books resemble them greatly in structure: both arrange their material according to a geographical order and proceed from the general to the more specific or from the higher to the lower rank, from the near to the more remote areas. The illustrations in Jean-Jacques Boissard's costume book (1581), for instance, cover the various regions in the following order: starting with plates of Italian dress, they continue with that of the German-speaking areas, of France, North Africa, the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, Arabia, Persia and America. Secondly, the plates normally include a sometimes extremely short, sometimes multilingual explanation of the dress represented.

In general, gender and regional origin were the minimum information given by this sort of short title and this might indicate that in the sixteenth century both gender and geography were considered of basic importance in determining the identity of a person. They were the two characteristics which guaranteed the readability of the representation of a human being and therefore could in no way be left out in a comment reduced to its very bone.

In several books, though, the texts referring to the costumed figures became more elaborate, ascribing to them a certain social standing, profession, moral status, nationality or ethnic origin. The most elaborate commentaries for the period of the sixteenth century can perhaps be found in Jost Amman's collection of female dress, published in 1586. Each figure is accompanied by a short poem of eight lines. Amman's woodcut of a Turkish prostitute ('Ein onzuechtige Tuerckin'; Fig. 2.6) is for example presented with the following words: 'This is a prostitute, who sells her impure body for dirty money to a lover that pleases her. With the earnings of this sin she dresses herself prettily and beautifully, in order to attract the Turks even more easily with her false ornaments.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> M. Lemmer ed. (1972), *Jost Amman. Das Frauentrachtenbuch: 122 Holzschnitte*, Leipzig, p. 112: 'Das ist ein onzuechtiges Weib/ Welche ihren unkeuschen Leib/ Verkauft umb schaendliches Gelt/ Einem Buler der ihr gefelt/ Von demselbigen Sundenlohn/ Kleidet sie sich denn huebsch und schon/ Dasz sie mit ihrem falschen Schmuck/ Die Tuercken desto eh beruck.'

## Ein Türckische Hur.

Das ist ein onzüchtiges Weib/  
Welche ihren vnkeuschen Leib  
Verkauffet vomb schändlichen Gelt  
Einem Vuler der ihr gefelt/



Vondemselbigen Hurenlohn  
Kleidet sie sich denn hübsch vnd schon/  
Daß sie mit ihrem falschen Schmuck  
Die Türcken desto eh beruck.

**Figure 2.6** *Turkish whore*, woodcut in Jost Amman, *Gynaeceum siue theatrum mulierum artificiosissimis nunc primum figuris (...) expressos (...)*, Frankfurt 1586. (Photograph by Ulrike Ilg).

At such a stage, the costume book becomes conceptually related to the makeup of a dictionary.<sup>22</sup> Of course, by ‘dictionary’, I do not mean mere glossaries or word-lists, but those dictionaries which involve a more extensive consideration of things, such as for instance the *Dictionary of National Biography*. In both dictionaries and costume books the material is arranged according to a single schematic criteria throughout, in one case alphabetical, in the other geographical, in order to enable the reader to get direct access to the subject they want to retrieve information about. They will be introduced to this information either by searching a keyword or a dressed figure, which assumes the role of a lemma in a dictionary and is related in a second step to a given meaning, which is transmitted also by way of a text.

By this very structure, which attributes a certain signification to a dressed figure (or a visual sign), the costume books create a general semiotics of dress. This semiotics is general because dress, as presented in the costume books, does not anymore seem to be a personal choice of one individual, influenced by taste and fashion. Instead, the costume books convey the impression that dress can be rationally classified and that it follows rules which hold true generally. Dress evolves into a system apparently dependent on objective criteria only, such as gender, social standing, profession, nationality or ethnic origin. It therefore becomes standardised, not only in its appearance, but also in its interpretation. In fact, if Vecellio (1590) presents a ‘Gentildonna da Conegliano’ or other noblewomen of Vicenza, Padua or Rome, the reader will suppose that the clothes they wear are in some way characteristic of their social status and the regions in which they lived. This principle of proceeding by supposedly representative examples reveals itself to be very important, because it permits the establishment of the claim that the representations in costume books depict a general truth and are applicable to the reality of the reader. Wherever they come across a figure that is analogous to one in their book, they will probably interpret it in the way suggested there. It may also be in order to affirm this practical ‘applicability’ that costume books often repeat the assertion that they contain figures done from life or compiled by a reliable scholar. The humanist Boissard is for instance presented by

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<sup>22</sup> It seems difficult to find a theoretical distinction between such a book of an encyclopaedic character and a dictionary. See J. Haiman (1980), ‘Dictionaries and Encyclopedias’, *Lingua*, 50, 329–357; W. Frawley (1981), ‘In Defence of the Dictionary: A Response to Haiman’, *Lingua*, 55, 53–61; J. Haiman (1982), ‘Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias Again’, *Lingua*, 56, 353–355. In order to resolve the debate about definitions R.L. Fowler suggested to consider ‘a good dictionary ... an encyclopaedia of words’, (1997), ‘Encyclopaedias: Definitions and theoretical problems’, in P. Binkley ed., *Pre-modern encyclopaedic texts*, Proceedings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> COMERS Congress [Groningen, 1–4 July 1996], Leiden/New York/Cologne, p. 13.



the publisher Rutz in his preface as the person ‘who depicted the dress of different people *from life to the best of his knowledge* in order that I may let them engrave’ (‘Boissardus ... qui ... diversos populorum habitus ad vivum bona fide ... delinatos ut eos scalpello edi curarem’); and Rutz also advertises the very same costume book as a sort of practical guide for distinguishing the native dress one could encounter in the different regions of the real world.<sup>23</sup>

This principle of proceeding by supposedly representative specimens, which includes the promise to render the multifarious world of real dress readable for whoever has studied a costume book, is of course to a large extent a fiction. This promise remained a fiction, because first of all there never existed *the* standard dress of say, a noblewoman of Conegliano. Its representation in a book can only be an approximation of the attire of such a person, because it does not consider possible exceptions or variations that actually existed. In the end, standard dress as depicted in a costume book is to a certain extent a creation of the maker of the book because of his choice to represent one costumed figure rather than another, and because of the introduction of categories and distinctions which were never, in reality, so clear. Before entering the book, the ‘world out there’ has thus passed several conceptual filters. Consequently, what costume books represent is an *ideal* social reality. They show a world with clear distinctions of gender, class, profession, nationality or ethnic origin and demonstrate the readability of dress as a sign language. This makes them on the one hand a valuable tool to handle experience which might in its complexity and quantity overpower the comprehension of a single human. On the other hand, besides being a sort of inventory of the real world, costume books become also a space of thinking. They ascribe a certain meaning to every figure and this meaning always implies a more or less direct judgement which also potentially determines the opinion of the reader.

To mention just one example of this way of conditioning the reader: many of the accompanying texts in costume books refer to the ‘dos and don’ts’ of human dress and of human behaviour in general, thus suggesting that they also fulfilled a regulatory function with regard to cultural conventions. In that respect, two main topics are usually treated in costume books: the ‘morality’ of dress, and the observance of social distinctions expressed in dress. Both points are referred to for example in Jost Amman’s costume book of 1586. Its plate of a woman of Lübeck has as an accompanying text: ‘... there is no falseness in them, they call everything by its proper name, and also their whole dress is designed to express orderliness

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<sup>23</sup> See the end of the Latin preface quoted in note 18.

## Ein Fraw auß Engelland.

Ein Edelfraw in Engelland  
 Ist geschmücket nach ihrem Stand/  
 Wann sie also ist angethan/  
 Wie diese Figur zeigt an.



Darinn hat sie ihr recht Gestalt/  
 Auch ihrem Mann gar wol gefalt/  
 Vnd wann sie ander Kleider trüg/  
 Ihr Mann sie zu dem Haus außschlüg.

**Figure 2.7** *Englishwoman*, woodcut in Jost Amman, *Gynaeceum siue theatrum mulierum artificiosissimis nunc primum figuris (...) expressos (...)*, Frankfurt 1586. (Photograph by Ulrike Ilg).

and respectability';<sup>24</sup> whereas the figure of the Englishwoman (Fig. 2.7) is commented in the following way: '... she is clothed according to her social position. Dressed in the manner shown in this figure, she presents herself correctly and pleases her husband very much. And if she would wear other clothes, her husband would chase her out of the house'.<sup>25</sup>

This interpretation of dress as a behavioural code and indication of the social class of a person in Amman's work is not new. In fact, the 1564 costume book by François Deserpsz starts with a dedication letter to King Henri II of France in which the author states that the study of the costumes collected in his book 'can help us to retrench any overly sumptuous dress, which leads man to vanity: because as one recognizes a monk by his habit, the fool by his cap and the soldier by his arms, one recognizes in the same way the wise by his modest dress'.<sup>26</sup> Some observations point to the fact that by the sixteenth century such a close link between the 'clothing' and the 'manners' of a person with a certain social standing as apparent in Deserpsz or Amman had become a generally accepted view. Indeed, already in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages numerous written dress and sumptuary laws existed, as well as writings of chroniclers or theologians, which establish a connection between 'clothing' and 'manners', though mostly in a negative sense: they impose specific rules for the design of dress, or prohibit certain garments, justifying this step by stressing the offence that they might otherwise cause to public morality or the code of social behaviour.<sup>27</sup> In fact, Thomas Aquinas argued that dress, in order not to appear sinful, must be moderate and designed 'according

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<sup>24</sup> Lemmer (1972), p. 63: '... Bey ihnen ist kein Heuchelen/ Sie sagen wies geschaffen sey/ Auff Zucht und alle Erbarkeit/ Ist auch gerichtet ihr gantz Kleid.'

<sup>25</sup> Lemmer (1972), p. 81: 'Ein Edelfrau in Engelland/ Ist geschmuecket nach ihrem Stand/ Wann sie also ist angethan/ Wie diese Figur zeigt an. Darinn hat sie ihr recht Gestalt/ Auch ihrem Mann gar wol gefalt/ Und wann sie ander Kleider trueg/ Ihr Mann sie zu dem Hauß außschlug.'

<sup>26</sup> François Deserpsz (1564), *Receuil de la diuersité des habits, qui sont de present en vusage, tant espays d'Europe, Asie, Affrique & Isles sauuage*, Paris, fol. A3–A3verso: '... nous peut serui de retrencher toute excessive vesture, qui attire l'homme à orgueil: car tout ainsi qu'on cognoist le Moyne au froc, le Fol au chaperon & le soldat aux armes, ainsi se cognoist l'homme sage à l'habit non excessif.'

<sup>27</sup> For a history of sumptuary laws see L.C. Eisenbart (1962), *Kleiderordnungen der deutschen Städte zwischen 1350 und 1700: ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Bürgertums*, (=Göttinger Bausteine zur Geschichtswissenschaft, 32); Göttingen. G. Hampel-Kallbrunner (1962), *Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der Kleiderordnungen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Österreichs*, (=Wiener Dissertationen aus dem Gebiete der Geschichte, 1), Wien. A. Hunt, (1996), *Governance of the consuming passions: a history of sumptuary law*, Basingstoke/New York.

to the customs of the society [the wearer of the dress] lives in'.<sup>28</sup> In the fourteenth century, dress continued to be interpreted in relation to manners. In 1335 King Robert of Naples ruled, for example, that short and closefitting coats, the latest invention of male dress, should be worn no more because the wearers of these garments were unaware that by wearing these clothes they appeared in a shameful way and that the very shortness of their coats incited carnal appetite.<sup>29</sup> In a sort of interpretative 'short cut' a certain manner of clothing thus could (and still can) become in some cases a sign for an 'irregular', abject behaviour. It is in this sense that Giovanni Boccaccio deals with the above-mentioned novelties of dress, consisting of tight and short gowns, in his commentary to the *Divina Commedia*: they become an allegory of the vices of luxury and lechery, and in a long paragraph he continues to interpret these items of dress as a sign of the vile character of the wearer and of his bad behaviour in every possible respect.<sup>30</sup>

Returning to the sixteenth century, this coincidence between dress and manners is explicit also in the fact that in this very period the Italian word 'costume' assumed its present double meaning, signifying both, 'clothing'/'outward appearance', and 'style of life, manners'.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, in several contemporary historiographic works both aspects, costumes and customs of the relative people, are treated under the heading of 'costumi'. This happens for example in Luigi Bassano's *I Costumi et i modi particolari de la vita de Turchi* (Rome 1545) and Giovanantonio Menavino's book about *I costumi, et la vita de Turchi* (Florence 1548 and 1551).<sup>32</sup> The same ambiguity characterises the English word 'habit',

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<sup>28</sup> *Summa theologiae*, II, 2, qu. 169: 'secundum consuetudinem eorum cum quibus vivit.'

<sup>29</sup> See G. del Giudice (1887), *Una legge suntuaria inedita del 1290*, Napoli, p. 129, note 1. A. Güdesen (1933), *Das weltliche Kostüm im italienischen Trecento*, Teil 1 (*Die Hauptbekleidungsstücke 1330–1380*), Berlin/Leipzig, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> See G. Boccaccio (1965), *Esposizioni sopra la comedia di Dante*, ed. G. Padoan, canto V (II), 31–58 Verona, pp. 332ff.

<sup>31</sup> See C. Battisti/G. Alessio (1951), *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, vol. 2, Firenze, p. 1136. S. Battaglia (1964), *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, vol. 3, Torino, p. 914. Defert (1984), (p. 25 and 37f.) points out that the situation seems to be the same in sixteenth-century France, where 'habit' refers to the clothing as well as to the behaviour of a person.

<sup>32</sup> For further examples see F. Sansovino (1582), *Dell'istoria universale dell'origine et imperio de Turchi : ne quali si contengono le leggi, gli officii, i costumi di quella nazione cosi in tempo di pace come di guerra*, Venezia 1564. - Id., *Historia universale dell'origine ed imperio di Turchi*, Venezia (wherein: Th. Spandugino, *Origine e costumi de Turchi*).

which already in late Middle English could signify 'clothing'/'dress' as well as 'a person's custom or moral qualities'.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, sixteenth-century costume books themselves leave no doubt that their plates were also read in reference to the moral status of the persons represented and that the dress shown in the costume books was thought to be indicative for the character and customs of a certain native population. This opinion was openly expressed for instance in the two above-mentioned costume books of 1577 and 1581. In the 1577 *Omnium poene gentium imagines* the publisher speaks of his intention to show 'not only images [of persons in native dress] but also their manners and social norms'; and in the 1581 costume book by Boissard it is asserted that 'the dress represented in the book gives also a notion of the temperament and habits of the relative people'.<sup>34</sup> As a result, dress appears as a sign system with reference to certain abstract characteristics of the wearer.

In that sense however, dress never reached the status of a completely self-sufficient system which could be universally read by whoever, wherever. This is demonstrated by the above-mentioned circumstance that in sixteenth-century costume books the plates include a written explanation of the dress represented. The mere presence of those short titles accompanying the plates in costume books is a strong indication of the fact that the information transmitted visually by a particular costume becomes at least in part accessible only by additional textual remarks. Dress is not a universal 'language', but a semiotic system which potentially functions only in a limited area. Beyond this local area, dress discloses its semiotic message only in part directly and therefore in most cases has to be commented on. The publisher of a costume book must have felt that need in a particularly pointed manner because he was addressing a very large public with his publication, as the Latin or multilingual captions accompanying the plates in numerous sixteenth-century costume books indicate.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *The new shorter Oxford English Dictionary on historical principles*, vol. 1, Oxford 1993, pp. 1168f.

<sup>34</sup> *Habitus variarum orbis gentium*, Cologne, 1581, German preface: 'durch die Kleidung die gemuetter unnd sitten gemeinlich abgenommen warden.' A similar idea is expressed in Deserpz (1564), fol. A1 verso: 'Sy tu veux voir de Femmes, Filles, d'Hommes/ Plusieurs pourtraits, le geste & vestement/ [...] ton regard dessus ces pourtraits range. Tu cognoistras les habits clairement/ Qui les humains font l'un de l'autre estrange.'

<sup>35</sup> Latin captions can be found in the costume books published by Ferdinando Bertelli, Hans Weigel and the *Omnium poene gentium imagines* (1577) by Rutz, whereas the texts in Boissard's *Habitus variarum orbis gentium* (1581) are in Latin, French and German.

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## Chapter Three

# A Question of Nation: Foreign Clothes on the English Subject<sup>1</sup>

Roze Hentschell

This essay examines the reaction in print to foreign textiles as they are brought into England and worn on the English body. Although there is precious little in the way of material artifacts of the clothing of the day, there is ample *textual* evidence that English people of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were rather fixated on the luxury goods imported from the continent. This essay is a study of the rhetorical thrust of these writings. I focus specifically on the texts of satirists and moralists, unlikely bedfellows in their common project of lambasting the ostentation of those men and women who choose to don silks and satins from France, Spain, and Italy. Implicit in their critique is the lament that these *fashionistas* are also clothing themselves in the various immoral attributes of those continental countries and, worse yet, disrupting the notion of what it means to be *English*. As a literary critic, I am interested specifically in how an analysis of the language of these texts can help us gain a better understanding of the concerns and preoccupations of early modern subjects *vis-à-vis* the culture of cloth.

A primary premise of my essay is that clothing is able to articulate a sense of national identity. The other essays in this section of *Clothing Culture 1350–1650* share this basic assumption. Wincott Heckett and Sekatcheva both discuss the ways in which regional dress consolidates national identity in Ireland and Russia, respectively. And Ilg's study of costume books reminds us of the important fact that sartorial differences necessarily reflect geographical ones. However, the textile industry and trade complicates any knowable differences of location because, in the circulation of cloth, clothing, and fashion, both within a particular country and beyond its borders, fixed notions of place are often called into question. While a

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<sup>1</sup> A longer version of this essay has been recently published. Roze Hentschell (2002), 'Treasonous Textiles: Foreign Cloth and the Construction of Englishness', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.3, 543–570.

particular cut and design of clothing might associate it with a particular place (e.g. the French farthingale, the Dutch slops), the fabric from which this apparel was made often confused that distinction. A Dutch sloop, then, might very well be made from Spanish velvet and be worn on an English body. At a time when the English wool broadcloth industry was facing economic difficulties, what these imports meant was that English subjects were not wearing their native cloth. My interest, then, here and in much of my work, is how the wool broadcloth industry in England - and the nationalist sentiment around the industry - is both upset and reinforced by challenges to its prominence.

### **The English Monsieur**

In his eighty-eighth epigram, ‘On English Monsieur’ (1616), Ben Jonson ridicules the vainglorious pride in apparel of his subject and specifically the Englishman’s obsession with clothes and accessories from France. Attired head to toe in French clothing, the Englishman becomes unrecognizable as such: he mutates into a ‘Monsieur’ through his very apparel. Jonson, however, does much more than simply deride the man’s vanity. By asking his reader to marvel at the Englishman whose clothing belies his nationality, he puts into question the very identity of the English subject: ‘Would you believe, when you this Monsieur see, / That his whole body should speak French, not he?’<sup>2</sup> Could the reader imagine, continues Jonson,

That so much scarf of France, and hat, and feather,  
And shoe, and tie, and garter should come hither  
And land on one whose face durst never be  
Toward the sea, farther than half-way tree?  
That he, untravelled, should be French so much,  
As Frenchmen in his company should seem Dutch? (3–8)

The Englishman, though never having ventured beyond his homeland, has forsaken any signs that reveal his proper national affiliation by wearing the various French garments. He has invited foreign fashion ‘hither’, thus becoming a foreigner in his own land. The body of the English subject, covered over with ‘so much’ that is French, not only obscures his Englishness, but also welcomes in the unsavory qualities stereotypically associated with the French: vanity and moral laxity.

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<sup>2</sup> Ben Jonson (1985), ‘On English Monseieur’, in *Ben Jonson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Ian Donaldson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, lines 1–2, hereafter cited in the text parenthetically by line numbers.



Indeed, Jonson suggests that the Monsieur's father may have had 'the French disease' when his son was conceived, thereby passing it on to him both in its manifestation as syphilis and in the obsession with clothes (10).

Jonson concludes the poem by remarking upon his subject's obsession with his tailor's wares and the display of foreign apparel: the Monsieur 'must prove / The new French tailor's motion, monthly made, / Daily to turn in Paul's, and help the trade' (15–16). By parading through Paul's Walk, the middle aisle of St. Paul's Church and London's early modern catwalk for the fashionable, the Englishman tests his sartorial success.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, by exhibiting the apparel in a public place, the French tailor and his 'motion' or puppet, the English Monsieur, perpetuate the domestic market in foreign clothes.

As Jonson's epigram demonstrates, clothing and the cloth from which it was made was not only associated with specific nations, but also helped to create sentiments of nationhood through the linkage of clothing with a particular county. As William Prynne asserts in his antitheatrical polemic, *Histriomastix* (1633), 'apparell' was meant, among other things, 'to distinguish ... one Nation ... from another'.<sup>4</sup> In the early modern period, national identification could be made clear by the visible medium of clothing. At the same time, however, as Jonson's epigram also underscores, clothing *confuses* national identity. While clothing may have confirmed national origin in its unworn state, the donning of apparel by actual bodies often disrupted this national clarity. Wearing foreign clothes disrupted the way of knowing one's country of origin and, perhaps more upsetting, where one's loyalty lay. The English Monsieur, his very name a blurring of national fealty, is several things at once: completely domesticated ('untravelling'), utterly French, morally suspicious (carrying 'the French disease'), and possibly traitorous. Jonson and other satirists of early modern London decry the social misdeeds that accompanied wearing foreign fabrics. But by drawing attention to the foreignness of the clothes, the authors do something else: they present the notion that clothes are capable of both disrupting and affirming English national identity.

As Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones point out in their important study of clothing in the Renaissance, fashion was linked 'with the dissolution of the body

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<sup>3</sup> See Ch. 8 of W. Sparrow Simpson (1881), *Chapters in the History of Old S. Paul's*, London. Because Paul's Walk was reputed to feature a cross-section of London society, John Earle, in his *Microcosmography*, calls it 'the Land's Epitome, or you may call it the lesser Ile of Great Brittain'. John Earle (1633), *Microcosmography*, ed. Alfred S. West, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920, 92.

<sup>4</sup> William Prynne (1633) *Histriomastix*, repr. New York: Garland Publishing, 1974, 207.

politic'.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, though, it is the very 'force of fashion' that can work to create a sense of nation. The threat of the other, and specifically the threat of the other's *clothes*, works to consolidate the importance of the English cloth industry for its subjects. Jones and Stallybrass further emphasize the way in which clothing engenders 'the human subject through the worn things that shape the body and work as material mnemonics'.<sup>6</sup> And certainly, the donning of foreign textiles works, as Polonius might say, to 'proclaim the man' as one perhaps overly concerned with luxury goods, as a fractured subject. But another form of mnemonics is at work here: we are also reminded of the ways in which what the subject chooses *not* to wear, that is English stuffs, enables a language of nationalism on the part of the early modern writer. It is in this absence, in the memory of what was once worn and now has been replaced with foreign clothes, that we find a rhetorical space for promoting the English wool industry.

While the English Monsieur's finished suit of clothes, and the haberdashery of French items that accessorize it, are highlighted to satirize this fashionable Everyman's foolishness, the cloth from which these suits were made was the primary culprit in debasing the nation. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the importation of silk, satin, and velvet from the Continent had reached an all time high. After wine, the primary imports of the sixteenth century were silks and velvets from Italy.<sup>7</sup> By the late years of that century, luxury cloth imports from Spain, as well as from France and Italy, had increased six-fold and were the most prominent class of imports.<sup>8</sup> By the turn of the century, there was a growing complaint from those involved in the manufacture of English cloth: the increased consumption, both at home and abroad, of textiles from Europe contributed to a crisis for the English domestic wool industry - England's major source of employment and primary export trade.<sup>9</sup> As the depression in the cloth industry in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was in large part blamed on the craze for foreign fashions, grievances against the consumption of foreign textiles were almost always also complaints about the decline of the wool trade at home. The literature of the period that takes up the subject of foreign fabrics reveals the extent to which the disruption of the cloth trade had become a national concern.

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<sup>5</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass (2000), *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Jones and Stallybrass (2000), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ralph Davis (1973), *English Overseas Trade, 1500–1700*, London: Macmillan, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Stone (1949), 'Elizabethan Overseas Trade', *Economic History Review* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. 2, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Peter J. Bowden (1962), *The Wool Trade in Tudor and Stuart England*, London: Macmillan, p. 186.

Indeed, the popular writers of the time were in effect echoing the preoccupations of the authorities who were troubled by the precarious position in which the domestic industry had been placed by the burgeoning trade in foreign cloth. The assault in print on those who bought and wore foreign clothes also announced the damage these actions inflicted on England's nationhood.

In the hands of these writers, the cloth from France, Spain, and Italy represented leisure, decadence, disease, and - most crucially - dissolution of the virtues associated with English textiles. Unabashed consumption of fabrics from the Continent compelled writers of the period to associate those who wore foreign fashion with the scandalous qualities of the country of origin. Papistry and lasciviousness were linked with silks and satins from Spain and Italy, syphilis and ostentation with French fabrics. Donning the fabrics and fashions from these countries invited the corruption into England. The English critic's perception of the Continent was thus transformed into an imaginative geography of morality wherein a foreign nation became legible only through its characteristic iniquities. If these writings represent the Continent as shadowy regions of vice, they also cast England as an untainted island of virtue. Domestic wool cloth, considered a visible manifestation of moral superiority, was the material through which English writers often negotiated questions of national selfhood and foreign otherness. In focusing on the threat of foreign textiles, a fundamental concern for the economic health of England's trade relations is written over as a narrative of uncertainty and anxiety about national distinctions. In representing England, texts and textiles are intimately linked in their power to *materially* articulate national identity.

### **An Englishman's Suit is Like a Traitor's Body**

The English had long represented themselves in print as concerned with fashions. As early as 1542, Andrew Boorde satirized what he saw as a particularly English obsession with attire:

I am an Englishman, and naked I stand here  
 Musing in my mind, what raiment I shall wear  
 For now I will wear this and now I will wear that  
 Now I will wear I cannot tell what  
 All new fashyons be pleasant to me.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Boorde (1542), *The First Book of the Introduction to Knowledge*, London, sig. A3<sup>v</sup>.



**T**he fyrste chapter treateth of the uaturall disposicion  
of an Englyshman, and of the noble realme of  
England, & of the money there is vsed.

**I** Am an Englysh man, and naked I stand here  
Musing in my mynd, what rayment I shal were  
For now I wyl were thys and now I wyl were that  
Now I wyl were I cannot tel what  
All new fashyons be plesant to me  
I wyl haue them, whether I thyrte or thee  
Now I am a frysker, all men doth on me looke  
What should I do but set rocke on the hoope  
What do I care, yf all the worlde me sayle  
I wyl get a garment, shal reche to my sayle  
Then I am a minton, for I were the new gyle.  
The yere after this I trust to be wyle

Not

Figure 3.1 Andrew Boorde, *The First Book of the Introduction of Knowledge*, L: 1562 (sig. A3v). (This item is reproduced by permission of *The Huntington Library, San Marino, California*).

The accompanying woodcut famously represents an unclothed Englishman with shears in his hand (Fig. 3.1). The significance of this emblem, as the anonymous author of the *Hic Mulier* (1620) pamphlet suggests, is that the Englishman ‘had liberty with his shears to cut from every Nation of the World one piece of patch to make up his garment’.<sup>11</sup> In *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606), Thomas Dekker also refers to this image, indicating its status as a stock emblem for representing the absurd sartorial habits of the Englishman:

Wittie was that Painter therefore, that when he had limned one of every Nation in their proper attyres, and being at his wittes endes how to drawe an Englishman: At the last (to give him a quipp for his follie in apparell) drewe him starke naked, with Sheeres in his hande, and cloth on his arme, because none could cut out his fashions but himselfe.<sup>12</sup>

Both the author of *Hic Mulier* and Dekker are aware that the image in Boorde’s text is meant as a clever barb to poke fun at their countrymen’s folly, while also invoking the question of nationhood in their reading of the image. In his insistence on looking elsewhere for his apparel, the Englishman must necessarily remain naked. England, then, represented by the emblematic figure, is left bare, exposed, and vulnerable. It is only by clothing himself in foreign attire that the Englishman can be dressed at all and it is dressing in the clothes of ‘strangers’ that puts English national identity into crisis.

Importantly, the authors who are troubled by the image of the Englishman with shears in his hand, poised to cut himself a foreign garment to his liking, point to the agency of the figure. In Boorde’s ditty, the Englishman insists that he ‘will wear’ ‘this’ or ‘that’, depending upon his ‘musings’. The author of *Hic Mulier* underscores the ‘liberty’ the man has ‘to make up his garment’, while Dekker points out that only the Englishman ‘*himselfe*’ has the ability ‘to cut out his fashions’ (my emphases). The utter freedom for a man to choose the clothes that he wears enables him to choose the national identity with which he associates himself. In an age where subjects had the liberty to purchase foreign goods at an unprecedented rate, the ability to define national identity could not necessarily be controlled by the crown. Discourse surrounding the purchase of foreign clothes

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<sup>11</sup> *Hic Mulier; Or, The Man-Woman, in Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640*, Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus eds, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985, p. 276.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Dekker (1885), *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606), in *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, Alexander Grosart ed., London, p. 59, hereafter cited in the text by page numbers.

thus becomes heavily moralized, pitting a national expansionism - in the subject's acceptance of and desire for foreign goods in England - against a national protectionism - in the desire of the crown and moralists to promote domestic wares in the interest of England. In the period's topical literature - particularly satire, ballads, and puritan polemics - we find almost without exception that the adoption of foreign fashions is derided for the disruption it causes to an imagined national solidarity. Repeatedly, we see in the texts that foreign cloth is sinister in its power to undermine England's virtue and the symbolic rectitude of the domestic wool industry.

Thomas Dekker's *The Seven Deadly Sins of London* associates deviance with continental clothes, but importantly emphasizes the implications of foreign cloth for English nationhood. In the chapter called 'Apishness', Dekker claims that wearing foreign fashion is akin to treason:

[A]n English-mans suite is like a traitors bodie that hath beene hanged, drawne, and quartered, and is set up in severall places: his Cod-peece is in *Denmark*, the collar of his Dublet and the belly in *France*: the wing and narrow sleeve in *Italy*: the short waste hangs over a *Dutch* Botchers stall in *Utrich*: his huge sloppes speaks *Spanish*: *Polonia* gives him the Bootes. (59–60)

Dekker here refers to the particularly English practice of simultaneously wearing various styles of clothing and fabrics derived from several countries, which figuratively disperses the Englishman's body all over Europe. By invoking the punishment reserved for high treason (hanging, drawing, and quartering), this sartorial deed is identified with a crime against the state. The donning of clothing from several countries both disassembles the English body and dismantles a unified nation. Discussing this passage, Karen Newman asserts that 'the mangle-mangle of English fashion is displaced onto national 'others' and xenophobia worked out through a spectacular and psychically useful synecdochic substitution of the traitor's body for the nation-state.'<sup>13</sup> While the confusion of English fashion is 'displaced' onto other nations, it is important to emphasize that in Dekker's passage the foreign, and therefore suspect, 'suit' remains *in England* on the Englishman's body, thereby emphasizing the main source of anxiety. Not only has the other been *willingly* allowed into England through the cloth trade, but this action also calls into question the national sympathies of the Englishman. Thus, Dekker's simile hints at what was at the heart of the debate over foreign clothes: treachery to English industry and English identity.

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Newman (1991), *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 125.

### English Cloth: 'A True Subject'

While the import of foreign luxury cloth was troubling in its disruption of England's cloth trade, it was troubling for other reasons too: foreign textiles perpetuated the craze for sumptuous fabrics, thereby causing a decrease in the *cultural* value of domestic cloth. While the success of the cloth industry throughout much of the sixteenth century was a source of pride and a locus for organizing fantasies of national solidarity, the consumers' turn away from the domestic industry was a blow to the unified vision of the nation based upon domestic cloth. Philip Stubbes, in *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), indicates this sentiment when he asserts that foreign fabrics were acceptable only as long as they stayed out of England:

those [continental] Cuntreyes are rich and welthie of them selves, abounding with ... riche attyre ... and therefore if they weare them, they are not so muche to bee blamed, as not having anie other kind of cloathing to cover themselves withall. So if wee would contente our selves with such kinde of attire, as our owne Country doeth minister unto us, it were much tollerable. But we are so surprised in Pride, that if it come not from beyond the seas, it is not worth a straw. And thus we impoverish our selves in buying their trifling merchandizes, more plesant than necessarie, and enrich them, who rather laugh at us in their sleeves, than otherwise, to see our great follie in affecting of trifles, & departing with good merchandizes for it.<sup>14</sup>

Stubbes' assumption that Europeans wear silks and satin because that is all they have, however specious, points to a primary reason the domestic cloth industry was in crisis: English people, particularly those with ready money, were decreasingly interested in wearing domestically produced cloth. While the Puritan Stubbes is mostly angered by the display of vanity that wearing foreign fabrics signifies, at the same time that buying foreign luxury goods 'impoverishes' the soul, it also financially impoverishes the country. Consumers have rejected 'good merchandizes', those products provided by England, in favor of foreign 'trifles', diminishing their own moral makeup as well as the English economic system. Importantly though, for Stubbes, a simple solution to the vice of pride is for English people to embrace their own industry, to 'content' themselves with the products that are 'ministered' by England itself. If the English will not wear their own cloth, then how is the industry, and indeed virtue, to be upheld?

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Stubbes (1973), *The Anatomie of Abuses*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, C1<sup>r-v</sup>. Subsequent references will be in the text.

This question is at the heart of Robert Greene's *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier, or a Quaint Dispute Between Velvet Breeches and Cloth Breeches* (1592).<sup>15</sup> In this extremely popular satiric pamphlet two anthropomorphized pairs of breeches dispute their respective positions in England (Fig. 3.2). To briefly summarize the plot: A young man, going for a walk in the country, falls asleep and has a dream in which two pairs of breeches - one made from cloth and the other from velvet - argue about who has more right to represent English values. The dispute is ultimately decided by a selection of jurors representing a cross-section of professions in England who happen upon the scene. Velvet Breeches represents both the importation of foreign fabrics and the accompanying degradation of morals of the Londoners who wear them. Conversely, Cloth Breeches upholds the virtues of the English industry and celebrates the morals of the men who resist the temptations of city life. Significantly, this dispute takes place in the country - away from the infecting influence of the court and city. And it is at least partially the rural setting that allows English Cloth Breeches to triumph over his foreign, urban counterpart. Greene's text participates in the expression of a sentiment prevalent in late sixteenth-century England: it is morally righteous to turn away from the city with its foreign and therefore dangerous influences toward the purity of the English countryside. Greene calls for a rejection of the city (London) in favour of the country (England) in order to spurn the foreign influences that have infiltrated the urban space.<sup>16</sup>

It is crucial to Greene's text that Velvet Breeches is not native to England. His foreignness creates the crisis in traditionally English values. In his dedicatory epistle to Thomas Burnaby, Greene asserts that his tale is an allegory for the damage that vanity has done in England: 'How since men placed their delights in proud looks and brave atyre, Hospitality was left off, Neighbourhood was exiled, Conscience was skoft at, and charitie lay frozen in the streets' (209). While the 'brave atyre' associated with foreign textiles undoes English morals, Cloth Breeches is portrayed as the material 'such as ... our great Grandfathers wore, when neighbour-hood and hospitalitie had banished pride out of *England*'

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Greene (1964), *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier: Or, A Quaint Dispute Between Velvet Breeches and Cloth Breeches*, in *Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene*, vol. 11, ed. Alexander Grosart, New York: Russell and Russell, hereafter cited in the text by page numbers. The events in Greene's text were borrowed from an earlier text, probably written by Francis Thynne and published in 1577; Francis Thynne (1841), *The Debate Between Pride and Lowliness*, ed. J. Payne Collier, London. See Clare Bartram's essay in this volume for an extended discussion of Thynne's text.

<sup>16</sup> Here I invoke the double meaning of 'country' that Raymond Williams (1973) points out in *The Country and the City*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 1.



**A**  
**QUIP FOR AN UP-**  
**START COURTIER :**

*Or,*

**A quaint dispute between Veluet breeches  
and Clothbreeches.**

*Wherein is plainely set downe the disorders  
in all Estates and Trades.*



**L O N D O N**

**Imprinted by John Wolfe, and are to bee sold at his  
shop at Poules chayne. 1 5 9 2.**

Figure 3.2 Robert Greene, *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier*, L: 1592 (frontispiece). (This item is reproduced by permission of *The Huntington Library, San Marino, California*).

(222). Cloth Breeches represents a long-standing tradition of hospitality in England that is threatened by the corrupting forces entering the country with foreign fabrics.

Velvet Breeches' foreignness and association with Spain and Italy is made clear throughout *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier*. He sheepishly admits his continental connections: 'I (poor snake) am sprung from the ancient *Romans*, borne in *Italy*...cald into *England* from my native home (where I was famous)' (224). Velvet's heritage is rich, emphasizing the tradition of vanity in the world of ancient Rome, as well as the connections to the papistry of the Roman Catholic Church. That he was *called* into England suggests that he did not come by his own volition but was rather beckoned to the island by the 'young Gentlemen heere in *England*' (224). A crucial part of Greene's quip is that sumptuous fabrics and their attendant vices would not be present in England unless they were *invited* in by the upstarts in London.

Recalling the satirical and moral discourse surrounding the use of luxury textiles, these velvet breeches are also seen as unnatural in their 'marvellous curious[ness]'. The association of foreign fabrics with the grotesque is evidenced by the narrator's first vision of the velvet trousers: he sees an 'uncouth headlesse thing,' which, despite the fact that it 'had motion', seems to be 'some monster' (220). Although the sight of an ambulatory headless pair of breeches would have been cause for alarm in and of itself, their monstrosity is made legible, rather, by the fabric from which they are made, compounded by their presence in the English countryside. The character of Cloth Breeches sees that it is not simply Velvet's existence in England that is so scandalous, but also that he 'camest not alone, but accompanied with multitude of abominable vices, hanging on thy bumbast nothing but infectious abuses, and vaine glory, selfe love, sodomie and strange poisonings, wherewith [he] hath infected this glorious Iland' (226). The sinless space of England has been 'touched', by the 'infectious abuses' associated with Italian velvet.

If, in *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier*, Velvet Breeches is represented as an ominous foreigner, invited into England by morally suspect young men and ready to spread disease throughout the island, Cloth Breeches is a vision of humble domestic morals. Even the difference in their gaits is telling: while Velvet pompously 'strouted up and down the vally as proudly as though they had there appointed to act some desperate combat', Cloth Breeches comes on the scene 'more soberly marching, and with a softer pace' (221, 222). In meeting Cloth Breeches, we see that he is everything that Velvet is not. While Velvet is accented with 'the best Spanish Satine', 'gold twist', and 'knots of pearle', Cloth is 'plaine', 'without either welt or garde,' 'of white Kersie, without a slop, the nether-stocke of the same ... and onely seamed with a little coventry blewe' (222). At a time when men were wearing as many sumptuous materials as they could possibly afford *at*

*the same time*, it is remarkable that both these breeches and the netherstockings were made from the same humble cloth, without decoration ('welt or garde') or bombastic garments (a 'slop'), and in simple colors (white and a 'little' blue). Just as the evils of Velvet Breeches are revealed through the naming of his countries of origin, so Cloth Breeches' humility and moral value is understood through the association with Kersey and Coventry.

The 'quaint dispute' to which the title refers is the important issue, not only in the text but in early modern cloth culture as well: 'whether Cloth breeches are of more worth, and which of them hath the best title to bee resident in *England*' (250). While Cloth claims that Velvet has damaged his good name and thus England's, Velvet feels Cloth is impinging upon his right to 'honour' the gentlemen of London with his 'countenance' (a puzzling word choice for a pair of trousers). The text, then, poses this crucial question to the jury of tradesmen assembled to decide the debate between Cloth and Velvet, and to the reader: Is it right to allow the popular market in foreign cloth to expand at the expense of the domestic industry so important to England's self definition?

The jury, not surprisingly, rules in favor of Cloth Breeches. In their estimation, the respective values and iniquities connected with Cloth and Velvet are enough to decide who is most fit to represent England:

we do find that Cloth breeches is by many hundred years more antient, ever since *Brute* an inhabitant in this island ... [Cloth is] a companion to kings, an equall with the nobility, a friend to Gentlemen and yeomen, and patrone of the poore, a true subject, a good housekeeper, and generall as honest as he is ancient, Whereas Velvet breeches is an upstart come out of *Italy*, begot of Pride, nursed up by self-love, & brought into this country by his companion Nufangleness: that he is an enemy to the Common-wealth, and one that is not in any way to be preferred in equity before Cloth breeches. [Therefore in generall verdict we adjudge Cloth breeches] to have don him no wrong, but that hee hath lawfully claimed his title of Frank tenement, and in that wee appoint him for ever to bee resident. (294)

Just as Velvet claims connections to the ancient and vain Romans, here we have Cloth portrayed as originating from the time of Brutus. By linking Cloth Breeches with Brutus, Greene suggests that he is as famous and as worthy to represent England as that valiant Trojan. Further, Cloth, who is regarded equally with 'kings', 'nobility', 'gentlemen', 'yeomen', and the 'poore', unites rather than divides the nation. With this final judgment, we also return to Thomas Dekker's and Philip Stubbes's understanding of what clothes say about nationalist sympathies. Italian velvet is an 'enemy to the Commonwealth'; wearing it is likened to treason. Cloth is 'a true subject'; to wear it demonstrates a show of

support for the country that manufactures it. The length of Cloth's appointment in England - 'forever' - precludes him from ever being threatened by outsiders again.

With the banishment of Velvet Breeches we are to assume that English virtues will be restored. Removing the stranger will reinstate the cultural superiority of Cloth Breeches and dispel all the greed, corruption, and loose morals associated with foreign cloth, thereby making the Englishman recognizable and whole again. By relinquishing the textiles of treason, and choosing to wear domestic wool, the Englishman can finally become 'a true subject'. Moreover, England can be restored to its former glory by the simple act of choosing cloth whose virtue is woven into its very fabric. Once again the nation can revert to the time 'when neighbour-hood and hospitalitie had banished pride out of *England*'. And, of course, in this fantastical dream narrative this can all be so.

But, no matter how critical about Velvet Breeches or celebratory about Cloth Breeches the rhetoric may seem, as a London-dwelling University wit it is likely that Greene wrote from intimate experience of the life of the velvet-wearing gallant. In *The Repentance of Robert Greene* (1592), Greene admits his own sartorial iniquities: 'At my return to England, I ruffeled out in my silks, in the habit of a *malcontent*.'<sup>17</sup> While deriding the cultural preoccupation with the London market in foreign cloth, Greene himself was indeed reliant upon the vicissitudes of the city's economy and the public's taste for satirical literature. Even as other popular writers such as Jonson, Dekker, Gosson, and indeed the Puritan Stubbes, scoffed at and made their subjects the ostentatious men and women of the period, these were the very people who comprised at least a part of their audience. While London provides the backdrop for the moral decay found in the obsession with imported fabrics, it also supports the economy of satire.

And despite Greene's idealized representation of Cloth, the text cannot disguise the important fact that Cloth, too, is itself dependent upon the market, and indeed the city, for its successful triumph in England. Although in the national imagination, wool broadcloth might stand for English virtue, that fabric possesses no intrinsic value beyond its economic power to render solvent England's economy. English domestic cloth, like its despised foreign counterpart, is ultimately reduced to a commodity. The bottom line is that the importation of foreign fabrics has disrupted England's most important industry. Greene's text, then, as well as those of other satirists and moralists, demonstrates a material attempt to emphasize the values so important to England at a time when the value of England's materials was under assault.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Greene (1966), *The Repentance of Robert Greene*, New York: Barnes and Noble, p. 20.

## Chapter Four

# Tomb Effigies and Archaic Dress in Sixteenth-Century Ireland

Elizabeth Wincott Heckett

In the first half of the sixteenth century in Ireland a particular type of tomb effigy sculpture was erected to commemorate well-born people. The effigies may be of husband and wife, or of single individuals; the men wear archaic armour seemingly of at least a hundred years earlier. The women's gowns and head-dresses follow styles originating even before then. Many such effigies are found in the lands of strong Anglo-Norman influence around Dublin, known as the Pale.<sup>1</sup> John Hunt in his seminal book, *Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture*, catalogues about twenty-five male and fourteen female figures from the sixteenth, and ten men and nine women from the mid to late fifteenth century. In St. Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny, lies the tomb effigy of Piers Butler, eighth Earl of Ormond and his wife Margaret Fitzgerald, daughter of the Earl of Kildare, both sculpted wearing these earlier forms of dress.<sup>2</sup>

Their tomb effigy is dated to the second quarter of the sixteenth century, however the armour of the Earl, and the dress of the Countess, bear no resemblance to contemporary fashions at, for example, the Court of Henry VIII or of François I of France. The ensuing discussion seeks to discover why this powerful couple

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<sup>1</sup> This research stems from a working brief for the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin on cloth cutting, sewing and embroidery techniques historically correct for a reconstruction of the Margaret Fitzgerald costume shown in the St. Canice's Cathedral effigy. This is in the permanent Medieval Ireland 1150–1550 exhibition at the National Museum, although the present writer claims no credit for the actual reconstruction; all decisions were in the capable hands of the exhibition curators. Possible construction techniques and materials are detailed in Elizabeth Wincott Heckett (2002), 'The Margaret Fitzgerald Tomb Effigy: a Late Medieval Headdress and Gown in St. Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny' in Désirée G. Koslin and Janet E. Snyder eds, *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress - Objects, Texts, Images*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 209–222.

<sup>2</sup> John Hunt (1974), *Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture 1200–1600*, vols. 1 and 2, Dublin and London: Irish University Press, Sotheby Parke Bernet.

preferred to make their final statement in this way. It appears the import of these particular choices outweighed all other considerations, carrying a very specific message to contemporary observers. Both people, members of an elite minority, inherited complex loyalties of class, culture and nationality. This contrasts with the Russian experience, described by Sekatcheva in this section, as canonical and retaining an ancient lifestyle unchanged since the tenth century. Hentschell argues that it was traitorous for an Englishman to adopt foreign clothes thus becoming 'un-English' in his loyalties. In Ireland however, it had become traitorous for the Anglo-Norman incomers to wear Irish clothes but it was also forbidden for the Irish themselves. Irish dress was seen by London as both threateningly independent and a sign of a backward society.

In terms of this discussion the contemporary Irish political situation is relevant. By the early 1500s the new Tudor dynasty was well established in England and intent on breaking the power of the Anglo-Irish lords in Ireland. The original members of these families had come into Ireland in the twelfth century, taking part in the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169 that destroyed independent Irish rule. They included the Fitzgeralds of Kildare in the east, the Fitzgeralds of Desmond in the south, the Burkes in the west and the Ormond Butlers in the south east. Lapses of control by the English crown in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries enabled these families to establish their authority in sizeable parts of the country. They built up immensely strong, wealthy fiefdoms and an almost royal freedom of action and jurisdiction that ran directly counter to the ambitions of Henry VIII, and his commitment to the modernization of society. In those same earlier centuries traditional Gaelic rulers had reclaimed some liberty of action, most significantly in Ulster and Thomond.

The concept of 'lordship' developed in the fifteenth century after the Irish model of 'kingship' diminished; Anglo-Irish nobles like the earls of Kildare then also adopted local practices. These included the rights of landlords to forcibly billet on husbandmen their private armies of kerns and gallowglasses (mercenaries) and for themselves and their households to enjoy free hospitality ('coign and livery') as they travelled their lands.<sup>3</sup> Gaelic noble families established more neighbourly relationships with the Anglo-Irish (or Old English as they were also known); inter-marrying led to a strengthening of bonds between former adversaries.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Katharine Simms (1992), 'The Norman Invasion and the Gaelic Recovery' in R.F. Foster ed., *The Oxford History of Ireland*, pp. 44–87; p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Simms (1992), p. 85.



**Figure 4.1** The Piers Butler and Marget Fitzgerald tomb effigy, St. Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny, plate 158 from *Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture*, by John Hunt. (Copyright The Irish Picture Library, Dublin).

By the end of the fifteenth century, society had become somewhat more settled with many noble families, both Gaelic and Old English, building and inhabiting tower houses. The first half of the sixteenth century was the final phase of an uneasy medieval balance between these factors. From the mid-century Elizabeth I pursued policies of colonization and plantation of English settlers, particularly in Munster. The adoption of the Reformed faith in England in contrast to the continued loyalty to Roman Catholicism in Ireland added in the fatal factor of religious intolerance and cruelty to English actions.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most powerful families, the Butlers had their long-established base in Kilkenny; as Earls of Ormond they ruled the surrounding countryside from the massive twelfth-century castle. Earlier family members had moved abroad; the fifth, sixth and seventh earls spent much of their lives in England. Indeed, the Butlers' elder son also lived for many years at the court of Henry VIII; the Ormond family was related to the Boleyns and a match was discussed between James and his distant cousin Anne.<sup>6</sup>

Margaret's family, the Fitzgeralds of Kildare, were near neighbours of the Ormonds. In the fifteenth century they had been pre-eminent in Irish politics. Like the Butlers they were at the head of the most powerful of contemporary dynasties, so the marriage of Sir Piers and Lady Margaret united, though only temporarily, these great families. The couple were flamboyant, ambitious and strong-willed. Having married young, they unusually lived into their seventies, successfully rearing two sons and six daughters. Known as Ruadh (red or red-headed), Piers was born about 1467 into a minor branch of the family, the MacRichard Butlers, but set his sights on becoming earl of Ormond with the accompanying vast wealth and authority.<sup>7</sup> His mother was Irish: Saiv, daughter of Donald Reagh Kavanagh whose royal family was related to the MacMorroughs of Leinster.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in addition to his English connections, Piers would have had an intimate understanding of the most noble Gaelic culture and society.

An almost contemporary description of the main players in this story in the 'Description of Ireland' from Holinshed's *Chronicles* was written by Richard Stanyhurst (born 1547) who would have been familiar with Kilkenny since he attended Kilkenny College, the grammar school founded by Piers and Margaret

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Canny (1992), 'Early Modern Ireland' pp. 88–133 in R.F. Foster ed., *The Oxford History of Ireland*, pp. 106–111.

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Empey (1984), 'From rags to riches; Piers Butler, eighth Earl of Ormond, 1515–39', *Journal of the Butler Society*, 2, 3, 1983/84, pp. 299–314, 299 and 310.

<sup>7</sup> Empey (1984), pp. 299, 310. Since the time of the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169 the family had been in receipt of duties on all wines that came into Ireland; hence their name.

<sup>8</sup> Empey (1984), p. 302.



Butler. He should have been in a favourable position to have an understanding of the personalities involved since there may well have been people who remembered the eighth Earl and Countess. Stanyhurst's English forebears settled in Ireland in the fourteenth century; he was Catholic, went to Oxford University and studied law in London acquiring some reputation as a scholar.<sup>9</sup> He describes Piers Butler as 'secret and of great forecast, very stayed in speech, daungerous of euery trifle that touched his reputation'.<sup>10</sup>

Since Margaret Fitzgerald's brother had succeeded as earl of Kildare in 1478 the marriage was a powerful alliance for her ambitious husband. She seems to have been even more strong-minded than Butler. Again Stanyhurst sets the scene. Piers is now Earl of Ossory (another family title) and is chosen as lord deputy of Ireland. 'In which office being himself (saue only in feates of armes) a simple Gentleman, hee bare out his honoure, and the change of gouernement very worthely, through the singular wisdome of his Countesse: a Lady of such a port, that all estates of the Realme crouched to hir so politique that nothing was thought substancially debated without hir aduice; manlike and tall of stature; very rich and bountifull; a bitter enimie.' It looks as if there was a considerable difference between the standards of gracious living at Maynooth Castle, her childhood home, compared with those of the MacRichard Butlers, since Margaret was also 'the only meane at those days whereby hir husbands countrey was reclaimed from the sluttish and uncleane custome, to bedding, housekeeping & ciuilite'.<sup>11</sup>

Margaret Fitzgerald would no doubt have been familiar with the library in Maynooth. By about 1500 AD it is known to have contained twenty-one books in Latin, eleven in French, seven in English and twenty in Irish, most concerned with religious topics.<sup>12</sup> At this same time Irish translations of other European texts such as medical and astronomical handbooks, Arthurian romances and the Travels of Marco Polo became popular.<sup>13</sup> By then Anglo-Irish lords had adopted the Gaelic custom of becoming patrons of Irish bards, harpers, scribes and traditional historians all of whom would have spent time in their houses or castles. Both Margaret and Piers would have grown up and lived among such company. The resurgence of Gaelic culture during the fifteenth century, particularly through

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<sup>9</sup> H.F. McClintock (1943), *Old Irish & Highland Dress*, Dundalk: W. Tempest, Dundalgan Press, p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Stanyhurst (1577), *Holinshed's Irish Chronicle and The Historie of Irelande*, p. 252.

<sup>11</sup> Stanyhurst (1577), p. 85.

<sup>12</sup> Katharine Simms (1992), 'The Norman Invasion and the Gaelic Recovery', in R.F. Foster ed., *The Oxford History of Ireland*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.44–87; p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> Simms (1992), p. 85.

songs and poems, affirmed its continuities with pre-Norman society. Indeed the Old English families began to be included into these legacies.

Piers and Margaret Butler established a modern school in the Renaissance manner and introduced skilled artisans from Flanders to set up tapestry and carpet making in Kilkenny.<sup>14</sup> The Butler-Fitzgerald effigies were made by a school of sculptors (now known as the Ormond group), closely associated with Piers Butler's branch of the family. Edwin Rae in his discussion of Irish sepulchral monuments of the later medieval period described in detail this *atelier's* association with the MacRichard Butlers, suggesting that by the early 1500s Piers and Margaret Butler were acting as patrons.<sup>15</sup>

There is no lack of evidence of the use of contemporary as well as archaic Irish dress at the time. Other similar families, both Anglo-Irish and Gaelic were using luxury clothes in European styles. Thomas Fitzgerald, 'Silken Thomas', was in the Tower of London awaiting execution in 1536. Even in such circumstances he wrote to his servant that he had no shoes, hose, doublet or shirt, indeed only a frieze gown instead of a 'velvet furred with bowge (white lambskin)'.<sup>16</sup> The English official St. Leger reporting to Henry VIII on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1541 on a meeting with the O'Donnell (Chief of his clan) includes the presumably significant information that the Gaelic lord was wearing a coat of crimson velvet with twenty to thirty pairs of gold aiglettes, a great double cloak of crimson satin ornamented with black velvet and a bonnet with a feather full of gold aiglettes.<sup>17</sup> Clearly, with a son at the English court, the Butlers knew all about the latest fashions and may well have worn them. Thus, superficially, it is surprising that in planning their tomb effigies, their final statement, they made such a traditional choice.

In the late medieval period fashion was indeed important, but in different parts of Europe national trends had become specific rather than generalized. The c.1539 portrait of Anne of Cleves (1515–1557) by Hans Holbein (1497–1543),<sup>18</sup> for instance, shows her wearing a most elaborate head-dress featuring pearls threaded into stem-like patterns with a complex jewel with gold aiglettes on the left side of

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<sup>14</sup> Empey (1984), p. 299–301. Ada Longfield, *Anglo-Irish Trade in the sixteenth Century*, London: Routledge and Sons, 1929), p.81. Historical Manuscripts. Commission, Appendix to second Report, pp. 224–5 (Manuscript of O'Conor Don).

<sup>15</sup> Edwin B. Rae (1970–1971), 'Irish sepulchral monuments of the later Middle Ages', pp. 1–39, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vols. 100 and 101, pp. 1–38, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Mairead Dunlevy (1989), *Dress in Ireland*, London: Batsford, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> McClintock (1943), p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> The miniature of Anne of Cleves (1515–1557) by Hans Holbein (1497–1543) is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (P153–1910).

the head. Equally her red velvet gown differs from English or French styles since its ample folds are gathered under the bust with a leather belt decorated with golden beads. Wide sleeves are held in perhaps by a braid midway between shoulder and elbow, the voluminous lower sleeves fall below the hands. Coming from the Low Countries, Anne of Cleves was out of step with the English court: apparently Henry VIII was completely disgusted by her ladies in waiting who were wearing clothes of identical material and, to his eyes, in an extremely ugly style.<sup>19</sup>

François Boucher argued that as smaller duchies disappeared in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, more defined, but less numerous, nation states emerged, particularly in western and central Europe. The specific fashions of small political entities can no longer be maintained in these larger and more homogenous groupings.<sup>20</sup> However in Ireland, as perhaps in other smaller communities, an impetus towards individual insularity persisted, strengthened by the inescapable reality of unacceptable foreign rule from Tudor monarchs and ministers. It is well known that Henry VIII, in company with other late medieval dignitaries, felt it was within his rights to legislate on his subjects' dress. In Ireland by this time such legislation was specifically political and directed towards the destruction of a separate Irish identity. An example of these restrictive edicts forbids any person in Ireland after 1 May 1539 to dress their hair in the Irish fashion or to 'weare any shirt, smock, kerchor, bendel (band or ribbon), neckerchour, mocket (bib or handkerchief) or linnen cappe coloured, or dyed with Saffron, ne yet to use, or weare in any their shirts or smockes above seven yardes of cloth to be measured according to the King's Standard, and that also no woman use or weare any kyrtell, or cote tucked up, or imbroydered or garnished with silke, or courched ne (overlaid, embroidered) layd with usker, (Gaelic *usgar* a jewel or ornament) after the Irish fashion, and that no person or persons, of what estate, condition or degree they be, shall use, or weare any mantles, cote, or hood, made after the Irish fashion'.<sup>21</sup>

The continuation of the wearing of the *houppelande*-derived gown of Margaret Fitzgerald is not the only instance of archaic dress in Ireland. There are other features of sixteenth century dress that originated in the fourteenth century. The woodcuts in John Derricke's *The Image of Ireland* (1570) show clearly at least three examples. These are the male doublet, which retained a gathered peplum, the

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<sup>19</sup> Neville Williams (1971), *Henry VIII and his court*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 176.

<sup>20</sup> François Boucher (1965), *Histoire du Costume en Occident de l'Antiquité a nos Jours*, France: Flammarion, p. 219.

<sup>21</sup> McClintock (1943), p. 66.

male and female hanging sleeves and the shaggy pile cloak.<sup>22</sup> The last for many centuries played an important role in Irish dress. The O'Neill, King of Ulster, and his companions are shown wearing shaggy mantles in an illustration of his inauguration ceremony at Tullyhoge Fort, Co. Tyrone.<sup>23</sup> Some part of this persistence of dress types may be because Ireland is relatively distanced from the European landmass but it goes well beyond that simple reality. In late medieval Ireland the modern concept of identity as an integral and personal right had not developed.

The putting on of clothes could be an 'investiture' that validated the person wearing them. In 1573 the Earl of Desmond, Garrett Fitzgerald, escaped from many years of detention in London and, with his wife, called a hosting of his clansmen and retainers at Lough Gur, Co. Limerick. It seemed he had been wearing shabby English clothes. However at that reunion with his own people the Earl 'and his wife put on Irishe rayment and made proclamation that no deputie nor constable nor sheriffe should practice their office in his countrey'.<sup>24</sup> It seems he is claiming back his palatine rights over his lands *while invested in the clothes or armour that incorporated his authority*. How much we would like to know exactly what that 'Irish rayment' was!

Piers Butler died in 1539 in his early seventies, and Margaret Fitzgerald in 1542. Piers achieved his life-long ambition to become Earl of Ormond only eighteen months before he died so the tomb sculpture might represent an affirmation of his enhanced standing.<sup>25</sup> However, it is more likely to have been an earlier establishment of his position. It would have been in character for Butler to

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<sup>22</sup>Plate III in John Derricke's *The Image of Irelande* (1581) shows men whose doublets have hanging sleeves and tightly gathered pleats at the waist, and a chieftain's wife wearing a shaggy cloak, Belfast: Blackstaff Press edition, 1985. See Elizabeth Wincott Heckett (1992), 'An Irish "Shaggy Pile" Fabric of the Sixteenth Century - an Insular Survival?' in L. Bender Jørgensen and E. Munksgaard eds, *Archaeological Textiles in Northern Europe, Tidens Tænd nr. 5*, report from the 4<sup>th</sup> NESAT symposium, Copenhagen: Der Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi, pp. 58–68.

<sup>23</sup> This illustration from a sixteenth-century map, held at the National Maritime Museum, London is used in the display on Irish Kingship and Lordship in the Medieval Exhibition, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.

<sup>24</sup> Justice Walsh to Lord Deputie, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1573, quoted in Anne Chambers (2000), *Eleanor, Countess of Desmond*, Dublin: Wolfhound Press, pp. 89–90.

<sup>25</sup> The complications of the Ormond succession were many, including the legitimate claims of the Boleyns. Questions of possible entailment of the estates, the interim granting to Piers Butler of the earldom of Ossory and Tudor politicking lie behind the lengthy delay before Piers was made earl of Ormond on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 1538; Empey (1984), pp. 310–311.

arrange for the effigy to be made while he was still working towards claiming his title. This would have ensured that at least in death he and his wife would be remembered appropriately. The effigies may have been designed as early as 1515–1527 since other tombs in St. Canice's were commissioned before decline or illness set in.<sup>26</sup> It is believed that the tombs of James Shortal and John Grace in the Cathedral were made twenty-six and sixteen years respectively before death.<sup>27</sup> In 1515 Thomas, seventh earl of Ormond, died in England at which point Piers Butler was acknowledged, in Ireland, as the *de facto* earl. He may have commissioned the double effigy after that date to reinforce his position. It is also considered that the double effigy fits stylistically into this time period.<sup>28</sup> However, we may also note that by, say, 1525 Butler would have been about fifty-eight years old, a considerable age for a man at that time, particularly in his position, and with Henry VIII as his monarch. It would have been appropriate to make such arrangements then.

The suit of armour worn by the Earl is at least a hundred years 'out-of-date'. However, John Hunt in his definitive discussion of Irish armour in the late Middle Ages, is quite specific that the suits of armour shown on the figure of Piers, and other similar effigies, are factual representations. He argues that individual pieces may have survived over a long period of time and that earlier types of armour persisted since they were better suited to contemporary military conflicts in Ireland. In this instance he argues that the armour is not archaic in the sense of being out-of-date but that it continues to be worn because it is effective.<sup>29</sup>

The form of dress and head-dress of the Countess were no longer current in many upper class European circles. They seemingly date from the fourteenth century but with, perhaps, developments specific to Ireland.<sup>30</sup> The bag sleeves of the Fitzgerald and other Irish gowns appear infrequently on earlier similar robes and the extra pleating at the base of the Fitzgerald robe appears to be unique. The dressmaking techniques for the very regular pleating of the robe have survived on examples of Irish sixteenth and seventeenth century dresses for women and children (although the styles are clearly more contemporary than the Fitzgerald example). The adult dress from Shinrone, Co. Tipperary and that for a child from Emlagh, Co. Kerry have skirts with well-defined folds made by stitching in

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<sup>26</sup> Edwin B. Rae (1970–1971), 'Irish sepulchral monuments of the later Middle Ages', pp. 1–39, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vols. 100 and 101, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Rae (1970–71), p. 33

<sup>28</sup> Rae (1970–71), pp. 32–3.

<sup>29</sup> Hunt (1974) pp. 61–7. Unfortunately no examples of Irish armour of the period have survived.

<sup>30</sup> John Peacock (1996), *Costume 1066–1990s*, London: Thames and Hudson, pp. 25, 28.

individual gores or panels.<sup>31</sup> These two examples of careful pleating are backed up by Luke Gernon's 1620 description of how Irishwomen's skirts were made: 'The skyrt is a piece of rare artifice. At every breadth of three fingers they sew it quite through with a welte, so that it seemeth so many lystes [selvedges] putt together. That they do for strength.'<sup>32</sup>

It is also evident that the construction of the headdress has developed differently to the original early fourteenth-century style. Then the side pieces were *crispinettes* or cauls of net worn over hair coiled or plaited round the ears and joined by a band over the top of the head. Later a soft roll of cloth in a heart shape lay across the head, covering the band and linking the cauls. In the Fitzgerald and other Irish effigies side panels are incorporated into the horns. They are no longer cauls but an integral part of the horns, made of netting, or of cloth whose weave patterns mimic a netted surface. It is likely these were made from gold thread twisted onto a silk core, perhaps with jewelled ornamentation. The cloth between the horns differs from the construction of earlier horned head-dresses. It appears to be raised and couched embroidered cloth specifically designed for the space it occupies and may well have had jewelled decorations. Irish embroidery was identified very specifically at this time and Irishwomen were forbidden to wear clothes that were embroidered, couched or inlaid with jewels 'after the Irish fashion'.<sup>33</sup> No examples have survived, so the head-dress may afford a rare glimpse of this work.

Although the Butlers, of course, had nothing of the modern twenty-first century concept of nationality, dress was an integral part of their identity, and therefore of their power structure, a far more important factor in that construct than it is in the modern world. As we have seen, Margaret's tomb sculpture shows the heavy pleated gown, belted just below the bust, and elaborate, stiffened two-horned head-dress. Information is sparse on how often or on what occasions this formal dress would have been worn. It may be that Margaret Fitzgerald's choice represents the conservatism often displayed by aristocrats, an independent decision related to her sense of identity, and an affirmation of her status in society.

Certain ideas put forward by Jones and Stallybrass in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* can be related to Irish archaic dress.<sup>34</sup> They postulate that

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<sup>31</sup> Dunlevy (1989), p. 48. Elizabeth A. Shee and Michael J. O'Kelly (1966), 'A Clothed Burial from Emlagh near Dingle, Co. Kerry', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 71, 213–4, pp. 81–91, pp. 81–3.

<sup>32</sup> McClintock (1943), p. 66.

<sup>33</sup> Wincott Heckett (2002), pp. 209–222.

<sup>34</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass (2000), *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3–5.

in the late sixteenth century it was believed that dress actually left a 'print or character' on the wearer, indeed that dress specifically had a 'transnaturing' effect so that people inwardly became what their clothes outwardly described them as being. They also discuss the concept that clothes act as a constant reminder of past events and other people.<sup>35</sup> We may consider this in the context of both the Ormond armour and formal dress. Certainly armour was an integral part of the life of a late medieval Irish lord with its incessant feuding and fighting. It was essential that the head of the family, whether young or old, should lead his troops on frequent dangerous forays. Much less can be gleaned about what was required of a noblewoman but she would, no doubt, have held a clear mental construct of the clothes that befitted her. The perceived 'alien' nature of Irish clothes may have seemed particularly threatening to the English authorities as they encountered the ever-shifting alliances of the powerful lords and their followers. Indeed a report sent to Henry VIII in 1515 says that 'English folk' of the counties of Waterford, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick, Kerry, Connaught, Ulster, Carlow and half of those of Uriel, Meath, Dublin, Kildare and Wexford 'be of Irish habit, of Irish language and of Irish conditions, except the cities and walled towns'.<sup>36</sup>

In his last will and testament Piers Butler leaves his habergeon (coat of mail) to his son James, and it seems it may well be the one Piers is wearing in his effigy.<sup>37</sup> James, the ninth Earl died in 1550 AD. In what is believed to be James' tomb effigy, also in St. Canice's Cathedral, he is wearing identical armour to that of his father.<sup>38</sup> Might it be that in putting on his father's armour James will 'become' the ninth Earl of Ormond, and that in some sense his father will be alive in him? The armour may well represent a mix of national and familial identity. Indeed, much of Piers Butler's will can be understood as being concerned with the continuing affirmation of his position after his death, and the passing of power to his heir, James (and in a lesser degree to his son Richard). The first aim is addressed by requiring that his body lie in St. Canice's Cathedral in perpetuity, and that annual commemorations take place in the Cathedral and numerous other churches

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<sup>35</sup> Jones and Stallybrass (2000), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Wright (no publication date), *The History of Ireland from the earliest period of the Irish Annals to the Present Time*, London and New York: The London Printing and Publishing Company Ltd, p. 276.

<sup>37</sup> Edmund Curtis ed. (1937), *Calendar of Ormond Deeds*, vol. Iv, 1509–1547, Dublin: Irish Mss Commission, p. 187. The original document, # 238, is held in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

<sup>38</sup> Hunt draws attention to the language used in the Ormond will, '*meam lorican*' which he translates as 'my habergeon', 'not his best habergeon, but his only habergeon', Hunt (1974), p. 63.

throughout his lordship. The remainder of Ormond's goods listed here is to be given to local churches. The traditional resting-place for the Butlers had been the chantry of St. Mary's Church, Gowran, so the tomb effigy in St. Canice's Cathedral represents a specific change. The annual commemorations that Ormond required his sons to carry out in perpetuity would also impress on their people the continuing importance of the family. In a society where the church or cathedral was the everyday social focus of people's lives these would be successful strategies to maintain the powerful image of the Butlers, and their ongoing authority.

The second aim is achieved by bequeathing certain possessions to Ormond's sons. (Interestingly, there is no mention in his will of legacies to his six daughters, all of whom had earlier made excellent 'dynastic' marriages.) It appears that it is important for James and Richard to be given specific items of dress. In the will these bequests are interspersed with the others; for example gifts of cloaks are made immediately after the appointment of James as heir, and of Margaret, James and Richard as executors. James is left his father's cloak, and Richard his second-best cloak. These might well be the valuable shaggy pile garments already discussed. Next the remainder of goods are left to St. Mary's churches at Gowran and Callan. Then his horse and habergeon go to James, and a horse to Richard. After that Ormond's great collar of gold is gifted to James and his small gold chain to Richard.<sup>39</sup> The will therefore is devoted to where his body (and tomb

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<sup>39</sup> Since the fourteenth century, collars worn by members of chivalric orders identified them as belonging to an honourable institution. The Tudors gave gold collars with familial insignia to favoured ministers and courtiers. A Holbein portrait of Thomas More shows him wearing such a gift with the linked Ss of the House of Lancaster. His friend Erasmus wrote that More 'liked to dress simply and does not wear silk or purple or gold chains excepting where it would be decent [sic] not to wear them'. (Jane Ashelford (1996), *The Art of Dress Clothes and Society 1500–1914*, London: The National Trust, p. 17). Sir Henry Guildford, Controller of the Household for Henry VIII and King's Master of the Revels, wears the collar of the Order of the Garter, and a gold chain in Hans Holbein's 1527 portrait (Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace, London). The 1532 inventory taken after his death lists 'Item a colar of golde w<sup>th</sup> garters and roosyes havynge a georger hanging thereat'. (*Holbein: Portraits of Sir Henry and Lady Guildford, 31 January–27 April 2003*, London: The National Gallery).



effigy) will lie and how his memory will be perpetuated, and to these specific individual gifts, presumably chosen from a large wardrobe and household, to his sons.<sup>40</sup>

It is likely that the choice of named bequests had clearly understood meanings for the community at large. We have seen something of the importance of cloaks in Irish society, and of armour. Horses played an integral role in creating a powerful image, and Ormond's great collar of gold might well have been instantly recognizable as a mark of his authority to his family and followers. In a Hans Holbein portrait Margaret's nephew, Gerald Óg, Earl of Kildare (1530, British Library, London), is in European dress, a doublet, coat or robe with a fur over-robe and a flat cap. He wears two gold chains. A plain chain of simple links is shown at his neck but disappears beneath his shirt. His second, more complex chain of rectangular and spiralled links with a suspended cross may well be the type described as the 'small gold chain'. Ormond's 'great collar of gold' would have been worn over the shoulders as shown in the Hans Holbein portrait of Henry VIII now in the Palazzo Barberini, Rome. There seems no way of identifying the type of collar bequeathed to James. However it may be pertinent that in 1521 Henry VIII sent as a gesture of conciliation to Con O'Neill of Tyrone (High King of Ulster) a collar of gold of his own livery, which probably would have been similar to those given to Sir Thomas More or Sir Henry Guildford.<sup>41</sup>

Very probably well before their deaths and before he achieved his earldom, Piers and Margaret Butler had decided on the style and content of their tomb effigies, and commissioned them from the sculptors. This would be their monument to the importance and nobility of their family, their place within it and in the wider community, their expectations of their heirs and the sense of identity both personal and societal that grew out of these beliefs. Representing three hundred and fifty years of military leadership and ascendancy in Ireland the Butlers and Fitzgeralds had a clear family and personal identity formed by Irish conditions and culture. Balancing these factors was the allegiance to the English crown. Since the house of Ormond was able to sustain itself not only throughout the dangers of the next two hundred years but also into the twentieth century, the Butler double effigy is indeed a monument to achievement.

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<sup>40</sup> The earl was not alone in bequeathing armour to kin or friends. Margaret's brother, Gerald Mór, Earl of Kildare (d.1513) willed to a friend armour made in the Irish fashion that he had in turn received - 'the haberion and pisayn that was had of MacCabe and a basnet that Donyll Oge had'. He also left to Piers Butler 'a chief horse, a grey hackney and a habergeon'. Hunt (1974), p. 63. It is an interesting speculation that such possessions would be imbued with the powers of previous owners, acting rather like secular relics.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Wright (no publication date), p. 282.

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## Chapter Five

# The Formation of Russian Women's Costume at the Time before the Reforms of Peter the Great

Oksana Sekatcheva

Medieval clothing has a special place in the history of Russian costume as it is widely regarded as a costume of national identity. The period from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century was a very important and interesting one for what is generally termed the 'historic Russian costume'. Its development was completed by the middle of the sixteenth century, and it existed almost unchanged until the end of the seventeenth century, when it was officially ousted in favour of European dress during Peter the Great's reforms.

The aim of the present research is the recreation of the visage of Russian women in ancient times and the process of its formation through the medium of costume. Such a recreation reveals costume as a system of historic elements which were powerful instruments in defining gender, social standing, marital status and national identity. One of the main functions of the costume of that time was to project women's place in society.

In the absence of any concept of fashion, the only way to dress was to follow the established code of the deeply religious and patriarchal society of the time. Patriarchy was an important part of the centuries-old tradition that the nation identified itself with. It is this tradition that governed all aspects of life in the class-conscious Russian society, in particularly its clothing. Only after the reform that introduced European clothing was traditional costume consciously recognised as a sign of national distinction.

Medieval Russian culture and art were holistic, one and the same. They were not divided into secular and spiritual, noble and common. Instead, the foundation of all culture, spiritual and material alike, was the all-encompassing religious canon of Orthodoxy. The country followed an ancient lifestyle and was relatively isolated from European culture. These factors directly influenced old-established Russian clothing. The main shapes of costume were obtained over several centuries of traditional making starting with the tenth century. They were established as

canonical, and served as examples for artists and craftsmen up to the end of the seventeenth century.

To understand the period under consideration it is necessary to explore its historical context. The main stages in the development of Old Russian clothing are divided into periods connected with major historical events.<sup>1</sup> The evolution of shape was influenced by domestic, ethnic and social developments, and international relations with neighbouring countries.

With the introduction of Christianity from Byzantium in the middle of the tenth century (945–957), the customs and clothes changed significantly. The shape and decoration of Russian costume began to follow the Byzantine tradition. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Tatars occupied the Russian land. It was a period of extreme isolation from western culture, when Moscow led the struggle against the Golden Horde. Russians kept to their traditional way of life and the Tatars' influence was restricted largely to military matters. However, due to the stagnation of social life and severe climatic conditions, the cut of the clothes became immobile and heavy. This tendency was developed further in the sixteenth century. Following the spread of ascetic concepts of Orthodox Christianity most noblewomen were secluded to their chambers, the so-called 'terema'.<sup>2</sup> It was a unique phenomenon in European history. Elite women had to stay at home all the time and did not have an opportunity to socialize and express themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Seclusion in terema was practised only in noble society, while women from lower classes led their usual lifestyles (working in the field, raising children, housekeeping). The ideology of seclusion, however, was reflected in costume of all parts of society. Family relationships had to follow 'Domostroi', a written ethical code for commoners, created in the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> It dealt with all aspects of domestic life, establishing the husband's role as a patriarch, and

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<sup>1</sup> F.F. Kommissarjevsky (2001), *Istoria Kostuma*, Minsk, p. 455.

<sup>2</sup> 'Terema' - wooden or stone parts of the house, reserved for females (gynaikon). See: A. A. Denisova (2001), ed., *Dictionary of gender terminology*, Moscow.

<sup>3</sup> The majority of contemporary scholars explain the existence of seclusion in the terema as a result of a combination of superstitions about the depravity of women, sexist images of women 'vessels of sin' in Byzantine writings, and religious ideas of self-purification through confinement. See: N. L. Pushkareva (1996), *Zhenshchiny Rossii i Evropy na poroge Novogo vremeni.*, Moscow, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Domostroi* - a 'rulebook for every citizen', compiled by priest Silvester, a well-known statesman from Ivan Grozny's inner circle. *Domostroi* reflects distinct Russian pedagogical thought of the time, heavily influenced by religious overtones. For an English translation, see Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, ed. and trans. (1994), *The Domostroi: Rules for Russian households in the time of Ivan the Terrible*, Ithaca.

advising women, amongst other housekeeping recommendations, on 'how to wear and store clothing properly', 'how to cut clothes and to save cuttings and pieces with care' and so on.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, the role of women in Russian society at that time was somewhat different from that in western countries. While in England, for instance, some women from high society were well educated and socially active, and the Queen ruled for half a century, Russian women were uneducated and played a minor role. Over the half-century 1520–1570 a series of decrees were issued, restricting women's rights.<sup>6</sup> Seclusion formed a special type of female personality - meek, lowly, trying to please 'God and husband'. It had an impact on their appearance, and influenced costume, completely obscuring the natural shape of the female body. The clothes became more sack-like and severe. There was a lack of accent on waist or breasts. The belt as an element of outerwear disappeared and was only used in underwear. Costume resembled a *homogeneous* mass, immobile and static.

### The Social Significance of Costume

In medieval times women's outfits were very informative. In this section, the description of traditional clothing elements will show how they conveyed information about social standing and wealth, the woman's origin, her marital status, whether she was a peasant or a city dweller.<sup>7</sup>

At first sight Old Russian costume seems complex and varied, but when studied carefully, analogies between its shapes and patterns emerge. Generally, the Tsar and peasants' clothes had the same structure, cut and names. The difference was in the exuberance of decoration, the quality of materials and the quantity of garments worn. Furthermore, there were special articles of clothing worn only by the elite and the Tsarina, and outfits for special occasions and festivals. These differences underlined the strict separation of social groups.

The costume sign system of that time had many elements, some of which were strongly expressive. The most important of these were the materials from which they were made. They were the most easy-to-read signs of distinction of social status and wealth; valuable, even to the extent of being accepted as a means of payment. Both local and foreign fabrics were in use at that time. There was no

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<sup>5</sup> V. Senin (1992), *Domostroï*, reprint, St Petersburg, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> N. L. Pushkareva (2002), *Znamenitie zjenshini Rossii*, Moscow.

<sup>7</sup> This paper primarily focuses on female costume. In male costume of the time the actual garments were quite different, however the same elements and techniques were used to convey social status.

textile industry to speak of in Russia, in spite of some attempts to organize it.<sup>8</sup> While a number of small textile workshops existed, most people used homemade fabrics. Spinning and weaving were very common in every family. The lower and middle classes used canvas and loden for cloth making.<sup>9</sup> Hand woven and printed fabrics were common, and local craftsmen often copied patterns from imported textiles.<sup>10</sup> This was an economical way to achieve a similar look. In the process, traditional and foreign motifs merged into an endless variety of new styles.

The imported silks, velvets and brocades were a sign of nobility and wealth. While most such fabrics originated in Western Europe and Asia, their appearance in Russian costume was often enhanced due to customisation by local craftsmen. The fabrics became heavier due to additional rich embroidery with golden threads, pearls, metal pieces and stones.<sup>11</sup>

For ease of presentation, articles of clothing can be divided into four groups according to their cut, purpose and the layer they belonged to. The articles in the first group were used by all social classes as an initial layer of clothing. Since ancient times, clothes were subdivided into under- and over-garments as required by climate and hygiene. This had more meaning in the context of elite costume, as poorer people often wore just a single layer of clothes. Commonly the distinction worked as inner- and outer-wear, clothes to be worn indoors and in public, the latter being of higher quality than the former.

The basic article of the first group was a straight shift - *sorochka* also known as the *rubashka*, or *srachitza* (Fig. 5.1). It was tunic-like, usually made long and loose. V-shaped gussets enlarged the skirt, rhombic gores enlarged the underarms, and it had a round or quadrangular neck.<sup>12</sup> The exact cut used in

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<sup>8</sup> N. Gilyarovskay (1945), *Russkii istoricheskii kostum dly szteni*, Moscow-Leningrad, p. 123

<sup>9</sup> Loden is a heavy, woollen cloth.

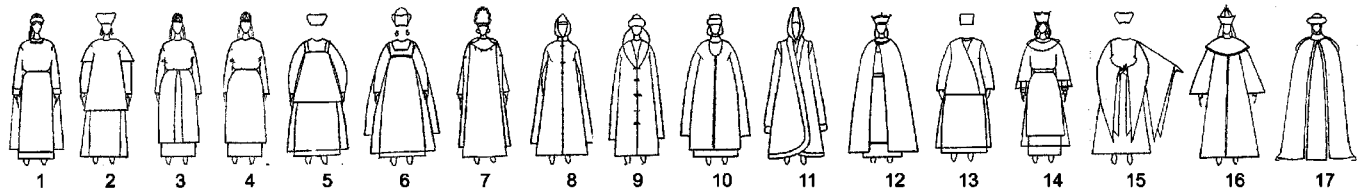
<sup>10</sup> The State Historical Museum holds the great collection of samples.

See: L.I. Yakunina (1954), *Russkie nabivnie tkani XVI–XVII*, Moscow.

<sup>11</sup> Russian makers employed their favourite motifs from imported fabrics and professionally combined them with original samples. As a result very unusual samples of embroidery and needlework appeared.

See: L.V. Efimova (1982), *Russkay vishivka i krujevo*, Moscow.

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed description see: M.G. Rabinovich (1986), *Drevnyia odejda narodov vostochnoi Evrope*, Moscow; A.V. Artcihovskiy (1944), *Drevnerusskie miniature kak istoricheski istochnik*, Moscow; F.F. Kommissarjevskiy (2001).



**Figure 5.1** Traditional Russian clothes, fourteenth to sixteenth century. (Images by Oksana Sekatcheva).

that time is unknown. The painters of the time were not allowed to depict women in underwear, and original sources are therefore absent.

The sleeves were extremely long, much longer than the hands. Bracelets made from glass, metal, or wood, and covered with leather or birch bark, held the fabric up in ruffles. The type of the fabric determined the length of the sleeves and the quantity of ruffles. In lower classes it was coarse linen fabrics, while the same garment of princesses and wealthy women were made from expensive Byzantine silk. Fine silks allowed them to make more and finer ruffles, demonstrating wealth.

The sleeves were disbanded only on festive days or for ritual dances.<sup>13</sup> They probably had a deeper meaning, not yet fully understood. In some cases dropped sleeves were a sign of respect, in others - grief. There is a Russian proverb that describes laziness: 'He works with his sleeves down.' This is opposite to 'working with sleeves held up', meaning that one is doing a good job.<sup>14</sup>

According to customs dating from pagan times, the neckband, wristband, and hem were thoroughly trimmed with hemstitch, weaving, lace or embroidery, as it was believed that evil spirits could not pass through handcrafted decoration. The type and sophistication of trimming varied from the simplest patterns of embroidery and punchwork amongst the peasantry, to small freshwater pearls for city women, to luxuriously decorated samples with golden and silver threads for the nobility.

Although it was a very common garment in all layers of society, sometimes the only garment worn in poor families, at the same time it was regarded as indecent to appear in just one *sorochka* in high society. Noble and wealthy women had to wear a second *sorochka* on top of the first, called *naverschnik* or *verchnitza* (Fig. 5.1–2). The outer *sorochka* varied in length: up to the waist, the knee, or the shin, and could be made of single or multi-coloured materials.

A distinguishing feature of Russian outfits was a multitude of layers. The richer the wearer, the greater the number of garments she put on one over another, sometimes five or more. There were strict requirements for the quality and quantity of items of women's costume. Most of them were based on religious beliefs and were related to the women's place in society. Deviations from these rules were considered unacceptable.

Historians speculate that the 'clothing code' of the time was the main reason for the family drama which occurred when Tsar Ivan the Terrible killed his son the

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<sup>13</sup> B.A. Rybakov (2001), *Iskusstvo drevnih slavian*, Moscow, p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> N. Gilyarovskay (1945), p. 39.



Tsarevitch.<sup>15</sup> It is believed that the wife of the Tsarevitch wasn't dressed properly when her father-in-law came in. Kostomarov wrote that he was enraged that she was wearing just a single *sorochka*. Meanwhile Pushkareva suggests that she was also unbelted. As mentioned above, the belt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries became a symbol of chastity, used only for undergarments. Women without a belt were regarded as immodest or indecent and could even bring bad luck. The choleric Tzar slapped the pregnant woman on the cheek and hit the Tsarevitch when he defended her.

The second group of articles in the present classification were sleeveless and worn over the *sorochka*. They were used both as inner- and outer-wear. Peasants all over Russia wore a kind of wrap-around 'loin' clothing called *poniova* (Fig. 5.1–3). It was one of the oldest elements of the Russian everyday clothing used among married women. The cloth was usually plaid, held around the waist by a belt or a drawstring. *Skirts* were similar, sometimes held with shoulder straps (Fig. 5.1–4). Urban and noble women did not wear *poniovas* and *skirts*. Instead, they had jumper-type garments with shoulder straps, called *sarafans* (Fig. 5.1–6, 7). *Sarafans* were pulled on over the head, came in diverse styles and cuts, always loose and long. They were widely used as daywear and as festive outfits.

One other typical apparel in this group among urban and noble women was a *dushegreya* - a sort of open waist-length vest, buttoned at the front (Fig. 5.1–5). It was worn around the chest, held by shoulder straps. Its back was extremely wide, gathered in large ruffles folded into tubes. This technique was equally good at concealing excessive plumpness or slenderness and emaciation. Due to its shape *dushegreya* was a very attractive garment and at a later time became part of festive and wedding clothing.

The third group comprises mostly outer-wear. It always was widely cut and loosely fitted with long hanging sleeves that emphasized the idea of monumentality and made the costume look more static. The extra-long sleeves of the *telogreya* - the spacious floor-length coat, had slits halfway down for the arms to go through. Actual sleeves that hung below the arm were sometimes even tied together behind the back. The skirt width was around 425 cm.

Most outer-wear was shorter than inner-wear, revealing sumptuously decorated lower dresses. For instance, a feature of *letniks* (Fig. 5.1–15) were big loose triangular-shape sleeves through which the lower garments were visible. Those

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<sup>15</sup> Chronicles and historians give slightly different accounts of this event, but all are united in connecting it to the dress of the Princess. See: N.I. Kostomarov (1993), *Russkay istoria v dizneopisaniyah ee glavneishih deyatelei*, Moscow, p. 212; N.L. Pushkareva (1995), 'I v pir I v mi, ili istoria genskoi odejdi za desyat veko', *Rodina*, N2.

sleeves, called *nakapki*, were often longer than the actual garment. The ideal for women at that time was the embodiment of piety and lowliness. To emphasize this idea, women held their hands folded on the chest and the sleeve structure forced them to do so.<sup>16</sup> To lower the hands was undesirable, as the sleeves would drag on the ground, damaging valuable decoration.

All outer-wear had sumptuously decorated detachable details - *voshvi*, for instance on sleeves and collars. They were works of art, bearing elaborate embroidery with silk, golden thread, needlework and precious stones.<sup>17</sup> *Voshvi* were valuable items, inherited and reused many times on different dresses.<sup>18</sup> In fact, clothing was a form of investment. There are many mentions of costumes and their elements in dowries and wills.<sup>19</sup> Domostroi suggested keeping clothing in chests and saving it for the next generation.<sup>20</sup> This was made possible by the loose cut of many garments that created a 'one-size-fits-all' wardrobe. Sometimes the size didn't even matter when clothes were simply draped over the shoulders on top of others. For instance the *opashen* was worn all year round by well-to-do people over all the lower layers. Like other garments it was wide, often further enlarged with skirt gussets. At times the front was shorter than the back allowing more freedom of movement. It had big buttons purely for decoration, and these were also common on coats such as the *odnoriadka* (Fig. 5.1–9). The coat-style required plenty of buttons and buttonholes. The size of the buttons, especially in the seventeenth century, was enormous and sometimes bigger than an egg. They were thought to enrich the outfit. There were about 15 to 18 buttons on the *odnoriadka*, 8 to 16 on the *opashen*, and 14 to 24 on the *telogreya*, although the exact number was up to the owner's taste.<sup>21</sup>

Severe climatic conditions necessitated the use of fur on the garments, their insulation with wool, and the use of quilted elements. So the garments of the fourth group were used as winter wear. Various furs were commonly worn in Russia at

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<sup>16</sup> N. Gilyarovskay (1945), *Russkii istoricheskii kostum dly stzeni*, Moscow-Leningrad, p. 98.

<sup>17</sup> According to cut books of the sixteenth century, the *voshva* was a rectangular piece of fabric made from decorative cloth. It was fixed on the edge of wide sleeves and looked catchy in the whole bright outfit.

See: Efimova (1982), p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> In the collection of the State Historic Museum in Moscow there are samples of these items. Many of them bare traces of second cut. See: Efimova (1982), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Rabinovich (1986), p. 75.

<sup>20</sup> Senin (1992), p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> P. Savvaitov (1896), *Opisanie starinnikh russkikh utvarei, odejd, orudjia, ratnikh dospekhov I konskogo pribora*, St Petersburg, p. 117.

that time. The lower classes settled upon cheaper furs, such as squirrel or rabbit. Wealthy people used expensive furs, such as sable, marten, lynx and beaver. Decorations even included ermine skins, which were used in Europe for Royal gowns only. Those who couldn't afford even the cheapest furs wore several layers of woollen fabric, called 'fish skin fur' implying that it was very cold. The fur coat had a special name - *shuba* (Fig. 5.1-11, 17). There are no mentions of the exact cut, but it was always loose with wide sleeves, floor-length or slightly below the knee. All fur faced inward, while the outside cover was made from brightly decorated fabrics, often decorated with embroidery and lace for the more prosperous.

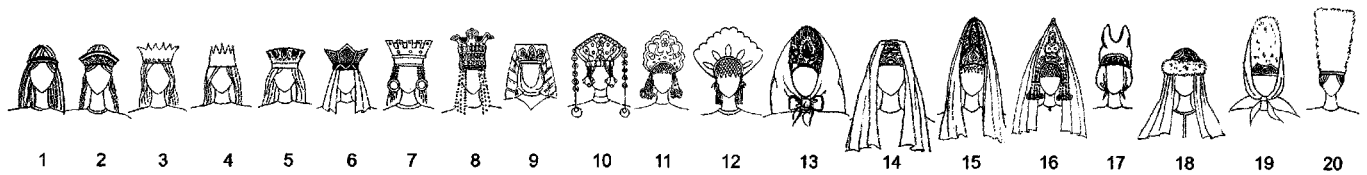
The ceremonial costume of the nobility, the Princess and the Tsarina, deserves separate attention. As a ritual dress it remained unchanged since Byzantine times. It consisted of a lower garment called the 'dalmatic dress' (Fig. 5.1-14). On top of that a garment similar to *opashen* was worn, albeit with wider and shorter sleeves. It was often combined with *odjernelki* - large round collars, covering the shoulders. They had a strong inflexible base, covered with velvet or brocade and luxuriously decorated. Over all that, the Tsarina wore a mantle, called *privoloka* (Fig. 5.1-16). It was draped over the other dresses and a fur coat in winter and had a long train. Hence the name 'privoloka', which means 'to drag' in Russian. Other noble women of the time wore capes (Fig. 5.1-12). These clothes created heavy sculptural drapes, sometimes held up by belts. The whole ceremonial dress was richly trimmed and beautifully decorated with embroidery, jewellery and precious stones.

## Headgear and Style

Women's costume was completed by headgear. In Medieval Russia it played an important role as a sign of women's marital and social status. According to ancient tradition dating from pagan times, a married woman shouldn't show her hair in public. It was believed that it could bring bad luck or even death.

Unmarried women, on the other hand, could show off their hair to a potential suitor. That is why all varieties of headgear were divided into women's and young girls' items. The sumptuously-decorated headgear was inherited by the family over several generations.

Young unmarried women fixed long hair with a *band* around the head (Fig. 5.2-1). The band was decorated with needlework and pearls. There were



**Figure 5.2** Traditional Russian headgear, fourteenth to sixteenth century. (Images by Oksana Sekatcheva).

different types of headbands, some of which had a crescent-shaped wooden, bark or metal frame with ribbons on the ends. The headbands were worn on the forehead and fastened behind, so the top of the head was open and untressed hair flowed down the back. Noble girls had artificial curls. This headgear was called *venets*, *venok* or *chelo* (Fig. 5.2-2, 5). The more complicated variation of the band, the *koruna*, had a zigzag figure edge at the top (Fig. 5.2-3, 4, 6, 7, 8). It was often accompanied with a pearl net covering the forehead, and with pendants over the ears. The sumptuously decorated *koruna* was an attribute of a wealthy young girl, and was later worn only by the Tsarinas. Other headgear of unmarried women included wreaths of natural or artificial flowers, herbs, and plants. These customs dated back to pagan times, and were a sign that the wearer had reached marriageable age.

Married women gathered their hair under a soft hat made from colourful cloth called *podubrusnik* or *povoinik*. Sometimes it was worn under an embroidered white shawl called *ubrus*, held by a brooch (Fig. 5.2-14), and at other times with the famous symbol of wifehood called the *kokoshnik* and *kichka* (also known as *kika*) (Fig. 5.2-11, 12, 15, 17). Both types of headgear had a similar structure - a soft base hat with a hard frame inside, covered with bright silk cloth. Their shapes differed across the regions of Russia. There was a differentiation of purpose as well. Some of them were used as wedding headgear which later on was worn for festive occasions and for the first three years after the wedding.<sup>22</sup> The *kokoshnik* and *kichka* were the most richly decorated elements in women's outfits. They were decorated on the forefront, had pendants over the ears, and a piece of fur or velvet at the back.

Fur hats were very common in all layers of society. The base was of wool, velvet, or silk, with fur lining, and a pearl and golden embroidery decoration was used by the wealthy. Wealthy women often wore a *shawl* over the hat (Fig. 5.2-19).

There were no specifically female shoes in the Russian costume; rather footwear differed according to place of residence and level of income. In the village for most of the year people went bare-foot. The most popular kind of footwear was *lapti* - the basketry shoes made from bark or Russian bast.<sup>23</sup> Another type of footwear was *porshni* - made from quadrangular pieces of rawhide leather or fur. Both shoes were fixed to the shin by hemp strips that criss-crossed several times. In the cities the women wore leather *slippers* and *boots* which had a soft

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<sup>22</sup> G.S. Maslova (1978), *Ornament russkui narodnoi vishivki kak istoriko-etnograficheskii istochnik*, Moscow, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Bast is the inner bark of the lime or linden tree.

multilayered sole with an arrow-headed toe cap, and a slightly short bootleg with a bevelled edge. Up to the fourteenth century boots were symmetrical - made alike for both legs and worn alternately. The high and middle size heels appeared at the beginning of the seventeenth century. They became a sign of wealth and nobility. 'Those who have the money put on heels', wrote the English poet Turberville in 1568.<sup>24</sup> It was possible to see the footwear under the outfit. High-heeled knee-high boots were popular. They were made from thin leather - white, yellow, blue or any other bright colour, embroidered with pearls.

The distinctive marks of elite Russian clothes were their vivid and bright colours and the use of Old Russian embroideries. Blue, magenta, crimson and purple velvets, ochre and white silks, were embroidered with large floral designs. Satins, silks, and brocade fabrics gleamed with gold and silver, pearls and jewellery created a feeling of grandeur and solemnity.

A diverse range of accessories was used to complete the outfit: necklaces, crosses, miniature icons, rings, earrings, bracelets. They were popular in all classes, setting the wearer apart by gender, social status or age. For instance, the little girls wore earrings to distinguish them from little boys as all children had the same dress and haircut.

While costume shape obscured the natural figure of the wearer, faces were covered by heavy makeup. They were heavily coated with white powder, cheeks painted bright red and eyebrows outlined with surma.<sup>25</sup>

## **Archetypes of Traditional Russian Costume**

In this research, costume has been examined as a complete system of connected elements, revealing fundamental archetypes of Russian costume and headgear, as well as their possible combinations and their correlation with textile and decoration.

An archetype is an idea that determines the shape of a costume. Despite the diversity of visual shapes of Old Russian clothing, all of it can be classified into five archetypes - formal structures verified by historical examples. These can be visualised using simple geometrical shapes.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Dly pamiaty potomstvu svoemu*, Moscow, 1993, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> Surma is a black powder of sulphide of antimony, or of lead.

<sup>26</sup> This classification was developed by the author; O.V. Sekatcheva (1999), *Viyavlenie obrazno-informatzionnoi structuri sovremennoi rossiiskoi modi*, PhD thesis, Moscow.

The analysis of the five fundamental archetypes reveals the three underlying principles of costume structure. In the first case, the shape and structure of the headgear is identical to that of the costume, and this similarity gives a monolithic impression (Fig. 5.3–4, 5). In the second case, the shape of the headgear is a mirror image of the costume shape along the shoulder axis. It adds dynamism to otherwise motionless forms (Fig. 5.3–1, 2). In the third case, the structure is composed from variations of the same trapeziform, where headgear shape focuses attention and conveys the idea of monumentality (Fig. 5.3–3).

These principles manifested themselves with particular clarity in the costume of the elite. On the whole, the women's costume had a holistic and solid look. It was distinctive, quite different from previous historical influences and from European styles. It was restrictive and monumental. The archetypes existed in popular consciousness as defining factors of national identity of the ascetically religious, class-conscious, patriarchal people coping with severe climatic conditions.

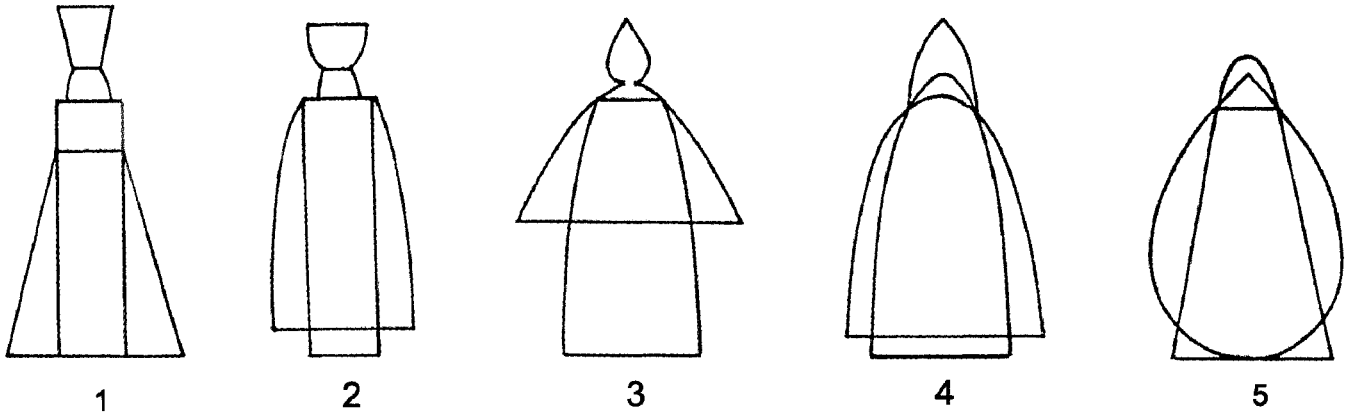
### **The End of Traditional Clothing**

These archetypes, as a typification of costumes of that time, were in use by all classes of society up to the eighteenth century. However, heavy floor-length gowns with exaggerated sleeves had no place in the more dynamic society brought about by Peter the Great's reforms. It was not only a matter of appearance and costume style. Peter fought against Old Russian superstitions and the stubborn desire to keep them.

On 4th January 1700, Peter the Great issued a decree banning traditional clothing for all except the clergy and the peasantry. On 1st December 1700, the same order was issued to women.<sup>27</sup> He replaced city wear with European clothing. However, this was not an abrupt decision, as changes had been underway for some time. The ties between Russia and Western Europe strengthened after the end of The Thirty Year's War in 1648. From Europe to Russia came military staff, engineers, doctors, pharmacists and other professionals. The Muscovites got the chance to exchange wheat, fur and other goods for

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<sup>27</sup> See: *Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiiskoi imperii*, IV, no. 1741.



**Figure 5.3** Archetypes of traditional Russian costume, fourteenth to sixteenth century. (Images by Oksana Sekatcheva).



cannons, guns and wines as well as cloth. This *rapprochement* had an impact on life in Muscovia, noticeable mostly amongst the upper and middle classes.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless Peter the Great's reforms were an unprecedented event in the history of costume, their radicalism driven by the strong personality of the Tsar. He reasoned that it was impossible for the mind to be forward thinking when the body was dressed in such a restrictive and backward costume. He had long garments and men's beards cut by force, and his 'scissors police' prosecuted anybody appearing in public dressed in traditional costume. For those who did not submit, the Tsar's decree ordered that they 'pay a fine in money, and the old-dress be cut and torn up'.<sup>29</sup> This event was even more extraordinary because the ban on national costume came not from a conqueror, as happened elsewhere in history, but from a hereditary Monarch.

From this moment on the costume, in the cities at least, acquired a European look, ever changing in its nature, while in the villages traditional clothes were still used until to the twentieth century.

The reforms established a new national identity, more secular, egalitarian and more Western-oriented than before. Eventually, after almost a century, a conscious interest in the traditional clothing, along with the desire to create a distinct Russian identity led to a revival of elements of traditional costume to symbolize a link with the past.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Under the guidance of foreigners, silk and velvet mills were established. Noblemen started to imitate foreign costume in their dress: Polish-style during Boris Gogunov's regime, and later Hungarian style. In the second part of the seventeenth century, the European fashion known as 'German style' spread through Russia. Tsar Fedor Alekseevitch openly expressed the idea of using European dress. See: S.K. Bogoyavlensky, *I Kievskay, Moskovskay Rus., v knige 'Russkii istoricheskii kostum dly stceni'*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1945, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> For more details see: *Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiiskoi imperii*, IV, no. 1771.

<sup>30</sup> Largely due to the personal efforts of Catherine the Second who met Austrian Emperor Josef the Second in 1780 wearing dress with elements from old Russian clothing. Later, the last Russian Emperor Nicolas the Second held a series of themed Balls in the Winter Palace, St Petersburg during 1903. Members of noble Russian families attended wearing specially recreated sixteenth-century costumes.

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## Section Two

# Marking Distinctions

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## Chapter Six

# Clothing Courtesans: Fabrics, Signals, and Experiences

Tessa Storey

This essay is concerned with the role played by clothing in the world of prostitution in early modern Rome. As with the other papers in this section, it explores the ways clothing articulated social distinctions and social identities. However, whilst normative discourse sought to use clothing to create boundaries according to wealth, ‘honesty’, gender and status, I find that these norms were largely ignored by courtesans and prostitutes in Rome. I will therefore go beyond discursive practices and explore the nature of these transgressions, seeking to understand how clothing functioned in the daily lives of prostitutes and what clothing could mean both to prostitutes and to those who came into contact with them.

This exploration of clothing forms part of my broader research into the material culture, economic strategies and professional relationships of women who prostituted themselves in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Rome. My analysis draws to a great extent on a micro-historical approach to the use of court records, using single cases as clues to a broader paradigm of experience. Yet I couple this with a quantitative analysis of some 124 notarial documents relating to the material possessions of courtesans, drawn up between 1594 and 1609 in Rome.<sup>1</sup>

Early modern discourses forcefully draw our attention to the centrality of material culture, particularly clothing and jewellery, in the world of prostitution. Sumptuary laws sought to restrict the attire of prostitutes; observers commented

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<sup>1</sup> These cases all come from the office of a single notary in the Archivio di Stato di Roma, Trenta Notaii Capitolini, Ufficio 19, (ASR; TNC). For details on this institution and the economy of seventeenth-century Rome see Renata Ago (1998), *Economia Barocca. Mercato e istituzioni nella Roma del Seicento*, Rome: Donzelli.

with shock or dismay that courtesans dressed so well that it was impossible to distinguish them from noblewomen; popular broadsheets narrated the lives of young women who turned to prostitution largely in terms of their greed for, and subsequent loss of, material goods. These concerns are closely linked to the importance of clothing in early modern culture in general. Clothes and jewels were the most obvious markers of social, professional, moral and gender distinctions in a deeply hierarchical society and since prostitutes transgressed many of these boundaries, their attire was a particularly sensitive issue. I shall first briefly outline some of the principal concerns voiced in legal and literary discourse, and then shift the focus to what prostitutes actually owned and wore and to the significance attached to clothing in their daily lives.<sup>2</sup>

### The Clothing of Courtesans in Literary and Legal Discourse

I have many dresses of Gold and velvet, and silk worked with precious stones and pearls. I have enough: more than all the others [i.e. other courtesans] I have more than a hundred golden and silken shirts, gathered with the finest cambrick, with stockings and many styles of shoes.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the ‘famous courtesan of Ferrara’ proudly boasts of her fine attire, in a song which was printed and reprinted, imitated and developed by the popular press in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many such narratives were

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper the terms prostitute and courtesan are used interchangeably. This is to stress that the same issues apply across the professional spectrum. The principal works dealing with Italian sumptuary legislation directed at women in general, and prostitutes in particular, are: Diane Owen Hughes (1983), ‘Sumptuary Laws and Social Relations’ in John Bossy ed., *Disputes and Settlements. Law and Human Relations in the West*, Past and Present, 69101; James A. Brundage (1987), ‘Sumptuary laws and prostitution in late medieval Italy’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 13, 343355; Diane Owen Hughes (1998), ‘Le mode femminili e il loro controllo,’ in Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot *Storia delle Donne in Occidente. Il Medioevo*, Christiane Klapish-Zuber ed., Laterza: Roma-Bari, 166192. Romano Canosa and Isabella Colonello (1989), *Storia della Prostituzione in Italia*, Rome: Sapere 2,000; Giulia Calvi (2002), ‘Abito, Genere, Cittadinanza nella Toscana Moderna’, (secc.xvixvii) *Quaderni Storici*, 110:2, 477503.

<sup>3</sup> ‘*Il Vanto e Lamento della Cortigiana Ferrarese, per esempio a tutte le Donne di Mala vita. Con il lamento d’una Villanella, che desiderava maritarsi*’, Siena: Gio. Batista Verini Fiorentino, 1540, (Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, (BNF) Coll. Landau Finaly. 535.7). There are many versions of this poem, the earliest is thought to be a 1532 version, published by Giov. Bapt. Verini, Venice.

produced in the period, in literary and visual format, and the broad outline of the majority of them is that the innocent young girl is led astray by promises and dreams of fine clothes and jewels and when she attains them she becomes vain and proud. Inevitably however her greed and '*superbia*', or ostentatious pride, are punished, and the courtesan finds herself miserable, sick, and ends her life in poverty, dressed in sackcloth and rags.<sup>4</sup> Texts such as this were predicated not only on the biblical links between glamour and sin but on the presupposition that prostitution was motivated by vanity, social ambition and greed for material goods.<sup>5</sup> Thus the courtesan's clothes are not just a neutral symbol of her wealth, but convey a tangle of moral critiques, observations and warnings, in particular serving as a visual shorthand to all women, warning them of the ephemerality of material wealth and earthly success.

Concerns about the clothing of courtesans in moral tracts, city statutes and social debate focus more on issues of economic propriety and social identity. Since clothes were understood to reflect social, moral and professional status it was particularly important that prostitutes, as immoral women of low social status and dishonest profession, be clearly marked as such. Yet, repeatedly, prostitutes disrupted such straightforward notions about the semiotics of dress. Literary and legislative texts imply that it was common practice for prostitutes to dress in finery inappropriate to their social station, both as an act of display, and in order to 'disguise' themselves, whether as honest women or as virgins.<sup>6</sup> Equally problematically, prostitutes often appear to have transgressed the boundaries between the genders, by wearing men's garments, or adopting a 'masculine style' of attire. Cesare Vecellio in his descriptions of the dress of Venetian prostitutes at around this time stated that towards the end of the sixteenth century there was a trend for them to wear a costume 'which tended towards the virile, because they

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<sup>4</sup> For reproductions of the broadsheets see David Kunzle (1973), *The Early Comic Strip: Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet from c. 1450 to 1825*, Berkeley: University of California Press. I discuss the relationship between some aspects of these narratives and personal narratives which emerge in court room testimonies in my 'Storie di prostituzione nella Roma della Controriforma', *Quaderni Storici*, 106:1, 2001, 261294.

<sup>5</sup> There are numerous biblical references to the links between the harlot, bright colours and fine clothing; see Jeremiah 4: 305; 1 Timothy 2: 911.

<sup>6</sup> To cite just one example, Cesare Vecellio, in his late sixteenth-century costume book observes that contemporary courtesans in Rome 'go so well dressed that few are able to distinguish them from the noblewomen of the city'. Cesare Vecellio (1664), *Degli Habiti Antichi et Moderni*, Venice, plates 2333, esp. 31.

wear doublets of silk or linen, and men's shirts ... silver medals at their neck and some wear men's trousers'.<sup>7</sup>

Various explanations can be offered for this practice, but given that as early as 1260 Florentine prostitutes were expelled from the city for having short hair and wearing male clothing, it was evidently a tradition of some standing.<sup>8</sup> In the case of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Venice, there is evidence to suggest that the trend was at least in part linked to the widespread popularity of male sodomitic relationships, and perceptions that women would have to dress in men's clothes in order to attract them,<sup>9</sup> possibly signalling that a prostitute allowed her clients to perform illegal acts of anal sex.<sup>10</sup> However, we may be in danger of over-interpretation, since this fashion for masculine dress was not necessarily exclusive to prostitutes. In Venice in 1480 'Venetian women' in general were forbidden to wear their hair in the style known as the 'mushroom', 'since by means of this coiffure women conceal their sex and strive to please men by pretending to be men, which is a form of sodomy'.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, my interpretation of the wearing of men's clothing in Rome tends towards the prosaic. About fourteen prostitutes were arrested by the Roman city police between 1594 and 1606 for wearing men's clothing, usually a beret and a cloak, sometimes breeches as well.<sup>12</sup> However, these numbers are presumably vastly under-representative of the practice, not only because successfully disguised women would not have been noticed but because of

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<sup>7</sup> Vecellio (1664). See also Pietro Bertelli (1589), *Diversarum Nationum Habitus*, Padua, showing courtesans lifting their skirts to reveal men's trousers underneath. See also *Il Gioco dell' Amore: Le Cortigiane di Venezia dal Trecento al Settecento*, Catalogo della mostra, Venice 1990, Berenice: Milan, 1990, 171.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Trexler (1981), 'La prostitution florentine au XVe siècle: Patronages e clientele'. *Annales ESC* 36, 9851015, 995.

<sup>9</sup> See Canosa and Colonello, *Storia della Prostituzione*, 38, and a citation of a law from 1578, in Patricia Cibin (1985), 'Meretrici e cortigiane a Venezia nel '500' *DonnaWomanFemme*, Quaderni internazionali di studi sulla donna, v25\26, Rome, 79102, 99. 'Courtesans and prostitutes of Venice in recent times, in order to take and tempt young men by leading them by their appetites, over and above other practices, have found this new method, which had fallen into disuse, of dressing themselves in men's clothing, wearing *ninfe*, doublets and other clothes.'

<sup>10</sup> See Cibin (1985), 99.

<sup>11</sup> 'Sexual dissimulation condemned', 1480, Decree of the Council of Ten, cited in David Chambers and Brian Pullan eds (1992), *Venice a Documentary History: 1450/1630*, Blackwells: Oxford, 123. The husbands of married women were fined 100 ducats, and whores were to be whipped and have their heads shaved.

<sup>12</sup> This data is culled from the Archivio di Stato di Roma, Tribunale del Governatore di Roma, *Relazioni dei Birri*, vols 18, 15951605.



a general laxity in policing. The most plausible interpretation of this transvestism in Rome is that since prostitutes were forbidden to move about the city after *Ave Maria*, dressing as a man was an expedient disguise, allowing them to slip unnoticed through the streets by night.

Despite being the seat of the Papacy, Rome was famous throughout the sixteenth century for its wealthy courtesans and was home to at least a thousand prostitutes by 1600. Yet surprisingly little legislation was directed at Roman prostitutes, and their clothing in particular seems to have been relatively unimportant prior to 1600. Those laws which were issued in the sixteenth century, however, suggest that the principal cause for concern was the ostentatious display of the courtesans' immoral earnings through their clothing and jewellery.<sup>13</sup> For example in 1532 the Capitoline authorities tried to stop courtesans from 'parading their riches and dressing *alla Romana*',<sup>14</sup> whilst in the late sixteenth century there were numerous attempts to expel the wealthiest prostitutes from the city.<sup>15</sup> Presumably such women were an unfortunate advertisement for the trade and an uncomfortable reminder of the immorality and profligacy of some of the city's gentlemen. Dressing 'ostentatiously', however, also signalled that courtesans were transgressing status boundaries and were liable to be confused with 'honest' noble women, and in the seventeenth century a number of edicts point to an anxiety at such a blurring of differences between honest and dishonest women. This was occasioned by the way in which courtesans were 'disguising' themselves, presumably to enable them to move freely about the city after curfew. They were therefore prohibited from wearing masks and 'dressing-up' during *Carnevale*, and from appearing

In windows or in public dressed openly as men... nor may they wear cloaks, spumiglie, nun's habits, or the habits of those who have taken vows, nor the habits of the pinzochere.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See the account of the Pope's punishment of 'ostentatiously dressed' prostitutes at the Corpus Domini mass in the late fifteenth century, in *Diarium Parmense*; Auctore anonymo, 14771482, in Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. 22, 1737, 342343.

<sup>14</sup> Emanuel Rodocanachi (1901), *Les institutions communales de Rome*, Paris, 256.

<sup>15</sup> This process is documented in my PhD (1999), 'Questo Negozio è Aromaticissimo: A Sociocultural Study of Prostitution in Early Modern Rome', European University Institute: Florence.

<sup>16</sup> ASR, *Bandi* vol 13, and ASV, Arm IVV. t60, p.216. 27<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1624. (F219). Pinzochere were a kind of female lay religious. For other similar *Bandi*, see Archivio Segreto Vaticano, (ASV) *Miscellanea*, Armadio IV, vol.60. 17 Feb. 1618, P62105. ASV, Arm. IV. t60, p. 215, and t80, p. 180. 18 Oct. 1624, f218.

## Dressing for Daily Life

Given that the principal concerns of the Roman authorities had been the ostentatious display of wealth and ‘blurring of differences’ between honest and dishonest women, it is interesting to analyse clothing purchased and owned by courtesans in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Overall, of forty-nine garments, I find six which could be defined as ‘luxury’ items, thirty-three which would have been ‘good quality’ items, and eleven which were probably of ‘poor’ quality. Obviously, however, these findings can only act as a rough guide, given that the actual quality of a particular item of clothing would have varied tremendously according to its make, age, place of origin and the initial quality of the textile itself.<sup>17</sup> Of thirty-seven dresses and cloaks purchased, only six were made of cloth of gold or silver, ormuz silk, satin and velvet;<sup>18</sup> only three of forty-two garments were dyed in ruby-red or scarlet, which were amongst the most expensive colours and only two dresses cost anything like the relatively princely sum of twenty-five scudi each (both owned by the same woman). Instead what we do find is that the majority of courtesans owned clothes made of reasonably good, woollen textiles, such as *Perpignano*, or *Roverso* (baize), which was widely worn by merchants, master artisans and middle-class foreigners, *Panno* (linen), and *Saia* which was a lightweight wool with a diagonal weave. They were dyed in bright but moderately priced colours, especially turquoise, *Paonazzo* (a deep blue colour with a purplish hue, like a peacock), and yellow, and again these appear to have been very popular amongst women at the time.<sup>19</sup> It would seem that these courtesans would therefore have been virtually indistinguishable from the majority of ‘honest’ women in the city given that they were dressing in fashionable but not particularly fine textiles, of the kind which were worn most widely in the city.<sup>20</sup> How do we correlate these findings with normative discourse? Does it imply that courtesans had responded to the concerns of the authorities, by toning down their attire? Or merely that in reality there were far fewer really wealthy courtesans than was generally feared? Perhaps both, but I suggest that in order to fully interpret official

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<sup>17</sup> The complexities of these gradations in value of objects circulating in the early modern economy are discussed by Renata Ago (1997), ‘Gerarchia delle Merci e meccanismi dello scambio a Roma nel Primo Seicento’, *Quaderni Storici*, 96:3, 663–683.

<sup>18</sup> One in cloth of silver, two in satin, one in *ormesino*, and two in velvet.

<sup>19</sup> My thanks to Renata Ago for updating me on her analysis of the colours worn by honest women at the time.

<sup>20</sup> Twenty-two in *Perpignano*, eight of *Roverso*, seven of *Saia* and four of *panno*. This data has been compared to Renata Ago’s detailed study of the inventories of Roman textile warehouse (1997).

anxiety about the clothing of courtesans we need to relate the kind of clothing courtesans were wearing to the kind of clothing they would have been wearing had they remained 'honest'. And if we assume that on the whole women entered prostitution because they were poor, then we should look at the earning power of poor honest women and compare the courtesan's clothing with this. I take as a benchmark a typical servant girl, who might have earned one or two scudi per month, plus bed and board.<sup>21</sup> If we then compare the costs of the garments owned by prostitutes, we see that they were wearing clothes which must surely have been far beyond the expectations of the average servant woman. At the very top end of the profession, only two of the thirty-seven garments cost twenty-five scudi, therefore the equivalent of one or two years' earnings for a servant. However, a remarkable sixty-seven percent would have cost between three and eight months' salary, whilst twenty-seven percent cost under three months' salary. Furthermore, although these were not 'luxury' clothes, judging from the predilection for bright colours, for trims and braids, these prostitutes were nonetheless dressing ostentatiously and fashionably, thereby blurring the boundaries between themselves and the average honest matron. I suggest therefore that despite all the rhetoric about wealthy courtesans, given that there were comparatively few of them, what was really causing concern was that a great many prostitutes were dressing in a manner inappropriate for their status, in clothes which they would only have been able to dream of wearing had they remained in honest professions.<sup>22</sup> This, I would argue, was profoundly disturbing in a hierarchical society in which just wearing the trappings of social mobility constituted a threat to the established order and could cause general resentment in the city. I would like to explore this idea of 'inappropriate' clothing and of its social visibility more closely by analysing some statements made about clothing in a trial which came before the criminal court in Rome, in 1607.<sup>23</sup> I suggest that these comments illuminate the importance which could be attributed to the getting and wearing of what seem to us to be very simple clothes, yet which must have been extravagant and showy in a

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<sup>21</sup> I have taken these figures from the court records. A wet-nurse was better paid than a normal servant and might expect to be paid two scudi a month. Serving and taking in washing and sewing were the most common forms of work undertaken by women in Rome at the time.

<sup>22</sup> Although clearly, this sample group is characterised by the fact that these women could afford to buy clothes through a notary, and therefore were not the poorest of the poor who we can assume would have been wearing very rough, ragged garments.

<sup>23</sup> The trial proceedings had been sent in from an outlying village for examination by a higher court in Rome, since various wrongdoings had been reported by the defendants.

poor community, typical of the kind of background from which most prostitutes must have hailed.

In March 1607, a young woman named Giulia, aged about 15, testified before the criminal court in Bagnorea, about one hundred kilometres north of Rome, that on several occasions she had been prostituted to an important local papal official, the *Auditore del Governatore* in the nearby city of Narni. Part of her evidence and that of other witnesses from the village in which she lived hinged on what she had received in return for carnal commerce.<sup>24</sup> It must be noted that the giving of clothes, jewels, foodstuffs and linen as payment was absolutely standard in the Roman economy, given the shortage of coinage.<sup>25</sup> However, gifts were not just a physical substitute for money. In some cases they signified a comparatively long-lasting relationship, particularly because the courtesan was expected to dress in a manner befitting the status of her long-term clientele, and it was up to the men to see that she could do so.<sup>26</sup> Thus, what a man gave a prostitute spoke volumes about him, his social aspirations and the nature of their relationship.

The fact that Giulia remembers so clearly what she had received from her illustrious client three years earlier suggests that these items of clothing had considerable resonance for her, for in the intervening years she had evidently had a number of other clients. The *Auditore* had given her, amongst other things, ‘A green *saia* (dress) made of *pezza* (linen), with braid, silk and a dress’.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, she was actually wearing some of these gifts in court that day. ‘A pair of yellow silk stockings which I have on my feet, and a pair of shoes which I am wearing, with a pair of low red mules with green ribbons’.<sup>28</sup> The fact that she was wearing some of those items of clothing when she appeared in court suggests either that they were her only clothes, or that they were her ‘best’ things, worn when she needed to impress. Furthermore, on the whole Giulia’s depositions in court consisted of extremely impassive, brief replies, yet what is striking is that one of the few occasions on which she let an opinion or emotion escape her was when she referred to those clothes. Not only when she pointed out that she was wearing some of those clothes in court, but when she revealed that on the very first occasion she had been prostituted to the *Auditore*, he had given her ‘a red *saia* which I have in my house,

<sup>24</sup> ASR; TCG, Processi, Vol. 63, (1607): c1101r.

<sup>25</sup> See Renata Ago’s discussion of this in *Economia Barocca*, premessa, XVII.

<sup>26</sup> I discuss the question of the way in which the courtesan’s material possessions reflected male status in a forthcoming paper, ‘The Domestic Interior of the Roman Courtesan in the Seventeenth-Century’.

<sup>27</sup> The word *saia* denotes a kind of thin silk or woollen fabric with a diagonal weave, and also means a shift or dress of the same fabric.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> March, 21 rv.

trimmed with green *as I liked it [A mio parere]*'.<sup>29</sup> In the context of this trial, which is a sordid story of a young woman's powerlessness in the face of her parents' and husband's decision to prostitute her, these words seem to betray genuine feeling, a sense of ownership and even pride in having a garment over which she been consulted and which in some way expressed *her* desires. She came from a tiny, impoverished rural community, a society in which the majority of people presumably had very little control over what they wore. She and the majority of other village women would have normally worn rough, plain clothes, hand-me-downs, dresses inherited from the dead, clothes from charitable institutions, goods from peddlers which had seen many previous owners and so on. Therefore, it must have been a considerable luxury to be given something new, especially to buy something new, to have something made to order and to be able to exercise choice over the colour, material and trim.

Indeed, Giulia's return to her village after she had been left for several weeks 'in the power of the *Auditore*' caused a stir, and a recurrent image in the depositions made by the villagers (all of whom testified against her) is of her re-appearing to the village laden with her ill-gotten material goods. These she did not attempt to hide, indeed, she apparently flaunted them and her relationship with the *Auditore*.<sup>30</sup> Whether or not she actually did behave in this manner we cannot know, given the obvious hostility of the villagers, yet this emphasis on her showing-off her possessions suggests that it was a behaviour commonly associated with courtesans, and would accord with a contemporary literary and visual topos of the *superba cortigiana*, or 'arrogant whore'.

And Giulia brought a kind of dress made of pezza to make herself a dress, and also two rings, shoes, mules, bonnets, money and many other things which the *Auditore* had given her.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the lists of her possessions seem to betray the villagers' envy and resentment that a young woman should earn so much from her immoral actions. It also reveals the significance and visibility that a new dress or pair of shoes could have in the context of a poor community, for even if she had not actually 'flaunted'

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<sup>29</sup> ASR; TCG, Processi, Vol. 63, (1607): c1101r. Testimonio di Giulia, 20th March, 22r23r: c23r.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7th March, 1607, c4r. On another occasion she supposedly flung a handful of coins on to the table of the *osteria*, saying 'Here is the money my old man has given me.'

<sup>31</sup> ASR; TCG, Processi, Vol. 63 (1607): c1101r. Fisco contro Tarquinio di Lucca, Artemetia moglie e Giulia figlia di lei. Bagnorea, Lenocinio. Testimonio di Ursolina, 7th March 1607, c5v7r: c6r. Also Testimonio di Angelica, 7th March 1607: c3v4v.

them, as they try to suggest, merely by wearing these new clothes she would have drawn attention to herself. And both Giulia's pride in her new clothes, and the hostile reaction of the villagers, tie in with broader concerns of moralists and lawmakers discussed above, that young women involved in prostitution were able to acquire material possessions beyond their station and that this caused hostility in the community.

A courtesan's clothing could also signal more than just her new found 'wealth'. It could indicate the kind of clients she frequented, and her professional 'style'. When Francesco de Urbino was called to testify in court in Rome in May 1605 he was asked at one point whether he knew two courtesans, sisters, Menica and Angela from Florence.<sup>32</sup> He explained that he used to frequent them, some four years earlier, when they worked in the house of a woman named Settimia, and that at the time 'they went dressed as widows'. Although this 'disguise' may have been intended to outwit the zealous policemen, known as *birri*, what he was probably implying is that their clothing indicated a certain 'gentility', and was connected with the kind of client they took, presumably gentlemen. I suggest this because he claimed that they had subsequently taken a house elsewhere, 'where all kinds of men hung-out' (i.e. of lower social status) at which point he had stopped visiting them.<sup>33</sup> However, contrary to this suggestion, Menica seems to have continued to consider herself as a gentleman's *courtesan*, 'keeping a clientele only of gentlemen', and although this was not actually true, she certainly considered 'impression management' an important part of her professional image. This might explain why one of the gifts which her *amico* Pietro had given her was a black embroidered dress, which would accord with the sombre attire worn by a widowed Roman matron, and suggesting that she therefore had carried on dressing 'as a widow'.<sup>34</sup>

So far I have discussed some meanings which a courtesan's clothing could have in the 'public' sphere, particularly as an indication of her clientele and wealth. I would like to finish by moving now to the 'private' sphere, and consider some evidence related to the more practical aspects of what a courtesan might choose to put on and also how her clothes might be taken off. Jones and Stallybrass describe dressing and undressing, particularly given the intricacies of lacing, as 'a social process ... that required other pairs of hands' and they observe that it was 'a constant reminder of the significance of clothes in the daily makings and

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<sup>32</sup> ASR, TCG, Processi, Vol. 46 (1605), 6<sup>th</sup> May.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Testimonio di Francesco, 20th May 1605, c756r761v: 758v759r.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Testimonio di Camilla, c714r717r: 714r. For the reference to the dress from Pietro Staffiere see above.

unmakings of the body'.<sup>35</sup> This was certainly true of the successful courtesan, whose clothing was vital to the making of her professional persona, and for whom undressing must have been a particularly significant act in the ritual of seduction. The depositions from a single court case allow us a glimpse of just such an occasion, one evening in the summer of 1602.

Late one evening, well after the curfew, a young married woman called Dianora was accompanied to the house of a gentleman, Sisigmondo Attavanti, by her husband Bernardo the Barber.<sup>36</sup> Bernardo waited until she had been admitted to the house, then he went back home. Meanwhile, Dianora was taken by a servant into the gentleman's rooms. She was wearing a dress of purple *saia*, an underskirt and a cap.<sup>37</sup> A short while later her servant boy Pietro Paolo turned up at the house, having been sent along by her husband. He was admitted to the house and directed to the gentleman's rooms. He describes what he did next:

And so I went inside, and found the aforementioned Signor Sisigmondo, and my above mentioned mistress, whom I undressed and pulled off her stockings, and she got into Signor Sisigmondo's bed, and I left and went home.<sup>38</sup>

From the context of this account, there seems to have been nothing strange about the servant boy acting as his mistress' 'maid', by undressing her. It was, perhaps, a standard component in the erotics of prostitution, presumably connected to displaying status. (This might also explain why in the court records servants were often to be found going about the town with their mistress, by night.)<sup>39</sup> Shortly afterwards the police, who had been following this suspicious pair through the streets and observing their comings and goings, banged on the door. Since no one answered they finally kicked it in and made their way into the bedroom where they found her dress, green silk stockings and shoes, by the gentleman's bed.<sup>40</sup> The gentleman, 'all trembling', was found hiding in the next room. He was dressed in

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones (2000), *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> ASR, TCG., Processi, Vol. 20 (1602): c1246r1348. Contra Dominicum Sigismondum Attavanti Bernardinum q. Jo Mattei Bataglia et Dominam Dionoram eius uxorum. Test. Hieronimus Baroncelli Urbis, 12481249r.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Costituto Dianora, cc 1256r1261v.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 12621263, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1602, test. Petrus Paulus.

<sup>39</sup> In my analysis of the households of courtesans for the early seventeenth century, ten percent of courtesans kept at least one servant.

<sup>40</sup> ASR, TCG., Processi, Vol. 20 (1602): c1246r1348, Hieronimus Baroncelli Urbis, cc1248r1249r, 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1602.

flame coloured taffeta breeches and a black doublet, his stockings having been taken away to be washed.<sup>41</sup> Dianora, described succinctly as ‘a beautiful naked woman’ was found lying on a small single bed at the top of the house.<sup>42</sup> They brought her up her clothes, but when she realised that the police were not going to accept a bribe, and that she was being taken to prison, she managed to ask the servant boy, who had obviously stayed behind to watch the fun, to go home and get her something else to put on. She asked him to fetch her ‘tatty old dress’ (*sua veste cattiva*), presumably not wanting to ruin the clothes she had worn for the amorous encounter, suggesting that they were indeed her best clothes.<sup>43</sup> That she cared a good deal about her appearance, and not just in a professional context, emerges from the account of how when she was summoned for trial from her prison cell, she borrowed a silk *zimarra* from another woman, because, as she told the court, ‘my own is a little too short’.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

The primacy accorded to the clothing of courtesans in early modern discourse was not, it appears, misplaced nor disproportionate to the role it played in the daily lives of courtesans and those associated with them. However, the literary and visual topos of the finely dressed courtesan was far more than merely a moralising symbol of her greed and vanity and needs to be interpreted in the light of the social context in which these texts appeared. The importance of clothing, above all other material possessions, lay in its central role in their professional lives.<sup>45</sup> In the context of the close community in which prostitutes lived and worked, people were extremely sensitive to what was worn, and to nuances in attire. Thus, when clothing was received as gift and payment, it indicated to all both the status of their clientele and the woman’s place on a many-layered professional hierarchy, given that gradations in the colour and quality of fabric, the type of trims and the age and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Cosituto Sigismondo Attavanti, 1278v 1285v, 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1602.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Hironimus Baroncelli Urbis, cc1248r1249r, 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1602.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Bernardinus Barbieri, c1250r1254v, 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1602.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, Costituto Domina Dianora, c1256r1261v, 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1602.

<sup>45</sup> Clothes were given at all social levels and could be seen in the streets whereas the contents of a courtesan’s domestic interior were more private.



condition of her clothing all communicated subtle variations of status, wealth and professional 'style'.<sup>46</sup>

The value of clothing also lay in the personal and emotional resonance it could hold for the wearers. Clothing gifts survived as a reminder of past emotional attachments and experiences with clients, whether bad or good. And although as we have seen, only a handful of courtesans could have purchased the kind of 'luxury' attire worn by the elite, many would have been able to acquire items of clothing which represented an escape from dire poverty. On the one hand, this suggests to me that the emphasis on 'glamour' in early modern discourse can be understood as a critique of a general transgression of social boundaries. On the other hand this helps to explain the social and personal significance of clothing and the apparent care courtesans took when dressing, whether it was a question of getting into their oldest clothes for a spell in prison, or wearing their 'best' clothes for a courtroom appearance or an erotic encounter. It suggests that the ability to buy, choose and wear new clothing was a relatively rare and perhaps longed for experience, one in which women could not only exercise personal taste, but could demonstrate to the community as well as themselves that they were both physically desirable and financially successful.

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<sup>46</sup> This impression is confirmed in many other ways: through a study of furnishings, savings, and a mid seventeenth-century census. This issue is discussed extensively in my PhD (1999), pp. 240338.

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## Chapter Seven

# Clothing the Naked in Late Medieval East Kent

Sheila Sweetinburgh

Like the other papers in this section, my essay examines the relationship between clothing (appearance) and identity (behaviour), looking at what was expected in terms of legislation or prescribed texts and how individuals actually sought to use these ideas in their relationships with others. Although the other papers are concerned with the later sixteenth century, they draw on attitudes and concerns voiced in the late Middle Ages, the period under investigation here. This essay examines the role of clothing in post-mortem charitable gift-giving in late medieval east Kent, in particular how clothing was employed by donors in their pursuit of salvation and the consequent relationship which developed between the benefactor and beneficiary. Clothing is seen to mark social and economic distinctions between the rich and the poor, but at the same time to function as a means of connecting them in an interdependent relationship. Furthermore, the rich used clothing as a badge of worthiness to pin on the poor, visually demarcating the 'good' poor from the idle beggar by giving clothing gifts only to the former.

My interest in clothing stems from my interest in charity and the relationship between the rich and the poor in medieval society. Though my primary concern to date has been the institutional poor, the brothers and sisters who resided in hospitals, I am interested in looking at this subject more widely and examining the employment of different types of gift by benefactors who saw gift-giving and reciprocity as vital parts of their charitable strategy. Clothing bequests are especially valuable in this respect because they offered opportunities for the employment of visual performance. In seeking to analyse these richly symbolic events it has been useful to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, which has meant drawing on current theoretical anthropology, particularly works on identity, exchange and reciprocity and ritual, as well as ideas from historical analysis concerning the complexity of the last will and testament. Through this holistic approach it has been possible to investigate the role of clothing more fruitfully as a way of exploring late medieval society.

When John Curteys of St George's parish in Canterbury made his will in 1490 he was concerned to position himself in the collective memory of the parish as a godly man.<sup>1</sup> As a successful artisan and property holder in Canterbury he had sufficient resources to make a number of pious and charitable bequests using the seven corporal acts of mercy as his exemplar.<sup>2</sup> By so doing he was fulfilling his duty as a Christian towards his fellow man, a necessary requirement if he was to secure a reduction of his time in purgatory and ultimately achieve salvation. But such acts also demonstrated his understanding of the symbolism inherent within post-mortem gift-giving in terms of the accepted practices of those of good standing and conversation among his neighbours and fellow craftsmen. Thus, in addition to seeking burial at St Augustine's abbey, the ringing of his knell and the undertaking of requiem masses at St George's and the Black Friars' churches on the day of his death, month's mind twelve month's mind and annually for twenty-one years, he expected his executors to make various provisions for the poor. In terms of the seven works of mercy these included providing 5s. worth of bread on his three funeral days, thereby feeding the hungry; the sick might have received relief through his bequests to the brothers and sisters at the hospitals of Harbledown, Northgate and Maynards; the prisoners were not forgotten, he intended that those held at the town jail in the Westgate tower of the city, and those at Canterbury Castle, should receive cash in return for prayers for his soul. The naked were to be clothed should his wife die before the completion of the twenty-one year obit. In these circumstances his executors were to sell part of his property and from the proceeds spend 20s. on the purchase of shoes, hose, shirts and smocks which were to be given to elderly, poor parishioners in his home parish of St George.

John's generosity would seem to highlight his concern for his poor neighbours, those whom his executors believed were the most worthy and needy among the local residents and, as recipients, such folk would be living testimony to his munificence. The provisional nature of the bequest of clothing seems to imply that John's first consideration was for the well-being of his wife, but should that no longer be necessary his executors would be able to extend his charitable provision. The likelihood of this occurring was presumably high considering the relatively long period of time involved, which might imply that he envisaged his clothing bequest as only slightly less important than his other gifts to the poor. Thus, John's charitable acts were expected to bring him favour in the eyes of God, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> CKS: PRC 17/5, f. 245.

<sup>2</sup> The seven works are: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, giving hospitality to the stranger, visiting the sick, clothing the naked, ransoming prisoners, burying the dead.

enhancing his status among his neighbours and fellow citizens who, as a result, would pray for him, their prayers joining those of the friars, the poor and the prisoners.

This chapter will examine whether John Curtey's use of such public post-mortem gift-giving to the poor was a common feature of testamentary provision in late medieval east Kent, and how donors may have employed clothing bequests as part of their charitable strategy. For the purposes of this essay the term 'poor' is used to denote those called 'the poor' in the testamentary materials. Presumably most were local poor people, those who had fallen on hard times as a consequence of unfavourable economic conditions, as a result of illness or following a change in their marital state.<sup>3</sup> Though rarely householders, they were apparently viewed as members of their town or village, unlike the marginal itinerant poor.

The passing of sumptuary laws from the mid fourteenth century onwards provided members of the political elite with a way of identifying social groups among the population. Clothing was to be employed as a visual boundary marker, defining an individual's socioeconomic status through the value of the material he or she might wear and the amount of cloth that should be used in the making of the garment.<sup>4</sup> Even though legislators' ability to enforce these laws was apparently limited, their presence on the statute books was important because they reflected current ideas. The 'middling sort', as well as the wealthy, understood the link between status and clothing, and the need to use this knowledge to maintain the boundaries between different groups in society. Consequently, when giving cloth or clothing to one's peers, servants or the poor, members of the nobility and the bourgeoisie believed it was important to consider whether the gift was appropriate in terms of the cloth - quantity, quality, and colour - and the type of garment. Such ideas are also be found in what Laura Hodges calls 'costume rhetoric' in contemporary literature, which may aid our understanding of the subtleties

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<sup>3</sup> John Henderson, in his classification of the 'shame-faced' poor, considers there were three categories: endemic (the elderly and chronically sick), epidemic (those suddenly forced below subsistence level by severe dearth or epidemic disease), episodic (life-cycle poverty); J. Henderson (1997), *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence*, Chicago and London, p. 246.

<sup>4</sup> A.R. Myers, ed. (1969), *English Historical Documents, 1327-1485*, vol. 4, London, pp. 1153-4, 1178. For a contemporary assessment of dress and social control see: L. Arthur (1999), 'Introduction', in L. Arthur ed., *Religion, Dress and the Body* Berg, Oxford and New York, pp. 1-4.

employed by benefactors who might wish to denote concerns about morality and conformity, in addition to status.<sup>5</sup>

The giving of clothing, therefore, offered donors the opportunity to act charitably towards their social inferiors, using the form of the gift to reflect the relative status of the benefactor and beneficiary.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, for the gift-giving to be ‘successful’ it was necessary for the process (the gift and the act of giving) to be seen as appropriate by both parties. Particular garments, for example, might be considered correct for/by certain groups. Such distinctions were apparently applied to various groups within the poor, at times linked to matters like life-cycle stage, where clothing was given to those hoping to marry. Thus, for the donor and recipient gift-giving resulted in a relationship, a form of interdependency between rich and poor where it was culturally understood that the act of giving would be followed by a reciprocal act. Because even though good works brought their own spiritual rewards, grateful recipients were expected to feel that they were under an obligation to offer a counter-gift. Some benefactors were willing to leave the timing and the form of the reciprocal act to the discretion of their beneficiaries, while others produced detailed instructions to try to ensure that ambiguity could not arise.<sup>7</sup>

These gift exchanges among the rich and the poor were an important aspect of medieval charity, and although benefactors might undertake such activities at different times during their lives, the only significant body of evidence to survive for the Middle Ages concerns testamentary bequests. However, it is important to bear in mind the problems, as well as the value, of this type of evidence. Any attempt to seek the ‘consciousness’ of the donor from a single document is fraught with difficulty. Even with the addition of copious other sources concerning the testator’s family, occupation, and social and political activities, the historian, even more than the anthropologist, is forced to ‘make recourse to intuition and imagination’.<sup>8</sup> Yet in the absence of other methods and with due regard for the inadequacies of this analytical approach, it seems worthwhile to try to ‘read’ the clothing bequests of the testators from east Kent. For the testator, her/his choices

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<sup>5</sup> L.F. Hodges (2000), *Chaucer and Costume. The Secular Pilgrims in the General Prologue*, Cambridge, pp. 1–15.

<sup>6</sup> Relative status, though important, was only part of the way gifts might be used to denote aspects of the relationship between benefactor and beneficiary.

<sup>7</sup> Though dealing with a slightly later period, Natalie Davis’ book provides a useful analysis of the processes involved in gift-giving and reciprocity; N.Z. Davis (2000), *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France*, Oxford.

<sup>8</sup> A. Cohen and N. Rapport (1995), ‘Introduction: consciousness in anthropology’, in A. Cohen and N. Rapport eds, *Questions of Consciousness*, London, p. 7.

and the priority s/he gave them were the product of her/his own ideas, the attitudes of those around her/him, and the dictates and conventions of society. S/he sought to balance the temporal demands of family and friends with the spiritual requirements for her/his soul, which can be envisaged as giving to God, to one's neighbour and to oneself (this was the most complex but in fulfilling the other duties the testator was aiding her/his own spiritual welfare).<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the last will and testament supplied a final opportunity to organise the provision of good works, allowing her/him to stand with the sheep on the day of judgement, and to receive counter-gifts from the grateful poor, intercessory prayers which would speed her/his soul through the perils of purgatory.<sup>10</sup> One of these good works, as noted earlier, was 'clothing the naked' a merciful act that was referred to in the Gospels and was portrayed in churches and more occasionally on secular buildings.<sup>11</sup>

Like the bequests to family and friends, those concerning the poor were part of the public spectacle surrounding the production and implementation of the will, a series of episodes initiated by the testator, but interpreted by recipients and others. Thus the making of a will offered medieval people considerable opportunities for display, which is extremely valuable for the historian who wishes to explore the place of clothing in the performance of gift-giving and reciprocity. Even though wills indicate the testator's intentions rather than the actuality of giving, they may be seen as a number of events: the dictating, writing and reading of the will, its subsequent reading following the death of the testator, the actions of the executor(s) or others in the purchase of the designated items (and production of the finished garments if cloth was to be bought), the selection of the poor recipients, and the distribution of the items on one or several occasions to these people. Such gift exchanges allowed benefactors to use clothing as a form of symbolic capital, its value a product of the relationship between giver and receiver, not its worth in the market-place.<sup>12</sup> For instance, by bequeathing his or her working clothes or a

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<sup>9</sup> Rotha M. Clay considered that benefactors (of hospitals) in their charters were seeking to fulfil a three-fold spiritual duty: to God, to neighbour and to self, R.M. Clay (1966), *The Medieval Hospitals of England*, reprinted London, p. 85.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew's Gospel, XXV, 31–40; Burgess, C., 'A fond thing vainly invented': an essay on Purgatory and pious motive in later medieval England', in S. Wright ed. (1988), *Parish, Church and People*, London, pp. 56–84.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the window at All Saints' parish church, York shows the seven works of mercy, which includes 'clothing the naked'.

<sup>12</sup> It could, however, return to the market-place in a subsequent transaction. Under these circumstances it would have been seen as a commodity, not a gift by those involved in the exchange process; I. Kopytoff (1986), 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as

specific garment to a named poor person, the testator might be thought to have initiated or sustained a more intimate relationship with the recipient compared to a gift of new clothes. In a society where clothing was worked and reworked to provide for a succession of users, a gift of a personal item might be seen as a precious memento in the economy of regard between donor and recipient.<sup>13</sup> For others, the receipt of new clothes or shoes might be more welcome, especially in the case of shoes which were likely to wear out rapidly. Thus, in addition to their altruistic motives, testators were able to employ the giving of clothing in a variety of ways, tapping into socially understood meanings, where they and others ‘read’ clothing bequests.

The findings presented here are based on an examination of almost 4,500 wills made between 1400 and 1540 by people from the east Kent town of Canterbury, the Cinque Port towns of Sandwich, Dover, New Romney, Hythe, and Lydd, and from many of the rural parishes in the hinterlands of Canterbury, Sandwich and Dover. Taken as a whole, a quarter of the testators included at least one specific bequest to the poor, most donating a stated sum of money to be distributed as alms to the poor by the executors, frequently on the testator’s three funeral days. However, some bequests were more precise. After money, gifts of food were the most common option, and a quarter of the charitable male testators made bequests of this type. Their female counterparts particularly favoured this choice, a third giving alms in the form of food. The provision of clothing was the next preferred option, though of those who made any sort of bequest to the poor only 9 per cent of women and 6 per cent of men made such bequests. This means very few testators of either sex considered ‘clothing the naked’ to be part of their charitable strategy. Women were more likely to employ this good work, a consequence, perhaps, of the type of assets they owned and the predominance of widows, who possibly had fewer dependants, among the female testators.<sup>14</sup>

Looking at these figures topographically, the testators of Canterbury seem to have been the most generous, 33 per cent of the men and 38 per cent of the women provided at least one charitable gift. Their counterparts from Sandwich were only slightly less generous, the comparable figures being 27 per cent and 34 per cent. In

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process’, in A. Appadurai ed., *The social life of things*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 68–9, 80–3, 87–90.

<sup>13</sup> A. Offer (1997), ‘Between the gift and the market: the economy of regard’, *Economic History Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 50, 450–76.

<sup>14</sup> Of the other categories of specific almsgiving, the provision of bedding or firewood was very rarely mentioned, though men were more inclined to aid poor maids at marriage than women, 8% of the charitable male testators did so compared to 5% of the women.



**Table 7.1** Testamentary bequests to the poor in east Kent, 1400–1540

<b>Place</b>	<b>Total number of testators</b>		<b>Testators who gave to the poor</b>		<b>Testators who gave food alms</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Canterbury	904	197	296(33%)	74(38%)	84(28%)	28(38%)
Sandwich	342	64	92(27%)	2(34%)	14(15%)	5(23%)
Dover	145	23	30(21%)	8(35%)	7(23%)	4(50%)
Hythe	251	44	53(21%)	8(18%)	2(4%)	4(50%)
Romney Marsh towns	550	93	91(17%)	16(17%)	20(22%)	3(19%)
Rural parishes	1576	260	334(21%)	51(20%)	95(28%)	14(27%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>3768</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>896(24%)</b>	<b>179(26%)</b>	<b>222(25%)</b>	<b>58(32%)</b>

<b>Place</b>	<b>Testators who gave clothing alms</b>		<b>Testators who gave bedding alms</b>		<b>Testators who gave fuel alms</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Canterbury	28(9%)	5(7%)	1(0.3%)	1(1%)	8(3%)	8(3%)
Sandwich	5(5%)	0(0%)	1(1%)	0(0%)	5(5%)	5(5%)
Dover	1(3%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Hythe	2(4%)	1(12%)	1(2%)	0(0%)	2(4%)	2(4%)
Romney Marsh towns	5(5%)	4(25%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	3(3%)	3(3%)
Rural parishes	16(5%)	7(14%)	0(0%)	1(2%)	3(1%)	3(1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>57(6%)</b>	<b>17(9%)</b>	<b>3(0.3%)</b>	<b>2(1%)</b>	<b>21(2%)</b>	<b>21(2%)</b>

<b>Place</b>	<b>Testators who gave alms towards marriage</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Canterbury	32(11%)	4(5%)
Sandwich	8(9%)	2(9%)
Dover	3(10%)	1(3%)
Hythe	0(0%)	0(0%)
Romney Marsh towns	9(10%)	0(0%)
Rural parishes	20(6%)	2(4%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>72(8%)</b>	<b>9(5%)</b>

contrast, those from the other towns and the group of rural parishes seem to have been much less likely to aid the poor specifically. Of the male testators about one in five did so, though this was one in six for the Romney Marsh towns of Lydd and New Romney. There was less variation in the provision of clothing because it was generally a far less favoured option among the testators, but again those from Canterbury were generally more likely to make bequests of clothing to the poor. However, female testators from the Romney Marsh towns and the rural parishes were more generous, and clothing bequests were made by 25 per cent and 14 per cent respectively of those women who included charitable gifts of any description. Because of the small numbers involved it is difficult to know what if anything these differences mean, but for women in the small Marsh towns and those in the countryside cloth and clothing may have been their greatest assets. Moreover, from their knowledge of the needs of the local poor, these women may have believed such goods would be particularly appreciated, and similarly the conversion of money or other possessions into clothing.

There was a considerable range of garments listed in the wills, and this variation was also found in terms of the material type, colour and quality of the clothes. Most testators wished to give their own clothes to family, friends and neighbours, and only about one in five of those who gave any sort of clothing to the poor bequeathed their own clothes. This reluctance may indicate the role of clothing in strengthening the bonds of kinship and friendship which meant such items generally were unsuitable gifts to be left to the unnamed poor. However, as noted above, certain items belonging to the testator might on occasion be bequeathed to a named poor person as a way of symbolically binding the recipient to the donor. The beneficiary would then discharge this personal obligation through his prayers for the soul of the deceased, the garment providing an ongoing reminder of the reciprocal process. In 1519, John Pynnok of Sholden, near Sandwich, bequeathed to William, 'my bedesman at Sandwich', a leather coat.<sup>15</sup> This garment was probably the last in a succession of gifts William had received from his patron, William having fulfilled his part in the exchange through his earlier prayers for John's well-being, and his continuing acts of intercession for John's soul after his death. Thus John's leather coat was a visible reminder of the personal relationship between the two men. William would be seen by his neighbours as a living memorial of his patron's generosity, while his own worthiness as a suitable recipient would be assessed through his devotion to his calling as a humble intercessor on John's behalf. This interdependency was also important for John's family, some of whom lived in neighbouring Sandwich,

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<sup>15</sup> CKS: PRC 17/14, f. 110.

where public perception of the family was based on local knowledge. Its status and reputation were enhanced by the sight of William dressed in the leather coat hurrying to one of the town's three parish churches to pray for John's soul.

Some testators used bequests of their clothes to the unnamed poor to denote other kinds of relationships between themselves and their beneficiaries. Juliana Lucas of St John's parish in Thanet (1520) bequeathed her working clothes to the twelve poor women who were to bear her to her grave.<sup>16</sup> Believing they were suitable charitable gifts, Juliana may have chosen to give her work clothes (she had better quality garments) because they were appropriate in terms of status, and because these women, as members of the respectable poor, should be seeking work. Selected also for their suitability, either by Juliana's executors, or possibly from her oral instructions, the recipients had a less intimate relationship with their benefactor, but still predicated on personal connections. William Thompson (1516) of St Mary Bredman parish in Canterbury had an even less personal relationship with his poor beneficiaries, donating all his old coats, jackets, doublets, hose, caps and hats, but not his doublet and jacket of worsted silk.<sup>17</sup> His executors would have employed local knowledge and reputation in their search for suitable recipients, possibly distributing the garments at William's funeral services, yet his primary concern seems to have been the appropriateness of the gift for the poor.<sup>18</sup>

Of those testators who wished to 'clothe the naked', most expected executors would purchase the necessary items, only a very few intending the garments should be made from their own stocks of cloth. This tiny minority may have included Thomas Wermyston (1447) and Margaret Swanne (1502), both of New Romney, who left specific lengths of blanket-cloth to be made into petticoats for poor people.<sup>19</sup> Another coarse material which is known to have been produced locally was canvas, but interestingly only Marion Dursden (1498) of Lydd bequeathed this type of material to the poor from her own household stocks.<sup>20</sup> Instead, benefactors generally expected their executors to organise the purchase and making of the designated clothes, and most laid down at least some specifications, sometimes with regard to the material, sometimes its colour, or the total amount to be spent. Such criteria provided appropriate clothing for the poor, in keeping with their status and position, but also indicating ideas about morality, and normative values. For example, Robert Parke of Canterbury, in his will dated 1461, instructed his

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<sup>16</sup> CKS: PRC 17/14, f. 215.

<sup>17</sup> CKS: PRC 32/12, f. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Testators saw the suitability of their old or working clothes as charitable gifts for the poor, shabbiness being one of the characteristics of peasant garb; Hodges (2000), p. 194.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Wermyston; CKS: PRC 32/1, f. 37. Margaret Swanne; CKS: PRC 32/7, f. 83.

<sup>20</sup> CKS: PRC 32/5, f. 33.

executors to provide russet (wool) gowns for seven poor men and six poor women.<sup>21</sup> Russet, like blanket, was deemed appropriate for husbandmen, the lowest category of peasant according to the sumptuary laws of 1363, and the garb worn by Franciscans as a mark of poverty.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as Hodges has indicated, peasant satires made much of the difference between dyed and undyed cloth.<sup>23</sup> The good peasant could be identified through his wearing of natural cloth, dull colours of grey, brown, and black, demonstrating acceptance of his position in society where he worked ungrudgingly for his lord in the hope that he would be rewarded in heaven. The bad peasant, on the other hand, looked to wear bright colours inappropriate for his station, thereby threatening the social order by seeking to ape his betters and gain temporal as opposed to spiritual advancement. Consequently, undyed cheap material matched cloth type to social status, but benefactors may also have considered more pragmatic reasons.

The only record of a different colour is in the will of John Breggys of Lydd (1500).<sup>24</sup> He intended that his executors should sell certain land and property, using part of the proceeds to procure thirteen gowns or kirtles of light blue colour (the poor men were to have the gowns, the women the kirtles), thirteen shirts or smocks, thirteen pairs of hose and thirteen pairs of shoes. His choice of light blue might suggest his affiliation to the cult of the Virgin Mary, but there is nothing in his will to associate him with the Virgin.<sup>25</sup> Yet, even if religious symbolism was not the significant factor, his choice may reflect other symbolic meanings. Blue was also associated with peasant garb, and dark or dull blue was considered appropriate to be worn on Sundays and other holy days. At the other end of the blue spectrum, cloth dyed perse or azure blue might be as expensive as scarlet dyed in grain, though lighter blue-dyed cloth, bluet, was far cheaper, and it may have been this kind of cloth John had in mind.<sup>26</sup> As well as this association with the poor, blue was also thought to represent the virtues of humility, loyalty, courage and fidelity in the late fourteenth century, and by the fifteenth century it symbolized loyalty and faithful love, and the attributes of purity and chastity.<sup>27</sup> It is not clear whether John anticipated that his beneficiaries would display the latter attributes in particular (such characteristics may have been part of the selection

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<sup>21</sup> CKS: PRC 32/2, f. 54.

<sup>22</sup> Hodges (2000), pp. 204–5, 208.

<sup>23</sup> Hodges (2000), pp. 188–9, 194–5, 200.

<sup>24</sup> CKS: PRC 32/6, f. 24.

<sup>25</sup> With regard to the holy family, both the Virgin Mary and Christ might be shown wearing blue and white; Hodge, (2000), pp. 198, 216.

<sup>26</sup> Hodges (2000), pp. 199–200.

<sup>27</sup> Hodges (2000), pp. 194, 198, 214–6.

criteria), but his bequest might imply that the clothes should be worn on special occasions. Consequently, in addition to Sundays and feast days, he may have expected that his thirteen beneficiaries would be present at his funeral days and other services of commemoration for his soul. Their presence at the local parish church would provide a visual reminder of his good works and his affective piety, though how far they would have considered their relationship with John in terms of that between a patron and his *bedesfolk* is difficult to assess.

Other testators used the gift process differently, beneficiaries receiving articles of clothing so that they would perform set services for their benefactor. In 1534 Thomas Aldy of Sandwich intended that his executors should provide four poor men with a black gown each, which they were to wear at Thomas' burial, month's mind and twelve month's mind, while holding the funeral torches over his bier.<sup>28</sup> Although few testators placed such specific obligations on the recipients, the relatively large number of benefactors who stipulated black clothes suggests that they were expecting the grateful poor to be seen as participants in the funeral rites through their presence and prayers of intercession. The use of the poor in the ceremonies for the dead presumably provided a very potent symbol of the place of the testator in the local community. They would be recognized as a respectable, worthy person, who could command the dignified presence of the local, grateful poor as mourners. These twelve or thirteen men and women were living symbols of the deceased's charitable activities, a vision of the testator's piety enhanced through the use of numerical symbolism.<sup>29</sup> Such actions might have been considered a more fitting employment of the poor in comparison with the distribution of a money dole, where the likelihood of disruption of the funeral process was probably an ever-present threat.

Interestingly, a few testators appear to have employed their bequests of shoes to the poor in a similar fashion. Thomas Drey (1501) of Fordwich instructed his executors that from the sale of his best gown they were to buy four pairs of shoes for the four men who were to carry him to the church at his funeral.<sup>30</sup> The decision to provide shoes may have been closely connected to practical considerations. Shoes were cheap items and probably did not last very long, which meant their provision may have been viewed by testators as an expedient, though worthwhile, charitable act. Yet in saving the poor from going barefoot, benefactors like Thomas were ensuring that at least the invited poor would be shod appropriately at the funeral, while for those who merely gave shoes, they were symbolically removing

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<sup>28</sup> PRO: PCC 14 Hogen.

<sup>29</sup> Like three, twelve and thirteen were symbolic numbers in Christian theology.

<sup>30</sup> CKS: PRC 17/8, f. 82.

the mark of beggarliness from their chosen beneficiaries.<sup>31</sup> Most testators bequeathed shoes, or money to buy shoes, but Thomas' desire to convert a high status garment into low status shoes may suggest that he was seeking to demonstrate his humility and his rejection of worldly show, as well as his generosity towards the poor.

When making clothing bequests, some testators enhanced their almsgiving through the use of calendrical symbols. As demonstrated above, the timing of the gift-giving was an important factor and a few testators specified significant feast days in the liturgical calendar. For Agnes Badell (1484) of Hythe, the theme of giving was linked to Christmas.<sup>32</sup> She instructed her executors to sell her message, and, from part of the proceeds, to provide each year at Christmas twelve pairs of shoes, six for men and six for women. By linking human gift-giving with the divine gift-giving of the Nativity, testators were tapping into the rich Christian symbolism provided by the medieval church. Others chose Good Friday or Easter Sunday, where the divine gift of the naked and defenceless child to mankind at Christmas was mirrored in the gift of the man on the cross. In addition, the Good Friday narrative produced the spectacle of the division of Christ's cloak among the Roman soldiers, and the Easter story described the laying aside of Christ's funeral clothes in the holy sepulchre. Thus for the testator, his charitable act of clothing the naked at this time of heightened spiritual awareness in the life of the parish might result in special acts of commemoration on his behalf, a product of the perceived link between his humble gift-giving and the ultimate divine gift, of crucifixion and resurrection. For example, as well as seeking commemoration at his home parish of Chislet, William Tomlyn (1535) instructed his executors to distribute annually on Good Friday to the poor of Herne a mark's worth of smocks, shirts, hose and shoes from the proceeds of the sale of his tenement.<sup>33</sup> The recipients were chosen by his executors and, in addition to place of residence, other criteria were presumably applied. Being worthy and of good conversation were desirable attributes, but the relative needs of those known to be poor in the village probably also exercised the minds of William's executors, who were seeking on his behalf to emulate the actions of Christ. The timing of the charitable act, moreover, marked the poor

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<sup>31</sup> B. Geremek (1994), *Poverty: A History*, trans. A. Kolakowska, Oxford, p. 48. In *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* (c.1390), the ploughman's wife is described as 'Barfote on the bare ijs [ice] – that the blod folwede'; W.W. Skeat ed. (1867), *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, Early English Text Society, OS 30, London, line 436. Over a third of those seeking to 'clothe the naked' included the provision of shoes within their bequest, and of these the majority solely confined their gift to shoes.

<sup>32</sup> CKS: PRC 32/2, f. 621.

<sup>33</sup> CKS: PRC 17/21, f. 90.

recipients as somehow special in the eyes of their fellow parishioners, especially if the almsgiving was performed in a sacred space, like the parish church.

To conclude, in late medieval east Kent a small minority of those involved in post-mortem almsgiving included clothing bequests among their gifts to the poor, and, though numerically fewer, as a percentage women were more likely to employ clothes in their charitable strategy than men. At a time when poverty was endemic, these charitable people apparently believed clothing offered them certain advantages in their pursuit of salvation, as well as being a valuable asset for those fortunate enough to receive such gifts. For donors, the distribution of clothing provided an opportunity for display, the result of their good works visible for all to see in the dress of the grateful recipients, who would offer suitable counter-gifts in exchange. Moreover, the timing of the giving and the type of cloth or clothing donated might be used to enhance the relationship between benefactors and beneficiaries, and as a currency of exchange clothing offered a way of underlining social difference, as well as social interconnection. The giver's old clothes denoted her/him as a prosperous member of society; s/he had other and better clothes which were available for special and other occasions, whereas the receiver's wardrobe was severely limited, the clothing gift possibly becoming the best (or only) garment owned, a mark of her/his lowly estate. In addition, clothing bequests gave donors ways of employing religious and other symbolism; moral judgements might be made by those involved, and the gift exchange laid open to the 'reading' of friends and neighbours. Consequently, a study of those who chose 'to clothe the naked' provides an opportunity to explore the meaning of clothing for the rich and the poor in late medieval society, whereby disparity becomes a mark of social and moral distance: the poor man is at the rich man's gate, but he is member of the 'good' poor not an idle beggar.

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## Chapter Eight

# Dress, Nudity and Calvinist Culture in Sixteenth-Century France

Graeme Murdock

This chapter will examine the ideas of French Calvinists about nudity and natural beauty during the latter decades of the sixteenth century. It will first assess the reaction of Jean de Léry to the natural beauty of the naked natives of Brazil. Léry's comments on the Tupinamba people will be placed in the context of efforts which were being made by his clergy colleagues in the Reformed church to enforce strict standards of modest clothing, particularly among women. Léry's account of the state of native peoples in the New World will also be compared with the modest aesthetic in dress advised in the Old World by the Reformed moralist, Lambert Daneau. The distinction which Daneau drew between nudity and natural beauty provided the basis for his appeal to French Calvinists to dress in a manner appropriate for true Christians.

Jean de Léry was a Reformed minister from Burgundy who travelled to Brazil in 1556. On his return to France he became a minister at Lyons, and then at Nevers and La Charité, before being caught up in the siege of Sancerre during the wars of religion in 1572. Léry then left France for Bern, and in 1573 published a history of events at Sancerre. By 1576 he had returned once again to France, and in 1578 published his *Histoire d'un Voyage faict en la terre du Brazil autrement dite Amerique*.<sup>1</sup> Léry's *Histoire* set out his version of events during the brief Calvinist presence in the French colony on an island in the bay of Janeiro. The text was dedicated to François de Coligny, son of the Huguenot leader Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, who had been murdered by the Guises in Paris in August 1572. The *Histoire* was a publishing success, which ran into six editions during Léry's lifetime, and his account of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jean de Léry (1990), *History of a Voyage to the land of Brazil, otherwise called America. Containing the navigation and remarkable things seen on the sea by the author; the behaviour of Villegagnon in that country; the customs and strange ways of life of the American savages; together with the description of the various animals, trees, plants, and other singular things completely unknown over there* (1578), Janet Whatley ed., Berkeley [CA]: University of California Press.

deaths of three Calvinists in Brazil was also included within the martyrology of Jean Crespin.<sup>2</sup>

There was growing interest within France during the mid sixteenth century in the New World and its economic potential. In 1550 Henri II's royal entry to Rouen was marked by the extraordinary display on an island in the Seine of some 50 Tupinamba who, together with around 250 French sailors dressed as natives, acted out life in a Brazilian village.<sup>3</sup> French royal enthusiasm to challenge Spanish and Portuguese power in America was taken up in 1555 by the soldier and adventurer Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon. Probably in response to Villegaignon's request for new settlers to travel to Brazil, a group of fourteen Calvinists left Geneva in September 1556 to join fresh recruits who were travelling to bolster around 600 original colonists. In sending out ministers Pierre Richer, Guillaume Chartier and Jean de Léry to Brazil, John Calvin certainly believed that Villegaignon and one of his patrons, Gaspard de Coligny, supported a Reformed presence in the colony.

Léry's *Histoire* detailed the new Calvinist colonists' arrival at Fort Coligny in the bay of Janeiro in February 1557. Léry suggested that at first Villegaignon shared their ambition to form the best of all Christian churches in Brazil. Villegaignon also apparently promised to reform morality among the colonists, including excesses in clothing. However, according to Léry, Villegaignon himself 'had a great quantity of silk and woollen cloth' made for his own personal use, with a different colour of coat and trousers made for each day of the week. Léry commented that 'you may judge for yourselves just how fitting this was to his age and to his profession and rank'.<sup>4</sup> Relations between the Calvinists and Villegaignon quickly soured over differing opinions about the sacraments, and reached the point where Léry and his colleagues were forced to flee from the colony to the mainland. The Calvinist refugees remained there for around two months, during which time they came into close contact with the local Tupinamba people. They were then able to voyage back to France in January 1558. Villegaignon also travelled back to France in 1559 to defend the progress of his venture at court, only months before the Portuguese captured Fort Coligny and ended France's official presence in Brazil.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Crespin (1597), *Histoire des martyrs persecutez et mis a mort pour la verité de l'Evangile, depuis le temps des Apostres jusques à l'an 1597*.

<sup>3</sup> Léry (1990), xxiv–xxv. Margaret McGowan ed. (1973), *L'Entrée de Henri II à Rouen, 1550*, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, xxi, k2v–k4v.

<sup>4</sup> Léry (1990), 47.

<sup>5</sup> André Thevet's defence of Villegaignon as *Les singularitez de la France antarctique* (1557). R.J. Knecht (2001), *The Rise and fall of Renaissance France, 1483–1610* (2nd ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 246–58.

Léry's *Histoire* also provided a detailed commentary on his encounters with the Tupinamba, and described their society, customs and dress. Léry praised the native people's generous hospitality to the Calvinist refugees, and his account often shows a certain sympathy for the Tupinamba, even comparing them favourably with France's peasantry. While he also described how his hosts practised cannibalism on their enemies, even on this issue Léry commented that 'one need not go beyond one's own country, nor as far as America, to see such monstrous and prodigious things'.<sup>6</sup> This comment was certainly intended as a jibe against Catholic beliefs about the Mass. Léry recorded that Villegaignon rejected the sacraments as signs of things signified, wanting;

to eat the flesh of Jesus Christ grossly rather than spiritually, but what was worse, like the savages named Ouetaca, of whom I have already spoken, they wanted to chew and swallow it raw.<sup>7</sup>

Léry also compared the cannibalism of Brazil with events in France after the St. Bartholomew's day massacre in 1572. He recalled that at Auxerre the heart of a Calvinist was cut to pieces, grilled and eaten, and at Lyons the 'livers, hearts, and other parts of those bodies [of massacred Calvinists] - were they not eaten by the furious murderers, of whom Hell itself stands in horror?'<sup>8</sup>

America had been regarded by some Calvinists as a potential haven from Catholic persecution, as well as a possible field of mission. Theodore Beza wrote of the possibility;

of finding and fortifying somewhere in America, which could serve as a retreat for those of the religion, who would wish to retire there, and by little and little to populate the country, and to advance there the church of God by winning over the inhabitants to knowledge of the truth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Léry (1990), 132–3, 150.

<sup>7</sup> Léry (1990), 41.

<sup>8</sup> Léry (1990), 41, 132. Janet Whatley (1984), 'Food and the limits of civility: the testimony of Jean de Léry', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, 387–400.

<sup>9</sup> Theodore Beza, *Histoire Ecclesiastique des eglises reformees au royaume de France* (1580), 158, quoted in Frank Lestringant (1980), 'Calvinistes et Cannibales. Les ecrits Protestants sur le Brésil Français, 1555–1560', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 126, 9–26, 167–92, see 179. All translations from French are my own.

While Léry admitted that his efforts at conversion had no effect, he remained optimistic that if the Calvinist party had been able to remain longer with the Tupinamba, then they would have converted to true religion.

I am persuaded that if Villegaignon had not revolted from the Reformed religion, and if we had stayed longer in that country, we would have drawn and won some of them to Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

As it was, Léry could only reflect on his hosts' apparent delight on hearing him sing Psalm 104 on the beauty of God's creation as he walked through the forests of Brazil.<sup>11</sup>

While Léry was hardly on the Brazilian mainland long enough to attempt a serious missionary effort, one important signal of his attitude that the Tupinamba, descendants of Ham as he thought, could be converted came through his attempts to reform the locals' dress, or rather their lack of dress. Léry described the appearance of the Tupinamba warriors, and the ways in which the Tupinamba people used jewellery, feathers and other forms of decoration. However, although it was;

no less strange than difficult to believe for those who have not seen it: the men, women, and children do not hide any parts of their bodies; what is more, without any sign of bashfulness or shame, they habitually live and go about their affairs as naked as they come out of their mother's womb.<sup>12</sup>

The Brazilians were not to be abandoned to their nudity and corruption, but were given coats and trousers to wear by the Calvinists. However, these efforts met with disappointing results, as some men put on the trousers and others only the jackets.

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<sup>10</sup> Léry (1990), 147.

<sup>11</sup> Léry (1990), 149. Ventures to Florida by French Calvinists ended with the massacre of around 1,000 colonists at the hands of the Spanish in 1564. Laura Fishman (1995), 'Old world images encounter new world reality: René Laudonnière and the Timicuan of Florida', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, 547–59. Frank Lestringant (1995), 'Geneva and America in the Renaissance: the dream of the Huguenot refuge, 1555–1600', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, 285–95. For English Psalm-singing in sixteenth-century Africa see P.E.H. Hair (1970), 'Protestants as pirates, slavers, and proto-missionaries: Sierra Leone 1568 and 1582', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31, 203–224.

<sup>12</sup> Léry (1990), 57.

After they had gawked at each other a while and paraded around in these outfits (which gave us our fill of laughing), they would take them off and leave them in their houses until the desire came to don them again.<sup>13</sup>

The Calvinist refugees had no more success with the local women, who proved 'obstinate in refusing to dress themselves in any way at all'. Even when other native women who had been taken prisoners by the Tupinamba were forced to wear some clothing, Léry reported that they took the clothes off as quickly as possible.<sup>14</sup>

While Léry was surprised to find that the local people went around naked without any sign of bashfulness or shame, he and his colleagues were determined that the Tupinamba should wear clothes since that was what the human state of sin required. Nakedness had been a sign of the innocence of Adam and Eve before the Fall. However, as the account in Genesis made clear when they had eaten from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, 'the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves'. The need for men and women to wear clothing was then a result of sin, and clothing was also a gift from God, who 'made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them' before they were banished from the Garden of Eden.<sup>15</sup>

Léry also wrote about the reaction of the Calvinists in Brazil to life alongside naked people, and especially women. He was concerned that some of his readers might 'think that the frequenting of these naked savages, and especially of the women, arouses wanton desire and lust'. Léry absolutely refuted this suggestion:

While there is ample cause to judge that, beyond the immodesty of it, seeing these women naked would serve as a predictable enticement to concupiscence: yet, to report what was commonly perceived at the time this crude nakedness in such a woman is much less alluring than one might expect.<sup>16</sup>

Léry confirmed that this was not because the native women were not appealing to the eye. Indeed, their 'natural beauty is by no means inferior to that of the others. If decorum allowed me to say more, I make bold to say that I could resolve all the objections to the contrary....' Léry's frank assessment of his experience of living alongside naked women was intended to counter the charge that this was one of the attractions for settlers of travelling to Brazil. Léry claimed later in the *Histoire* that he

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<sup>13</sup> Léry (1990), 62.

<sup>14</sup> Léry (1990), 66.

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 3: 6–7, 10–11, 21–23.

<sup>16</sup> Léry (1990), 67.

had effectively ‘refuted what some have written and others thought: that the nakedness of the savage women and girls incites men to lust more than if they were clothed’.<sup>17</sup>

However, Léry was also aware of the implications of this analysis of Brazilian society for Christian Europe.

I do not mean, however, to contradict what the Holy Scripture says about Adam and Eve, who, after their sin, were ashamed when they recognised that they were naked, nor do I wish in any way that this nakedness be approved.<sup>18</sup>

Léry also commented that ‘I detest the heretics who have tried in the past to introduce it [nudity] over here’. This referred to persistent claims that Anabaptists went naked when they were baptised, and to the ‘*naaktloopers*’ or ‘naked-walkers’ who proclaimed apocalyptic judgement in Amsterdam and Münster in the 1530s.<sup>19</sup> While Léry therefore did not approve of nakedness, he did juxtapose the simplicity of Brazilian native attire with the excessive concern among women in France about their appearance. He was critical in particular of the attachment of Frenchwomen to novel and expensive forms of decoration, and to all sorts of embellishment of their natural appearance.

And I maintain that the elaborate attire, paint, wigs, curled hair, great ruffs, farthingales, robes upon robes, and all the infinity of trifles with which the women and girls over here disguise themselves and of which they never have enough, are beyond comparison the cause of more ills than the ordinary nakedness of the savage women....<sup>20</sup>

Léry drew from his experiences in Brazil some lessons for his readers in France about how true Christians should be dressed. He suggested that they should not spend too much time, effort and money on their appearance, or show vain and proud ostentation in their clothes, jewellery or hair. Léry advised his readers that;

what I have said about these savages is to show that, while we condemn them so austere for going about shamelessly with their bodies entirely uncovered, we ourselves, in the sumptuous display, superfluity, and excess of our own costume, are

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<sup>17</sup> Léry (1990), 67, 157.

<sup>18</sup> Léry (1990), 68.

<sup>19</sup> Léry (1990), 68. Anabaptists pointed to Isaiah as a model for this behaviour (Isaiah 20: 2–6). George H. Williams (1962), *The Radical Reformation*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, pp. 359, 380.

<sup>20</sup> Léry (1990), 67.

hardly more laudable. And, to conclude this point, I would to God that each of us dressed modestly, and more for decency and necessity than for glory and worldliness.<sup>21</sup>

However, it was not so easy for Léry to find an application for his audience of his comments on the lack of interest inspired among men by the crude nakedness of naturally beautiful Brazilian women. Léry's denial that seeing women naked incited men to sexual lust ran counter to the insistent advice of sixteenth-century moralists, particularly in the Reformed church, that women could best protect their own moral virtue and prevent immorality among men by covering their bodies. According to this view, women held the key to promoting the sexual morality of their communities by dressing in a way which did not engender sin in men who might see them. As we shall see, writers such as Lambert Daneau seemed certain that women who wore revealing clothes, or clothes which drew attention to certain parts of the body, or who tried to accentuate or to disguise their appearance, stimulated erotic desires among men which had to be suppressed.

Léry was not the only sixteenth-century writer to draw moral lessons about clothing from an exploration of contrasts between European society and the New World. Michel de Montaigne was in contact with a former colonist in Brazil, and in 1562 at Rouen met a Brazilian native who had been brought to France. Montaigne considered that the natives of Brazil remained in 'a state of purity'.<sup>22</sup> The discovery that Brazilians 'don't wear trousers' encouraged Montaigne to consider whether wearing clothes was in fact only a human custom rather than a natural law. Montaigne suggested that the natural limitations of the human body meant that 'we have more reason than any other animal to cover ourselves', but he argued that an effective 'cure for amorous passions' was 'a full and open sight of the body we desire'.<sup>23</sup> If Montaigne came to any conclusion from these observations it was, in a different way from Léry, to challenge conventional wisdom on the purpose of sumptuary laws, and on the moral impact of covering and uncovering the body. Montaigne wondered why women;

cover with so many obstacles, one on top of another, the parts on which are chiefly concentrated our desires and their own? And what purpose is served by those great

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<sup>21</sup> Léry (1990), 68.

<sup>22</sup> 'Of cannibals' in *The Essays of Montaigne*, trans. E.J. Trechmann (1919), (2 vols), New York: Oxford University Press, vol. 1, pp. 206, 209, 215.

<sup>23</sup> 'Of the custom of wearing clothes' and 'Apology for Raimond Sebond' in *The Essays of Montaigne* (1919), vol. 1, pp. 224–7, 478.

bastions which our ladies have recently adopted to fortify their flanks, except to allure our appetites, and attract us to them by keeping us at a distance?<sup>24</sup>

Concern about dress and morality, and consideration of what lessons, if any, attitudes in other cultures to nudity and clothing had to offer Christian Europe, were not therefore a monopoly of the Reformed church and its clergy. Neither were regulations and social conventions on dress in Europe simply a matter of religious and moral concern, but also of state law and economic interest. In France, laws in 1563 and 1583 were introduced which specified dimensions of approved farthingales, and regulated the decoration of clothing, and use of gold, silver and silk. However, appropriate clothing was a matter of particular and extensive concern in Reformed Europe. The ruling council in Geneva, after consulting with the Company of Pastors who directed the city's Reformed church, introduced a series of regulations on clothing during the second half of the sixteenth century. Ordinances which were passed in 1564 outlawed the use of luxurious cloths and expensive forms of decoration, and were directed against slashed clothing and against women who wore low collars and revealing necklines.<sup>25</sup> In the latter decades of the sixteenth century the Genevan clergy led by Theodore Beza, Lambert Daneau and Simon Goulart kept up pressure on the council to provide more detailed ordinances on inappropriate clothing, and to enforce the existing regulations more effectively.<sup>26</sup>

Synods of the Reformed church in France also introduced regulations about abuses in dress, which often particularly mentioned the need for women to show modesty in their clothes, to limit their use of make-up, and to curb the ways in which they styled their hair. In 1570 Reformed synods in Guyenne and Languedoc warned against women wearing farthingales, or revealing too much flesh to public view.<sup>27</sup> In 1581 the national synod of the Reformed church which met at La Rochelle was concerned that congregational consistories should reprimand or, if necessary, exclude from participating in Communion, those who wore clothes with;

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<sup>24</sup> 'That difficulties increase our desires' and 'Of Sumptuary laws' in *The Essays of Montaigne* (1919), vol. 2, 63, vol. 1, pp. 263–5.

<sup>25</sup> Marie-Lucile de Gallatin (1938), 'Les ordonnances somptuaires a Genève au xvie siècle', *Mémoires et documents publiés par la Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de Genève* 36, 224–5.

<sup>26</sup> Gallatin (1938), 235. Robert M. Kingdon (1972), 'The control of morals in Calvin's Geneva' in Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W. Zophy eds, *The Social History of the Reformation*, Columbus [OH]: Ohio State University Press, pp. 3–16.

<sup>27</sup> Janine Garrisson-Estebe (1980), *Protestants du Midi, 1559–1598*, Toulouse: Privat, p. 307.



certain marked features of impudicity, dissolution or too ostentatious or indecent novelty, such as make-up, pleating, tufts of feathers, stitchings... exposed bosoms, farthingales and other similar things.<sup>28</sup>

The Languedoc regional synod also complained in 1581 about the indecency of women's clothing which revealed too much of their bosoms. In 1592 the ministers and elders of Nîmes were required to go from house to house 'to induce women to dress themselves modestly', as was appropriate for those who professed to serve God.<sup>29</sup> In 1594 the national synod which met at Montauban insisted that its clergy and consistories show 'much greater rigour against women and girls who... have exposed bosoms', and demanded that congregations 'follow the rules of Christian modesty'.<sup>30</sup>

One leading French Reformed minister who attempted to provide clear guidance on appropriate dress was Lambert Daneau. Daneau, one of the ministers who pressed the Genevan council to tighten and enforce regulations on clothing during the 1570s, had been a student of law at Paris, Orléans and Bourges, before leaving France for Geneva in 1560 to study theology. On completing his studies, he returned to France to serve as a pastor in his home region at Gien-sur-Loire near Orléans. In 1572 he fled back to Geneva, where he remained until a brief period spent teaching at Leiden University in 1581. He then returned to France to work as a pastor at Orthez, and then at Castres where he died in 1595. Daneau published a number of tracts during his years working in Geneva on sorcery, games of chance and dancing.<sup>31</sup> He also translated and published texts from the third century by Tertullian on jewellery and appropriate dress for women, and by Cyprian on clothing for girls.<sup>32</sup> These tracts explored many of the ideas taken up by Daneau in his own work on the dress

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<sup>28</sup> *Actes Ecclesiastiques et civiles de tous les synodes nationaux des eglises reformées de France*, ed. Jean Aymon (1710), (2 vols), The Hague, vol. 1, 152–3.

<sup>29</sup> Raymond A. Mentzer (1987), "'Disciplina nervus ecclesia': The Calvinist reform of morals at Nîmes", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 89–115. Philippe Chareyre (1994), "'The great difficulties one must bear to follow Jesus Christ': Morality at sixteenth century Nîmes" in Raymond A. Mentzer ed., *Sin and the Calvinists. Morals control and the consistory in the Reformed tradition*, Kirksville [MO]: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 86–7.

<sup>30</sup> Aymon ed. (1710), vol. 1, 184.

<sup>31</sup> Christoph Strohm (1999), 'Zur Eigenart der frühen calvinistischen Ethik: Beobachtungen am Beispiel des Calvin-Schülers Lambert Daneau', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 90, 255–88.

<sup>32</sup> Lambert Daneau (1580), *Deux Traitez de Florent Tertullian, docteur tres-ancien, et voisin du temps des apostres, environ CLXX ans apres l'incarnation de Iesus Christ l'un des parures et ornemens: l'autre des habits et accoustremens des femmes Chrestiennes. Plus un traité de saint Cyprian evesque de Carthage, touchant la discipline et les habits des filles*, Geneva.

appropriate for Christians. His 1580 *Traité de l'estat honneste des Chrestiens en leur accoustrement* also drew on his experiences in Geneva and on his interpretation of relevant scripture passages. Daneau's *Traité* identified the many dangers posed to the Reformed community by immoral and inappropriate clothing, the need for regulations over how to dress, the principles behind such rules, and how they should be applied, in particular, to women.<sup>33</sup>

Daneau claimed that 'disorders and excesses in clothing are the most common form of corruption in this world, and consequently are the most difficult to reform'. He juxtaposed the appropriate dress of Christians in the most humble, sober and simple clothes against his description of contemporary standards of appearance in France. Daneau attacked the current enthusiasm for all sorts of novelties in clothing, for ways of disguising natural appearance, and the vain use of a variety of colours, slashes in clothes, and of different gemstones and forms of jewellery.<sup>34</sup> Daneau suggested that;

we see corruption among us, as in other matters, but here most of all: namely, dissolution, lascivity, defiance and sumptuousness in clothes, make-up, and in the garb of women, of girls and wives, at court and elsewhere, and there is not a nation today more soiled in this regard than France.<sup>35</sup>

For Daneau, it was a source of scandal and condemnation for the Reformed church in France that some of its members dressed in unnecessary finery while others were in poverty. Daneau pointed to clear warnings from the scriptures on the results of this sin of sumptuous apparel. Arguing from the text of Isaiah 3, Daneau suggested that God's righteous judgement must be at hand for France as it had been for Judah, and that God's arm was already raised to execute judgement because of the excesses of dress which would destroy all who refused to accept reform.<sup>36</sup> His call for repentance was couched in apocalyptic tones, 'we are at the end of the ages, and our redeemer is about to come'. While the French kingdom was in desolation, and the children of God were shedding blood for the truth of the Gospel, was it the right time for people to style their hair and to take pride in their appearance?<sup>37</sup>

Daneau's concern about abuses in clothing and appearance was so acute that he argued that regulations on dress should be introduced and rigorously enforced by

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<sup>33</sup> Lambert Daneau (1580b), *Traité de l'estat honneste des Chrestiens en leur accoustrement*, Geneva. See I Timothy 2: 9–10 and I Peter 3: 3–4.

<sup>34</sup> Daneau (1580b), 7, 34–5, 65–7, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Daneau (1580), 3–4, 42–4.

<sup>36</sup> Daneau (1580b), 186.

<sup>37</sup> Daneau (1580b), 190–1.

public magistrates. Daneau argued that the issue of appropriate dress could not simply be left to the free consciences of individuals as a matter of indifference.<sup>38</sup> He stressed the need for rules which would govern the appearance of the rich and the poor, of people of different social ranks and occupations, as well as rules for the clothes of clergy and most especially rules for women's clothing and appearance.<sup>39</sup>

These rules would be certain and assured remedies for passions which engender disorder: and they would be like cures to hold back and prevent the bad habits of our vanity. The fight is against the world, against our lusts, and against infinite occasions for evil....<sup>40</sup>

In support of his argument on the need for clothing regulations, Daneau developed a number of principles on how Christians in France ought to be dressed. To begin, they must wear clothes. Daneau considered that there was;

a rule of natural honesty, in which man does not go naked, but covered and clothed. And if some people who live differently do exist, (as we are told do the savages of the other pole, and sometimes the spirit of error revealed such abuses in our Europe) such people one can say approach the nature of beasts and are deprived of common sense by a just judgement of God.<sup>41</sup>

While Jean de Léry had tried to reform the naked state of Brazilian natives, Daneau saw their nudity as a sign of God's judgement against them. This view reflected Daneau's deep concern about moral confusion in France, and his desire to see strict rules on dress adhered to if God's judgement was not to fall on France as it evidently had already done on Brazil. Clothing for Daneau served to 'conceal the shame of man', to cover the body, and to protect it against cold and injury. Daneau also had a grave distrust of the gaze of man, arguing that 'the eyes of all are only too quick to notice vanity and pick out evil'. Clothes needed to block the view of men's eyes, and Daneau argued that Christians had a duty to dress in a way which did not inflame passions in others. People were not to 'throw oil on the fire', and to be aware of 'very

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<sup>38</sup> Daneau (1580b), 58, 84, 87, 91.

<sup>39</sup> For the development of Reformed clergy dress see Paul Romane-Musculus (1969), 'Histoire de la robe pastorale et du rabat', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 115, 307–38. Graeme Murdock (2000), 'Dressed to repress?: Protestant clergy dress and the regulation of morality in early modern Europe', *Fashion Theory. The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 2, 179–99. Daneau (1580b), 94, 98, 140, 155, 163. Daneau (1580), 7–41, 46–68.

<sup>40</sup> Daneau (1580b), 96.

<sup>41</sup> Daneau (1580b), 59.

dangerous inflammations'. Daneau also argued that women should pay particular attention to how much of their bodies they revealed to public view. Women should cover their heads, and conceal their bodies in 'the most sober cut of clothes'. They should especially take care to wear high collars and, for Daneau, women who displayed 'naked bosoms, could not be honest'. Daneau suggested that by enveloping themselves in modest clothing, Christians were in effect putting on armour against all sorts of vices. Modest and sober dress was 'the attendant and guardian of honour, a defence against all sinister suspicions, in short, the proper virtue of a good woman'.<sup>42</sup>

A commitment to wearing modest and sober clothing not only provided a barrier to vice, but was also a sign of spiritual renewal. Daneau explained that the bodies of Christians who were 'no longer of this world' were vessels which had been renewed in Christ. Christians were to sense that 'in truth, the consecration and sanctification of our whole body is required, which ought to apply equally to clothes'. Clothes ought therefore to savour of humility which was truly agreeable to God, and be well cleansed of all the corruption and infections of the world.<sup>43</sup> The clothes of Christians acted as a livery of true faith, and a means of identifying oneself to others as a Christian. Daneau suggested that if those who had something of a reputation for believing in God, and who claimed to support the reformation of the Gospel, at the same time took pleasure in the 'curiosities and inventions of the people of the world' it would be a clear sign that they were, in reality, dissolute.<sup>44</sup> People were therefore to adopt;

clothing which is suitable for piety, and in which there will not be anything to please the eyes of the flesh, or give free expression for vices, or be an occasion of scandal in any way: but which will be more a good example and education to all those with whom we converse.<sup>45</sup>

Daneau's *Traité* then described the true beauty of a Christian's appearance. Firstly, it was a natural beauty, as Daneau claimed that 'true beauty does not need any assistance'. He also suggested that this true beauty, which was a gift from God, was sullied when people took pleasure from their appearance, or tried to adjust their appearance by artificial means. Daneau argued that when men took great care over how they looked, any beauty which resulted was not to their honour but was rather a display of their vice. People in fact made idols of themselves by excessive concern about their own appearance. Daneau wrote that he often saw a mirror;

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<sup>42</sup> Daneau (1580b), 60, 72, 126–7, 133–5.

<sup>43</sup> Daneau (1580b), 37, 46–7, 49–50.

<sup>44</sup> Daneau (1580b), 34–5, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Daneau (1580b), 50.

placed on the belt of women: as if it was the instrument of some good action, and necessary for life, to always have it close to one, or in one's hand. It is [rather] the game of women of leisure, the instrument of their vanities, the sustenance of their pride and presumption. It is to see and contemplate yourself, which is to say to take pleasure and contentment in the love of yourself: which is the most pernicious vice which one can have.<sup>46</sup>

According to Daneau, clothes should not disguise the natural shape of the body or accentuate certain parts of the body, such as large shoes, hoops, or farthingales, which were not only vain, but also signs of a dissolute character and a 'sickness of spirit'. Daneau disapproved of women making any changes to the style or colour of their hair on the grounds that the natural state of the body was given by God and should not be altered. He railed against all sorts of artificial means of raising or lengthening hair, or twisting or curling hair. Daneau was equally severe against women disguising their natural appearance in any way with make-up to give a different colour to their faces or accentuate their features. He advised his readers to be content with what God had given them rather than seek this 'so-called beauty'.<sup>47</sup> Daneau also explained how Tertullian had insisted on the use of only natural colours in clothes and advised against wearing clothes of too many sumptuous colours. Tertullian had suggested that God was pleased only by those things which he had made, and that 'he could have made ewes which had purple or green wool' if that was what he wished. Daneau's approving gloss on this passage suggested that Tertullian did not intend here to condemn all colours which were made by mixing natural pigments together, but rather to attack this 'insatiable appetite to disguise simple colours, which challenges a good Christian simplicity, and always follows all sorts of sumptuousity and novelty in clothing'.<sup>48</sup>

Encounters with the native peoples of the New World in the sixteenth century offered opportunities for contrasting Christian and non-Christian cultures. Jean de Léry was optimistic that given time the natives of Brazil could be converted to true faith and that their culture and social customs could be reformed. In the realm of dress, Léry's reflections on the appearance of the Tupinamba allowed him to confirm that Christians should adhere to a model of simple clothing which lacked any excessive display or expense. These conclusions supported the regulatory and disciplinary project of Calvinists in France, Geneva and across the Continent to enforce a series of regulations and ordinances against ostentatious, novel, and excessively sumptuous and costly clothes during the second half of the sixteenth century. However, as Lambert

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<sup>46</sup> Daneau (1580b), 136–7, 148.

<sup>47</sup> Daneau (1580b), 100–2, 109, 135.

<sup>48</sup> Daneau (1580), 39.

Daneau admitted, the battle to get ordinary people in Reformed communities to adhere to these rules was a hard one.

Léry's discussion of the naked state of Brazil's native peoples was more problematic for Reformed moralists. When Daneau stressed the need for Christians, and particularly women, not to alter the natural appearance which God gave them, he meant that they must dress simply, soberly, with humility, and in an appropriate manner for their social rank. They must, above all, dress with modesty to combat the gaze of a fallen world. For Daneau, the lack of clothing of Brazilians was a sign that they had been judged and abandoned by God. According to Daneau, this divine judgement was also imminent over France because of its failure to adopt moral standards of clothing and appearance. However, Jean de Léry's reflections on Brazil suggested that among the Tupinamba, even if they were abandoned by God, sexual desire did not increase in response to the sight of 'crude nakedness'. If complete uncovering of the body did not pose the danger to society's moral well-being as had been thought, was covering the body more modestly likely to provide any solution to controlling sexual appetites? Was erotic interest actually being suppressed by the Reformed women of France covering themselves more effectively with clothing? As Montaigne wondered, was Frenchmen's ardour really being cooled, or was interest in the female body not merely being redirected, or even being increased and inflamed? Lambert Daneau at least remained certain that the natural beauty of the women who lived in the forests of Brazil held no answers to France's moral problems. Daneau's work and Calvinist regulations on clothing remained firmly based on interpretation of Biblical and Classical texts which inspired ideas about a true and natural beauty which was modest, sober and unaffected, and to which Christian women in particular were encouraged to aspire.

## Chapter Nine

# Social Fabric in Thynne's *Debate Between Pride and Lowliness*

Claire Bartram

This article examines the ways in which an ostensibly late medieval text, revived and published in 1577, intersects with Elizabethan debates concerning identity and clothing culture. The text in question is entitled *A Debate Between Pride and Lowliness* and details a dispute between two pairs of breeches, one of velvet signifying wealth and pride, and the other of cloth signifying humility.<sup>1</sup> The dispute hinges on different interpretations of worthiness: of status achieved through wealth, or through virtue and inherited right. As such the text intersects with contemporary debates concerning social mobility and the definition of gentility in a culture in which clothing is used to signify, to display or mask the moral identity and true social status of the individual. A key aspect of this dispute is the moral significance of attire and the link between clothing, vanity and the cardinal sin of pride, a trope rehearsed in sumptuary proclamations across the medieval and early modern period. Examining the proscriptive purpose of this text, the article highlights the correlation between *A Debate* and forms of legal address evident in Elizabethan sumptuary legislation and in the public addresses and texts of lawyers and divines.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Debate Between Pride and Lowliness pleaded in an assize and how a jurie with great indifferencie being impannelled and ready to have geven their verdict were straungely intercepted, no less pleasant than profitable*, J. Payne Collier ed. (1841), London: Shakespeare Society. In the absence of line references all subsequent references to this text will be page numbers. The provenance of the text is described by Payne Collier who attributes authorship to Francis Thynne (pp.viii–xvi). Carlson's recent survey of Thynne's writings disputes this authorship and the text itself displays many qualities which would posit its compilation at an earlier date. D. Carlson (1989), 'The Writings and Manuscript Collections of the Elizabethan Alchemist, Antiquary and Herald Francis Thynne', *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 52, 203–272.

The other articles in this section provide a broader context in which to consider the debate between the Velvet and Cloth Breeches. In particular they highlight the recurring promotion of codes of modest, Christian attire as a means of imposing social control in both the medieval and early modern period. *A Debate* coincides with many of the discourses of clothing culture raised in this section. Particularly interesting is the correlation between English and continental narratives of dressing and the reiteration of moral values of honesty, modesty and sobriety urged in legislative, legal, literary and spiritual arenas: highlighted particularly in Storey's and Murdock's work. These virtues are set against the excesses of clothing consumption and in response to the vagaries of the wheel of fortune, which turns 'Agaynst all wysedome, counsell, and forecast/ Agaynst all hope and expectation' in *A Debate*. Sweetinburgh's article provides a much-needed demonstration of the medieval nuances of these discourses, drawing attention to the continued resonance of sumptuary legislation and the special status of the poor both ideologically and in practical bequests of clothing.

*A Debate* is figured in the form of a dream vision. The dreamer and narrator is an attorney who, on falling asleep, finds himself in verdant countryside in mid May.<sup>2</sup> Wandering along 'till at the last I came into a dale/ Amid two mighty hills on eyther side' the dreamer witnesses a strange sight as down each hill rolls a pair of breeches, one 'All of velvet very fine', the other 'of cloth with outen pride' (9; 10). As the trousers meet in the valley, 'Upstood this velvet breeche,' who addressed the Cloth Breeches 'in great disdayne' demanding to know why he 'hath presumed here to take thy place/without regard of us or reverence' (11). The dispute becomes heated as the Cloth Breeches refuses to acknowledge that his status is lower, stating that he perceived 'betweene us little difference/ Or none at all save only workmanship'. The Velvet Breeches riles at this perceived insolence, shouting,

Thou beggers weed, quoth he, base and villayn!  
 How dare thou speak such language unto me  
 Thy better and thyself with me compare  
 So far inferior in eche degree (12)

Anticipating the violent intentions of the Velvet Breeches, the Narrator intervenes and, in his professional capacity as an attorney, offers his services as arbitrator of the dispute.

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<sup>2</sup> For further details concerning the conventions of medieval dream visions see P. Brown ed. (1999), *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, London: OUP.



Each party then states the nature of his grievance to the attorney. The dispute rests on differing perceptions of status or 'worthyness'. The Velvet Breeches claims superior origins to the Cloth, he is Italian 'sometime the mistres of the world so wide/ Famous in learning and chivalry' (12). He is also expensive, 'my foote is worth thy yard' he quips. Velvet Breeches 'boosteth' of his influence and of 'How that he hath rowm in throng and presse/ Because that of the wealthy he is worn' (15). As a symbol of wealth the Velvet Breeches claims he is coveted by all: 'For who would set his sonne to school, quoth he/ To studie scripture, physicke or the lawe/ But that he beareth good wyll unto me?' (22). He continues,

Hence risen learned men in eche estate  
Conning in handy craft and facultie  
And gotten dignities of doctorate  
Who is their marke, what shoot they at but me? (22)

In other words, those who rise through handicraft and learning do so only to achieve the material rewards of status.

The Cloth Breeches, however, will not admit his inferiority. 'As for obeysaunce' to the Velvet Breeches, he claims 'He ought him none, homage ne fealty' for 'His [own] cause was good, his title auncestrell/ For in this Country he was borne and bred' (16). In the past he too had 'covered the best' of men but such men 'whose lyfe and maners vices did detest' (13). 'Whyle I was in favour' laments the Cloth Breeches, 'The father was content that his sonne/ Should leade a lyfe as before did he/And end in such estate as he begon' (26).

As such the two pairs of breeches demonstrate changing social values and perceptions of worthiness. The Velvet Breeches, with humanist associations implicit in his birthplace, promotes the social mobility of the individual, the ability to rise to wealth through education and professional service. The Cloth Breeches on the other hand represents inherited worth in an (equally) idealised but static culture in which wealth and status are conferred by inherited birthright. His perception of worthiness is grounded not in visual appearance but moral fortitude. He 'did not judge man, maide ne wife by their array', (22) for seldom was it that 'vertue and humanitie were tyed to riches ... as pride and vices are most commonly' (13). In further contrast, Cloth Breeches states that the pursuit of learning should not be for personal financial gain but in the service of the commonwealth at large. Those who 'in youth' were driven 'to travell and to faren hard', placed no value on 'this world and her fickle glory' but 'imploied' their 'studie, care and thought' in aid of their 'neighbour, freend and territory'(24). With heaven as the only 'hoped for reward', the dressing and preparation of the soul took precedence over 'silke', velvet and 'outward shewe'. Far better was it to be

such, ‘As more esteeme our bodys then our gere/ Namely our soules which are celestiall’ (23).

Intending to test the legitimacy of each title in a court of law, the Narrator seeks to assemble a suitable jury from passers-by. But, in a world in which status is symbolised by attire, in which wealth can change a journeyman ‘cleane into another guise’ as one that by his attire ‘seemen wyse’, (26) the Narrator finds it hard to accurately judge the status and occupation of those he meets. The medieval, Chaucerian qualities of this parade of symbolically dressed individuals and its interaction with the conventions of estate satire are readily apparent.<sup>3</sup> The brief description of each individual focuses on their attire as the primary means of identifying their status and occupation. Significantly, however, the order in which the figures appear, from Tailor to Husbandman, far from enforcing the conventional social hierarchy reflects some significant social mobility. The first candidate appears to be a gentleman and is described as wearing a ‘fair black coate of cloth’ at twenty shillings a yard ‘layd upon with parchment lace’, a ‘very fine’ ‘satten’ doublet with a costly lining of silk and breeches of ‘sylken grogerane’. However, he is revealed to be a tailor (19). When a Baker, Brewer and Vitaller come into view, the Narrator ‘sought to knowe some of them by their face/ But I ne might ne gesse what they should be’ on account of the fact that they were so ‘handsomely apparelled’. Others display equally inappropriate aspects of social mobility. The rich Tanner ‘asked where I thought he might purchase/ Som great domayn, som lordship or som maner’ (32). The Grasier refused to reveal his identity but demanded information about available land ‘or office if I wyst any to sell/ He had a sonne or twaine he would advance’ (31).

The Cloth Breeches laments this climate in which all seem ‘set to followe gaine’(20) and indeed to capitalise on the materialistic tendencies of others, with such figures the cunning Bricklayer eagerly anticipating his own wealth through the rising demand for ‘full many a statelye place’ (32). These individuals are countered by such simply dressed figures as the ‘homely’ Husbandman, ‘a simple hind’ with his coat of coarse Kendall cloth and a ‘strawen hatte’ framing a face sunburnt by his labour in the fields (32). Chosen to preside over the case are three Paupers who only ironically participate in this system of display,

[The] Woman and the wench were clad in russet  
Both coarse and olde and worne so very neere

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<sup>3</sup> For further details of these conventions see Derek Pearsall (1985), *The Canterbury Tales*, London: Allen & Unwin, pp. 57–71; Jill Mann (1973), *Chaucer and Medieval Estate Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

That ye might see cleane through both sleeve and gusset  
 The naked skinne wheras it dyd appear.  
 There hosen and their shooes were all of one  
 I meane both for the workmanship and leather  
 To wyt their skinnes for other had they none.  
 And chapped were they, sore with wind and weather. (35)

The paupers exist outside the type of consumer culture symbolised by such figures as the Tailor. Their clothes are worn out, their shoes non-existent, they have nothing, and their enforced renunciation of worldly goods epitomises the Christian concept of lowliness or humility.<sup>4</sup> Christ-like in their 'simplicitie' they represent 'a virtue deere and precious' which 'hath the promise of eternitie' for 'The humble, lowe and contrite hart/ Sayth David is to God most acceptable' (73). By choosing the paupers to preside in judgement over the case, the moral probity of the text is reinforced: those who in material terms have the least are closest to God and therefore the fittest judges in a temporal realm of justice which is perceived as an extension of the divine.

The suitability of each potential member of the jury is debated by both pairs of Breeches. Those accepted include, the Knight, the Squire and the Gentleman, the Baker, Brewer, Grocer and Vintner, the Weaver, Haberdasher and Shoe-maker, the Tanner, Bricklayer, Smith and the Husbandman. Those with dubious occupations, such as the Tailor or the Dancing and Dysing House Masters, whose moral identity is symbolised by their flamboyant attire, are rejected as promoters of idleness, 'Wylfulness and pride, contrary to the sober godly sort' (58). Once assembled the jury retire to consider the case. It is expected that the verdict will favour the humble Cloth Breeches, 'His cause so good, that need he must he winne'. However, worldly justice and order are denied as six armed strangers approach the Cloth Breeches. Challenging his presumption in bringing a case against one of 'such worthyness', they 'him puld and halde', ripping the Cloth Breeches in half and then tearing out the lining,

So that they were defaced in a throw  
 And peece by peece so very smal itorn  
 That there was nys man so conning that couth know  
 Or gesse what garment they had ben befor

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<sup>4</sup> In his history of poverty, Geremek highlights the medieval link between humility and poverty stating that 'in Biblical terminology and in early Christian literature *pauperitas* is clearly assimilated to *humilitas*. B. Gemerek (1994), *Poverty: A History*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 19.

Not so much as the codpeece was exempt  
 Or for his service so much favour found  
 As not to be in peeces al to rent  
 And here and there in peeces throwen a ground. (64)

On witnessing this ‘extreme cruelty’ the jury scatters and the Narrator ‘sodenly’ awakes. A *Debate* ends when, disorientated and ‘at the first full pensive’ he hurriedly checks the state of his own hose: ‘I looked where I layde them overnight/ Upon my bedde even at the very feete’ and to his relief finds them ‘whole and in good plight’ (65).

This text is fundamentally concerned with the visual figuring of identity in a culture in which clothing acts as a signifier of status, wealth and moral respectability. As such the different aspects of this debate are mediated through clothing culture. The apparent status of the Velvet Breeches is reinforced by the stipulation of sumptuary legislation that velvet was not to be worn by any ‘man under the degree of a baron’s eldest son, except that he be of the Order of the Garter or of the Privy Council or that may dispend 500 marks by year for term of life’. Only this group were entitled to wear,

Any velvet or satin, or any stuff of like or greater price, in the upperstocks of his hose or in any part thereof; or shall garnish the same with any embroidery or any fringe, lace or passement of gold, silver or silk, or any other garnishing with silk.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, the modest appearance of the Cloth Breeches constructed, ‘Of Cloth I say both upper stocke and neather/ Paned and single lyned next to the thie’ (10), coincided with sumptuary descriptions of occupational groups below the degree of a gentleman. This group, which included husbandmen, serving and journeymen were not entitled to ‘wear any silk... nor anything made out of the realm saving camlet’.<sup>6</sup>

For the Narrator-attorney who nervously checks the state of his Breeches, and by implication his status, this debate holds particular significance. His professional status held an ambiguous position in contemporary descriptions of the social

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<sup>5</sup> P.L. Hughes and J.F. Larkin eds (1964–9), *Tudor Royal Proclamations* volume 2, Yale University Press, p. 281, henceforth *Proclamations 2*. The proclamation also notes the restrictions on wearing of velvet in ‘sleeveless coats, jackets, jerkins, coifs, caps, purses or partlets’ to any man ‘under the degree of a Duke, marquis, earl and their children or under the degree of a baron, unless he be a knight of the Order of the Garter ... [or] the son and heir apparent of a man of 300 marks’, *Proclamations 2*, p. 279.

<sup>6</sup> *Proclamations 2*, p. 280.

hierarchy. His professional training enables him to claim the status of a gentleman but also leaves him open to accusations of self-interest and personal financial gain.<sup>7</sup> The grabbing Bricklayer, the Tanner, the Grasier and the Tailor belong to another socially mobile group, the 'handycrafte men'. Such men were berated in the mid sixteenth century text *The Institucion of a Gentleman* as those who 'Covet to clymbe the steppes of worshippe which tittle had wont to appurtaine to gentlemen onely and men of office and estimacion'. They 'get landes neyther by their lerning nor worthiness achived but purchased by certeyn darke augmentation practices, by menes [means] whereof they be called gentilmen'.<sup>8</sup>

*The Institucion of a Gentleman* rehearses a similar argument to that of the Cloth Breeches. Here wealth facilitates the purchase of land and the trappings of gentility by those not entitled to join this status group. These men are not learned or worthy, the traditional categories of men of lower social status accepted into this social elite. Instead they rise through wealth often gained through manual work to assume the title of gentleman and the 'office and estimation' with which this group are associated. Visual appearance may suggest wealth and thereby status, but it does not give an accurate indication of an individual's true status or worthiness which, for the Cloth Breeches, is predicated on inherited birthright.

Sumptuary legislation also highlights this issue. The 1562 sumptuary proclamation drew attention to 'the meaner sort' as those most likely to 'have so much exceeded, or do daily more exceed in the excess of apparel'.<sup>9</sup> The 1574 proclamation draws out the moral and social implications of this excess. It

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<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of social mobility and social order see Keith Wrightson (1982), *English Society 1580–1680*, London: Unwin Hyman, pp. 17–38, and his (1986), 'The Social Order of Early Modern England' in L. Bonfield ed., *The World We Have Gained*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 177–202. In his discussion of the professions in early modern England Christopher Brooks notes that 'learning of the sort which was associated with the professions became an important element in the calculus of social differentiation which united the professions and the gentry...Physicians and Barristers were regularly described as esquires. Attorneys ... invariably have 'gent' written after their names and so are indistinguishable from minor country squires and the upper reaches of the urban elite', p. 118, Christopher Brooks (1994), 'Professions, Ideology and the Middling Sort in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries' in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture Society and Politics in England 1550–1800* ed. Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, London: Macmillan, pp.113–140.

<sup>8</sup> *The Institucion of a Gentleman*, 1555, reprinted 1568, quoted in J.P. Cooper (1983), 'Ideas of Gentility in Early Modern England' in *Studies in Early Modern History*, London: Hambledon, pp. 54–55.

<sup>9</sup> *Proclamations* 2, p. 187.

destabilised society by bringing ‘disorder and confusion of the degrees of all estates’. It brought financial ruin both to those who sought ‘by show of apparel to be esteemed as gentlemen’ and to a ‘great number’ of actual ‘young gentlemen’,

Who allured by the vain show of those things, do not only consume themselves, their goods and lands which their parents have left unto them but also run into such debts and shifts.<sup>10</sup>

This statute describes a significant erosion of the social order precipitated by those tempted by vanity and covetous. Such ‘extremity’ brought decay to the wealth of the nation, which was further weakened by the number of ‘serviceable young men’ and ‘good families’ who were ruined both in terms of finance and reputation as the ‘young gentlemen’ are driven to ‘unlawful acts’ to maintain their appearance.<sup>11</sup> Such costs are mirrored in *A Debate* as the Cloth Breeches traces the fortune of a man ‘corrupted’ by vanity. At first ‘he wasteth much unorderly/ and of his cost and charge to small purpose’ before employing the ‘usurer and eke thextortioner’ and then descending to ‘devises, many a shamefull shift/ To begge, to borowe and to deceive their freend’ (27) to finance their excesses. The implications of this social instability are described by the Tailor,

For although som through pride thus down are cast  
And waste their living that their freends them last  
Yet others by their meanes aryse as fast  
Some by their cunning and some by their craft.(21)

The moral implications of the statute are thus mirrored in *A Debate*. Those ‘allured by vain show’ are ‘consumed’ by their pride and, losing the ‘name of gentry ... distroy themselves’.<sup>12</sup> However, as the Tailor describes, others ‘aryse as fast’ and men of lower social status seek ‘by show,’ to appear and to be perceived as or ‘esteemed’ gentlemen.

This financial ruin which ‘distroys’ the material status of the gentry is accompanied by a significant moral decline. There are significant spiritual implications in this process of consumption. The ‘wearynge of aparell more gorgeous, sumpteous and precious than our estate, calling or condition of life requireth’, was the facet of pride which most ‘offendeth God’, for such behaviour

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<sup>10</sup> *Proclamations 2*, p. 381.

<sup>11</sup> *Proclamations 2*, p. 381.

<sup>12</sup> It is *The Institution of a Gentleman* which describes this ‘destruction’, Cooper (1983), p. 54.

'intices others to vanity'.<sup>13</sup> Vanity in turn was linked to other sins, as Edward Dering's gloss on the seventh commandment in his *Household Catechism* demonstrates,

We are forbidden in the seaventh commaundment, firstly all adulterie, fornication and all other uncleanes in our bodies. Secondly all unpure thoughts, and lustes of the hart. Thirdly all other things which might intise to such uncleanes, as all unchast behaviour, filthy talke and songes, wanton apparell, lewd & idle pastimes, gluttony, drunkennes, houses of open whoredome, and whatsoever els might allure us to uncleannesse.<sup>14</sup>

Contemporary legal addresses reflect the fusion of these spiritual and social concerns. Addressing the Kent Quarter Sessions in 1585, William Lambarde listed 'vanity of array' alongside other 'corrupt and rebellious lusts' which were responsible for social disorder within the county. These included 'uncleanness of body, excess of drink, dissolute game, extreme idleness' practised by 'each sort and trade of men', misdemeanours which were dealt with in the assizes, from the pulpit and through the sober example of the JP.<sup>15</sup>

Similar issues are raised in *A Debate* in which the link between appetite and excessive attire is made explicit: as an expression of the triumph of sensuality over reason,

And therefore if the buttocks do exceede  
Or be too monstrous in that they weare  
The head ought to be blamed for the deed  
For reason ought to have his dwelling there. (68)

The breeches symbolised appetite, for while other parts of the body 'may with less shame be discovered', the breeches covered the site of masculine sexuality and by extension 'filthy gain and all excesse ... lust and lewde desire/ Of sport or speche or fleshes foule delite' (79).<sup>16</sup> The Dancing-School Master is rejected as a member

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<sup>13</sup> Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* fo.5r-6v.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Dering (1590), *A Necessarie Instruction for Christian Householders* printed in *Maister Derings Works*, written before his death in the mid 1570s.

<sup>15</sup> C. Read ed. (1962), *William Lambarde and Local Government: His 'Ephemeris and Twenty Nine Charges to Juries and Commissions*, Cornell University Press, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> It is breeches of course, which feature in that familiar trope of usurped masculine authority when domineering wives stole and wore the breeches. For further details concerning this trope and the significance of clothing in defamation cases see Laura Gowing

of the jury on account of his occupation which was regarded as both a ‘professed foe to vertue’ and opposite to ‘Godliness and goodnesse’. He is described as having breeches that are ‘great full of ventositie;’ (30) flamboyant attire that is indicative of his flatulent lack of moral respectability.

Thus the moral impetus of *A Debate* also coincides with discourses of individual reform designed to counteract such ‘excesses’ and ‘uncleanesse’. ‘The Lord God’, stated Dering ‘commaundeth us to keepe our bodies and soules chaste and pure, as temples of the holy ghost’.<sup>17</sup> For the justice of the peace, sobriety of apparel was part of the process of personal reform, of ‘continency of life ... moderation in meats and drinks, temperancy in pastimes, labor in our several callings and equity in all our deeds and dealings’.<sup>18</sup>

In both the proclamations and *A Debate* the prevailing social order is reinforced by the description of those who in their ‘degree and office’ are expected to enforce the adherence to the ‘statute of awrai’ (20). The statute lists the royal household, noblemen, privy councillors, archbishops and bishops, clergy, mayors and head officers in cities, towns and corporations, chancellors of universities, ancients and benchers in Inns of Court and Chancery ‘and generally to all that hath any superiority or government over and upon any multitude and each man in his own household for their children and servants’.<sup>19</sup> This recourse to the governing elite is also marked in the Narrator’s address to his audience in *A Debate*. Dreamed and recorded by an attorney, it is presented to an audience of barristers who may ‘thanke me when we meeten at the terme’ (4). This ‘superiority’ is also appealed to in the parade of potential jurors. Although the first ‘gentleman’ is revealed to be an elaborately dressed Tailor, the second group of passers-by appeared to be of genuine noble origins. Approaching the company, the Narrator asks ‘If they were such *as veryly they seemed!* To wyt of knighthood and gentle progeny’. The group proves to be a Knight, a gentleman and ‘a squire of ancient race and lyne’. The Knight ‘gentle was of cheere ... So playne in his apparel and his port’, like a ‘peacock ... without a tayle’ (28; 39). ‘He liveth very well content at home’ complained the Velvet Breeches, ‘Nor to the citie hath desire to goe/ Ne up and downe there in the streetes to rome’. As such, the Knight rejects ‘silke on backe’ and ‘doth more esteeme ... the goodly’, his plain attire symbolising his inherent

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(1996), *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 82–4.

<sup>17</sup> Dering (1590).

<sup>18</sup> Read (1962), p.78.

<sup>19</sup> *Proclamations 2*, pp. 382–3. Sponsler makes a similar point in relation to medieval legislation: Sponsler (1992), ‘Narrating the Social Order: Medieval Clothing Laws’, *Clio* 21, 3, 272–3.



honour and worthiness. He 'spends his living on the poorer sort' and ensures that 'his tenants and his farmers live at ease' (39). In his rejection of the material world, in his charity and estate management, the Knight represents 'ancient' idealised values of gentility.

In describing Kentish society in the 1570s, William Lambarde saw two key social groups, the gentry who were the 'Governors' and everyone else who were the 'governed'.<sup>20</sup> Addressing the Kent Quarter Sessions in the mid 1580s, Lambarde urged his predominantly gentle audience to adopt 'sobriety in apparel' both as an example to the wayward but also as a symbol of their rejection of worldly corruption and material excess.<sup>21</sup> Like the Knight in *A Debate* their true gentility, their worthiness, would be apparent not in their fine attire but in their visible sobriety.

When the Narrator states that 'gentilnesse' is the very 'roote' (29) of *A Debate*, the facets of this debate concern not only the qualities of gentility but their external manifestation. The impetus towards sobriety in apparel cuts across the practice of reading clothing as the external signs of status and worth described in the Sumptuary proclamations. Gentility is redefined in response to the apparent mobility and (im)morality of other occupational groups. As such the figure of the Knight in *A Debate* is defined against the external trappings of this elite status group. Those occupational groups who seek the means to attain gentility such as land, office or title fail to recognise that it is the interior qualities which define 'gentilnesse':

Through stedfastnesse and trueth in woord and deed  
 Abhorring filthy gayn and all excesse  
 Supporting eche other in his neede  
 Accompting godly living great richesse.(79)

This distinction between the exterior and the interior also defines the spiritual impetus of the text, for those who 'idols of their carcasses dooe make' will be 'throwen out of heaven', (24) while those who seek only to dress their souls receive the 'promise of eternitie' (73).

As moral instruction, *A Debate* should be considered within the context of contemporary prescriptive writings such as Dering's *Catechism*, Lambarde's legal

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<sup>20</sup> William Lambarde (1826), *A Perambulation of Kent: Conteyning the Description, Hystorie and Customes of that Shire* 1576, London: Baldwin, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Read (1962), p. 78. For further information on the life of William Lambarde see R.M. Wanicke (1973), *William Lambarde: Elizabethan Antiquary 1536-1601*, London: Phillimore.

addresses or the sumptuary proclamations. Furthermore, in debating the virtues and representation of ‘gentilnesse’, ‘worthyness’, or ‘lowliness’, *A Debate* is bound up with broader processes of identity construction and representation that are manifested by the gentry in the Elizabethan period. One such example is apparent in the preparations for death made by another Kentish gentleman, Sir Roger Manwood. Manwood casts his own life, and indeed is held up by others, as a moral example. William Lambarde describes Manwood’s career, stating he had been advanced ‘to the degree first of a Serjeant, then of a Justice of the Lawe and lastly to a Knight and place of the Chiefe Baron of the Escheaquer’, a meteoric rise in status and wealth that is justified, however, by his ‘vertue and good learning’.<sup>22</sup> Apart from a mention of the ‘newe tapistrie hanginges apointed for the great dyning chamber and for myne owne lodginge chamber att great St Bartholomew and the greate turkish carpett and great velvett cushiones imbroydered with myne armes’, Manwood’s last will and testament gives little indication of the extensive worldly goods that a man of his wealth and position would have had.<sup>23</sup> Instead he anchors his bequests within his local community with extensive charitable provision for the poor.

Manwood’s deliberate rejection of worldly goods is also apparent in his funeral monument which depicts his skeleton realistically carved and lying prostrate on a woven mat; a reminder of the transience of worldly life. The edifying principles of Manwood’s will as a public document, the enactment of his charitable bequests and morbid realism of his monument, are further enhanced by his stipulations for an annual sermon in which,

mention [is] to be made of the fraylthe and vaine delightes of this worlde and what greate travaile and care mankinde dothe use to take for provicon to this lyfe which is momentarie and uncertaine and how little care for provicon to lyfe eternall which is for ever certaine. And therefore [how] meete [it is] for every man to walke worthelie in that vocation wherein he is placed with a contented minde, daylie, in the feare of God, respecting how many be in the worlde in povertie and of lesse habilitie then himselfe, which daily thanks to God for the same and to doe as he woulde be donne unto which is the beste rule amongst men in this lyfe.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the same moral values apparent in *A Debate* are found in Manwood’s spiritual provision for his community. The reminders of the frailty of this life and provision for the next, the caution against self-advancement in favour of living

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<sup>22</sup> William Lambarde (1826), p.119.

<sup>23</sup> CCA: CC/ S7 f.2v.

<sup>24</sup> CCA: CC/S7 f.1v.

worthily and contentedly and the reminder of provision for the poor offset Manwood's own wealth and social mobility. Although he may possess the external trappings of wealth and status, he chooses to manifest his identity as a moral example of the qualities of worthiness and lowliness.

This article has sought to provide an Elizabethan context for a medieval text by examining the correlation between the moral imperative in *A Debate* and Elizabethan prescriptive writings including sumptuary proclamations, religious texts and legal addresses. Clothing plays a vital role in the construction of identity and in the expression of reputation, but *A Debate* raises a fundamental paradox within this culture in suggesting that in the face of such apparent social mobility and thus the appropriation of the language of clothing by 'the meaner sort', those who are truly worthy should reject the material symbols of social degree. Here the medieval equivalence of poverty and humility is refashioned as sobriety and godliness for a protestant audience. Similarly the values, the 'worthiness', of the medieval figure of the Knight become associated with the status of the gentry. The identity of the Knight and the value system of the Cloth Breeches in *A Debate* find an Elizabethan context in the construction of identity by such legal figures as William Lambarde or Sir Roger Manwood, who present themselves as models of godliness and sobriety as a further means of instructing, and enforcing, social differentiation.

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## Section Three

# Material Movements

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## Chapter Ten

# Clothing Distributions and Social Relations c.1350–1500

Joanna Crawford

Later medieval England, particularly from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards, was witness to an explosion of regulatory activities which attempted to structure and control the production, distribution and display of clothing. Moreover, and this is less frequently noted, the more intimate and idiosyncratic sources of medieval social history also suggest that this period witnessed a profound increase in the complexity of clothing practices, especially in terms of the political life of secular society. The contours and significance of this newly emerged ‘problem of clothing’ in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, and its impact on social groups below the nobility is the subject of my PhD thesis ‘Clothing Connections: Dress and Social Life in Late Medieval England’. The discussion in this essay is derived in part from my broader argument about how the antithetical outcome of regulating clothing customs and of promoting versions of hierarchical order meant that those same structures were capable of being consciously and obviously subverted.

Across the whole range of secular clothing controls, this regulatory activity consistently underscored the importance of social connections as a key to determining the legitimacy of a person’s sartorial appearance. By examining official legislative pronouncements about clothing payments and distributions alongside the evidence of social practice, it can be shown that both of these aspects of ‘clothing culture’ were characterised by a flexibility and negotiability not typically associated with medieval experiences of dress.

As Elisabeth Salter rightly points out in her essay in this volume, analysis of the written materials which theorise clothing use, especially the evidence of statutory efforts to control clothing, comprise the most discussed aspects of ‘clothing culture’ in late medieval English historiography.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of so much regulatory discourse around the problem of clothing in the fourteenth and fifteenth

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<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Salter, pp. 179, 181.

century acts as a reminder that consensus on apparel - on how it should be read, on what it signified, and how it related to identity - remained beyond the experience of late medieval English society as a whole. Although several sections of late medieval society were busy formulating codes and rules about clothing, they never presumed to make regulations apply across ranks, and neither did they insist on compliance at all times. Acknowledging the utility of worship, rewards and flattery, individuals of high and low estate regularly manipulated the proclaimed ideals of order that structured late medieval clothing practices. In a sense, the prerogative of those in positions of power to flout convention (as well as law) effectively reinforced the hierarchical framework which connected high status with sartorial privilege. Importantly though, because of their role as society's leaders and material providers, this more adaptable approach to clothing shaped the experiences and expectations of significantly wider social groups. Indeed, a study of the movement of clothing items, provides a striking illustration of the necessary instability of late medieval legislative efforts to pin the signs of colour, fur and fabric to specific points on a hierarchical scale.

The employment of clothing in the formation of social alliances and group identity is apparent across a range of social and spatial settings in late medieval England. Maria Hayward's essay in this volume outlines this use of clothing in the very highest social sphere: that of the court of Henry VIII.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Elisabeth Salter has examined testamentary evidence to show how clothing bequests could also be expressive of social groupings.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the significance of a grant of clothing was not equivalent to its monetary value. Rather, payments, gifts and distributions of clothing bound individuals to each other, or individuals to a group, in a variety of socially useful and culturally important ways. The distribution of uniform clothing was intended to reflect collective strength and discipline, whilst gradations of cost and cloth facilitated the expression of an increasingly elaborate hierarchy of honour and worship. In the same period, the tendency towards more systematic uses of colour and emblems resulted in an ever more precise system of recognition through which people could identify a certain form of clothing as connecting its wearer to an individual lord or patron, an official post, or a guild or fraternity.

This is how the distribution of clothing in its most formal and regulated sense was expected to operate in late medieval society. However, the material objects of clothing also moved between individuals and social groups in much more informal ways. Given the overlapping nature of these transactions, I would be wary of

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 11, *Fashion, Finance, Foreign Politics and the Wardrobe of Henry VIII*.

<sup>3</sup> Salter, pp. 188-90



making any overly rigid opposition between these 'formal' and 'informal' clothing movements. It is revealing of the changes influencing English society at this time that 'formal' movements - by which can be understood official uses of clothing such as guild distributions of livery, the use of recognised uniforms by civic officers and the regular distributions of household livery - were increasingly structured to replicate and tighten the hierarchical basis of clothing culture. However, the existence of so much legislative activity surely testifies to the perception among elites that a dangerous level of disorderliness and 'informality' characterised livery distributions and clothing payments. Conversely, whilst 'informal' transfers of garments and accessories such as those that were bequeathed in wills, or that were given as gratuities, or as gifts between associates might seem to be expressive of affections and memories, they too were just as likely to also function as signifiers of office and status.

In a recent and highly influential examination of Renaissance clothing culture, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass have argued that 'Clothing is a worn world: a world of social relations put upon the wearer's body'.<sup>4</sup> They instructively use a broad and inclusive concept of livery - highlighting the characteristics of reciprocity and obligation - to encompass virtually any transfer of clothing from superior to inferior. This generous definition of livery is especially useful for a discussion of medieval clothing culture in that it underscores the continuum of social practices surrounding clothing rather than seeking to draw restrictive and perhaps artificial distinctions. However, through a contrast with what they identify as the newly fluid use of clothing in the sixteenth century, Jones and Stallybrass suggest that medieval clothing culture was so dominated by this idea of 'livery' that it created a system in which clothing embodied and enforced hierarchic arrangements whilst emphasising institutional rather than individual identities.<sup>5</sup> Contrasting with the highly static image of medieval clothing culture presented by Jones and Stallybrass, the emergence of debate over clothing payments and distributions in the fourteenth century shows that medieval clothing practices were not always reflective of social consensus, and nor were they impervious to economic and cultural changes.

The controversies surrounding the distribution of liveries as an aspect of 'bastard feudalism' are well documented,<sup>6</sup> but less recognised is the fact that the provision of clothing within urban communities and even customary grants of

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass (2000), *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Jones and Stallybrass (2000), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent summary of this literature see Frederique Lachaud (1996), 'Liveries of Robes in England: c. 1200–1330', *English Historical Review*, 111 (441), April, 279–299 esp. 280.

clothing to labourers, servants and associates also provoked some anxiety in late medieval England. Symptomatic of the increased social complexity and material improvements of the period between 1350 and 1500, the movement of clothing between individuals and groups can be regarded as a pervasive but contentious strategy for forging social relations. As a social practice it both strengthened and challenged the hierarchical expectations of late medieval culture. As will be shown, attitudes and practices surrounding the dress of servants and those 'in service' provide adequate testimony of the notion that the legitimacy of a person's clothing was determined largely by their social connections, both formal and informal.

Successive legislative attempts to deal with the problem of clothing distributions put forward various ideas about what constituted legitimate and illegitimate movements of clothing. Allocations of clothing which would identify the recipient and affirm their position within a social network were regarded as both necessary and favourable by parliamentary legislators and moralists alike. Parliamentary petitions show that 'livery of cloth', the traditional annual or biannual provision of cloth or garments to household servants and permanent retainers, was a practice which was consistently defended by legislators. The more innovative practice of distributing 'livery of company' - recognisable tokens of affiliation which took the form of uniform cloths, hats, badges or insignia - was regarded with much greater suspicion.<sup>7</sup> The main threat identified by the livery laws was the apparently unrestricted ability of 'livery of company' to represent the power of connection, and there is little doubt that the materiality of the livery itself was seen to be a central feature of the challenge its use posed to late medieval social and political order.

Within the language of parliamentary statutes, the 'household' appears as the central social structure through which the legality of clothing distributions could be defined. Membership of the household, which could take a number of forms, constituted the key for determining whether an individual had the right to benefit from the provision of livery. The livery statutes in general attempted to curb the distribution of liveries to individuals who were not permanent members of a lord's household or affinity, especially those below the rank of esquire. As the continuing anxiety directed towards the use of livery by lower ranks suggests, the tendency for lords to use distributions of clothing to increase their retinues was additionally worrying because of the apparent ease with which these 'little men' could be

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<sup>7</sup> 'Liveries called liveries of company' are mentioned in 13 Ric II stat. 3, A. Luders et. al. eds. (1810–1818), *Statutes of the Realm*, 12 volumes, London, ii, p. 75; and the distinction is explicitly made in 1 Hen IV, c7 ii, p. 113.

recruited.<sup>8</sup> The fact that one of the fifteenth-century livery laws even suggests that yeomen were opportunistically adopting the colours or signs of lords' liveries, emphasises the fears aroused by the symbolic and actual power of liveries, especially in the hands of such lowly ranked men.<sup>9</sup> Accepting that clothing or tokens of affiliation should ideally represent the mutual obligations of both patron and client, it was the apparently corrupted nature of the connection manifested by more arbitrary distributions of livery of company that prompted both parliamentary legislation and literary complaint.

It is important to note however, that even in their most strident criticism of livery of company, the commons never questioned the right of a lord or lady to clothe their servants as they saw fit. Ideally, this meant that servants' clothing would be attuned to the status of their master, but would reveal their relatively humble and essentially subordinate estate.<sup>10</sup> However, whereas evidence from the thirteenth century suggests that only 'gentlemen and knights' in service would wear the livery of their lord,<sup>11</sup> in the fourteenth century a more precise conception of the ordering of ranks below that of knight was developed and this had important implications for the clothing of those in service. By this period the division among esquires, gentlemen, yeomen and grooms was made visually apparent in distributions of livery.<sup>12</sup> Livery rolls and household ordinances show that distinctions were primarily made by allocating varying amounts of cloth (or equivalences in money) as well as by stipulating the quality of materials to be used (fur or no fur, silk or linen lining).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Ric. II, cap. 7, *Statutes of the Realm* ii, p. 3; *Rotuli parliamentorum: ut et petitiones, et placita in parlamento (1278–1503)*, 8 volumes, (1767–1832), iii, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> 8 Hen. VI, cap. 3, *Statutes of the Realm* ii, pp. 240–1.

<sup>10</sup> For discussions of the proper clothing of servant men and women see *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus 'De Proprietatibus Rerum': a critical text*, 3 vols, Oxford, 1975, i, pp. 305–6, pp. 311–321 and Christine de Pisan (1985), *Treasure of the City of Ladies, or, The Book of the three Virtues*, trans. Sarah Lawson, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 110, pp. 132–3.

<sup>11</sup> Grosseteste's rules regarding the dress of retainers in Dorothea Oschinsky (1971), *Walter of Henley and other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting*, Oxford, pp. 402–403.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of this development at the beginning of the fourteenth century, see Nigel Saul (1981), *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the fourteenth Century*, Oxford, pp. 6–26. For a detailed account of the finely ranked liveries of the royal household of Edward III, see Stella Mary Newton (1980), *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: a study of the years 1340–1365*, Woodbridge, pp. 65–70.

<sup>13</sup> See Oschinsky (1971), pp. 402–403; for the later elaboration see A. R. Myers ed. (1959), *The Household of Edward IV: The Black Book and the Ordinance of 1478*, Manchester. The

The significance of the correlation between legitimate clothing and social connection in the case of servants can be judged by the fact that when medieval preachers complained about over dressed servants, they saw it primarily as a failure on the part of their masters.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, complaints levelled at overdressed servants and retainers became a staple of satirical literature from the mid fourteenth century onwards. In these complaints the complexity of the relationship between the distribution of clothing and its implementation in social life is somewhat effaced, but it is present nonetheless.<sup>15</sup> Although presumption and overweening pride on the part of the servants was identified as the major reason for their too-fine clothes, satirists also observed that in the case of household retainers, such dress was typically encouraged - and even provided - by the master. For example, one homilist complained that in an effort to compete with the knights, squires now surround themselves with yeomen 'alle of sute of as gret [array] as sumtyme weren ful worthi squyers'.<sup>16</sup> By apparelling their servants in the latest styles and with the richest materials, such men were in reality staging impressive performances of their own prestige and 'worship'. The difficulty of regulating and restricting one of the most widespread and traditional forms of material exchange in medieval culture also highlights how strongly-held notions of the privileges ensuing from rank could complicate the best efforts of late medieval lawmakers. The legitimacy or otherwise of an individual's use of clothing was almost always interrogated by contemporaries with a characteristic - and often shrewd - alertness to the importance of social connections.

Among the most crucial social connections were those fostered through the household placement - and in the closely scrutinised arena of the great household the clothing stakes were particularly high. Patrons were, not surprisingly, highly sensitive about the appearance of their gentle servants, members of client families who were placed in their households for limited periods of time: a custom which consolidated the rewards of social connection through an exchange of courteous education for personal service. Their relatively high rank and their ancillary role in the house itself meant that such individuals were typically responsible for their

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beginning of this development has been discussed by Frederique Lachaud (1996), pp. 279–299.

<sup>14</sup> G.R. Owst (1961), *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters & of the English People*, Oxford, pp. 467–8.

<sup>15</sup> The vanity of both secular and ecclesiastical lords who 'overdress' their retainers is a common target in sermon literature, Owst (1961), pp. 281, 283, see also Frederick J. Furnivall ed. (1897), *Hoccleve's Works III – The Regement of Princes*, Early English Text Society extra series LXXII, London, p. 17, 438–441.

<sup>16</sup> Owst (1961), p. 337.

own dress. The fifteenth century letters of gentry families such as the Pastons and Stonors include instances where family members engaged in service in great households plead with their parents for better clothing because their patrons had deemed their current appearance unacceptable. The sisters-in-law of Elizabeth Stonor, ladies in waiting to the Duchess of Suffolk, were apparently so poorly dressed that the Duchess had remarked that if their array was not improved, she would be unable to retain them any longer.<sup>17</sup> Margaret Paston repeatedly implored John Paston II to supply his sister Anne with ‘kercheives of cremmelle’, the lack of which had caused no small displeasure to Anne’s mistress.<sup>18</sup> The letters reveal the patron’s sensitivity towards the quality, and perhaps even the fashionableness of these servants’ clothing, but they also suggest that going into service in a higher ranking household depended on access to a suitable wardrobe. One letter from Edward Paston II whilst engaged in service at the court of the Duke of Norfolk requests a dizzying list of clothes and accessories including eleven different items from points to gowns, and specifies seven colours and four different fabrics from simple kersey to sumptuous velvet.<sup>19</sup> The responsibility for clothing a family member engaged in such service could clearly be an onerous duty.

Outside the obligations entailed by continuing household service, in order to rise socially a family might need to make judicious decisions about the benefits to be gained from an otherwise excessive outlay for clothing. For example, in a letter to his wife Margaret, John Paston argued the case for using expensive cloth for a new doublet on the grounds that, ‘thow it be derer thane the tother...I wold make my doblet all worsted for worship of Norfolk’,<sup>20</sup> that is, the Paston’s sometime patron the Duke of Norfolk, John Mowbray. Indeed, an earlier letter reveals where such sartorial ‘worship’ might be staged. In 1463, the same Duke wrote to John requesting that he promptly come to the Duke to do him personal service at his castle at Framlingham.<sup>21</sup> What is especially significant about this comment is that it shows the extent to which people such as the Pastons conceived of their sartorial display - and made purchasing decisions - with these sorts of social and political connections in mind.

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<sup>17</sup> C.L. Kingsford ed. (1919), *Stonor Letters and Papers 1290–1483*, Camden Third Series, volume 30, London, II, no.172, p. 14 (22 Oct. 1476).

<sup>18</sup> N. Davis ed. (1971), *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, 2 vols, Oxford, I, no.200, p. 336 (12 March, 1469) & I, no. 201, p. 339 (3 April, 1469).

<sup>19</sup> *Paston Letters* I, no. 394, p. 633 (18 Nov. 1471).

<sup>20</sup> *Paston Letters* I, no. 77, p. 140 (20 Sept. 1465).

<sup>21</sup> James Gairdner ed. (1904), *The Paston Letters AD 1422–1509*, 3 volumes, London, vol. II., p. 137 (31 Aug. 1463).

Clothing given to a mutual associate could even act as a bond between two separate patrons. John Paston III was thanked heartily by the Earl of Surrey when the Earl's servant arrived back from service with the Pastons in what must have been an impressive array. The Earl's letter of thanks specifically mentions that 'now at his coming to me ye have at your great cost sent him to me dressed in such a way as is very necessary for me to have men apparelled'.<sup>22</sup> Whilst this comment could refer to a specifically defensive array, the language used is more suggestive of a gift of apparel which may have included a combination of military expediency and civilian finery. That the servant's clothing could result from the connection of patronage that existed between the Pastons and the Earl of Surrey, certainly shows complexity of relationships and obligations manifested in an individual's clothing.

A sense of obligation and mutuality can also be sensed in less formalised circumstances. A man like the Duke of Norfolk could repay the hospitality provided by the wife of one of his associates (designated in the accounts as 'his ostes, Braytoff's wyffe') with a generous gift of nearly 60s. worth of fine imported cloth.<sup>23</sup> Countless other entries record the purchase of clothing items which were subsequently given away, such as the girdles given to the wives of various servants.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the obligation could be more serious. In 1476, the under-sheriff of Norfolk offered a doublet cloth of silk, worth 20s. to John Paston III in an effort to dissuade Paston from pursuing legal action against him.<sup>25</sup> That gifts of clothing were commonplace and sought-after rewards is further shown in a letter from John Taylor, a squire in the service of Sir John Hastings at the end of the fifteenth century. Taylor was bold enough to write a letter to Sir Robert Plumpton stating matter-of-factly that he 'desarved a dobellet' from him as reward for setting up a meeting between the two knights.<sup>26</sup>

Whereas the evidence from fifteenth-century letters and household accounts points to a widespread distribution of clothing items among the gentry, fourteenth century legislation restricting the use of clothing as an aspect of wage payments helps shed some light on the passage of clothing items to those lower down the social scale. In 1388, the Statute of Cambridge, an act intended to add more detail to the statutory wage limits that were established in response to the labour shortages which resulted from the black death, asserted that, among agricultural

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<sup>22</sup> *Paston Letters* II, no.844, p. 482 (6 July ?1489–1504).

<sup>23</sup> Anne Crawford ed. (1992), *The Household Books of John Howard, Duke of Norfolk, 1462–1471, 1481–1483*, Stroud, p. 360.

<sup>24</sup> Anne Crawford ed. (1992), p. 364.

<sup>25</sup> *Paston Letters*, vol. I, p. 490, (27 January 1476).

<sup>26</sup> Joan Kirby ed. (1996), *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, Camden Fifth series, volume 8, Cambridge, no. 131, p. 128 (20 March 1499).

labourers, only a bailiff of husbandry - essentially the overseer of the lord's manor - was to be in receipt of clothing, and that was to be 'once by year at the most'.<sup>27</sup> The statute insisted that all other labourers be paid their wages 'without Clothing, Courtesie, or other reward by covenaut'.<sup>28</sup> The language used here suggests that grants of clothing were being demanded in addition to regular wages. The statute's reiteration in the parliament of 1405–6 even identified 'Pride of Clothing and other evil Customs' as responsible for the exodus of agricultural servants into the towns.<sup>29</sup> Complaint from the pulpit around this time similarly asserts that labourers, through pride in clothing, demand from their masters not only higher wages but their 'lyverei also therto'.<sup>30</sup> In 1414 the commons even petitioned parliament for an addition to be made to the statute of Cambridge of 1388 which would provide specific detail on the clothing permitted to servants and labourers.<sup>31</sup> Although it was rejected by the King, the confluence of labour controls and sumptuary regulation in the minds of the petitioners is of some note.<sup>32</sup> The conservatism of this law is also evident in the fact that it was restated word for word as late as 1495, with no increase in payments permitted.<sup>33</sup>

In these laws, the workers who were legally entitled to receive payments in clothing were also compelled by the statute to remain with their masters for the minimum of one year. According to formal pronouncements on the matter, it appears therefore that clothing payments were not expected or desirable unless the relationship between employer and employee was a lasting one. This further suggests that the payment of clothing was much more than a way of avoiding or supplementing cash wages. That said however, the fact that the laws throughout the fifteenth century aimed to limit the amount paid in clothing reminds us that the problem as far as the members of parliament saw it again came down to the complaint that common labourers and servants were earning too much. On top of that, they were gaining access to and wearing clothes that were too good for them.

Indeed, the extent to which even a relatively humble servant's earnings might take the form of clothing is shown by an account for the year 1468 which appears in the Stonor letters. The account records the wages due to Thomas Pratt whilst in

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<sup>27</sup> 12 Ric. II c.4, *Statutes of the Realm* ii, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> 12 Ric. II c.4, *Statutes of the Realm* ii, p. 57, see also L.C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey eds. (1982), *The Westminster Chronicle 1381–1394*, Oxford, p. 365, and G.H. Martin ed. (1995), *Knighton's Chronicle 1337–1396*, Oxford, p. 509.

<sup>29</sup> 7 Hen IV c.17, *Statutes of the Realm* ii, p. 157.

<sup>30</sup> Owst (1961), p. 369.

<sup>31</sup> *Rotuli parliamentorum* iv, p. 26, paragraph 18.

<sup>32</sup> 23 Hen VI c. 12, *Statutes of the Realm* ii, pp. 337–338.

<sup>33</sup> 11 Hen VII c.22, *Statutes of the Realm* ii, pp. 585–6.

the service of Nicholas Wendover. His entire annual salary was 13s. 4d. ‘and a gounne cloth’, but of the amount due in cash payments, over half was spent making and repairing items of Thomas’ clothing, mostly his shoes and hose, as well as a doublet and apron.<sup>34</sup> Although there is ample evidence such as this that clothing such as this provided within a household was likely to be basic and functional,<sup>35</sup> a generous payment of clothing might also act as a conspicuous mark of special favour or function as an advertisement of the wealth and largesse of an employer. For example, in 1343/4 the bailiff of Hinderclay, an estate of the Bishop of Worcester, received a fur edged gown worth 16s. 8d., more than three times the amount permitted according to the legislation passed a century later.<sup>36</sup>

Another complicating factor was the practice of giving clothing previously worn by the lord and his family to their servants. For example, in 1438/9, four ploughmen at another of the Bishop of Worcester’s estates, Chevington, were given garments which were cast-offs from the lord’s own wardrobe.<sup>37</sup> William Ebesham, employed by John Paston as a scribe, asked for one of Paston’s ‘olde gownes,’ to supplement wages owing to him for the year 1467.<sup>38</sup> Clothing was, of course, commonly bequeathed to servants and some apparently exceptional grants can be found in testamentary evidence. When Joan, the wife of a York Goldsmith died, she left her father’s servant, Agnes, money, a large amount of cloth, and several items of clothing including a gown formerly owned by the Countess of Northumbria.<sup>39</sup> In a will from 1462 gowns and kirtles of varying worth were given to the testatrix’s serving women, but a special gift of the mistress’ best gown furred with mink was to be granted, along with 100s. in silver, to the woman who was at her side when she died.<sup>40</sup> Upon the death of William Greene in 1427, Joan, his servant received ‘all the clothes which belonged to Agnes, my late wife’.<sup>41</sup> It is

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<sup>34</sup> *Stonor Letters*, I, pp. 98–99.

<sup>35</sup> According to a statute of 1373, cloths to be distributed within a household, along with cloths made specifically to sell to ‘less [poor] people’, were exempt from the Assize of Cloth - regulations that applied to cloths destined for the market. 47 Edw III c.1 *Statutes of the Realm* i, p. 395; see also the range of quality revealed in the weaver’s bill for cloth supplied to Dame Elizabeth Stonor, *Stonor Letters* p. 101 (21 Dec. 1468).

<sup>36</sup> David Farmer (1996), ‘The *famuli* in the later Middle Ages’ in *Progress and Problems in Medieval England*, R.H. Britnell and J. Hatcher eds, Cambridge, p. 234.

<sup>37</sup> Farmer (1996), p. 243.

<sup>38</sup> *Paston Letters*, II, no. 751, p. 387 (?July–?October, 1467).

<sup>39</sup> *Testamenta Eboracensia*, ed. J. Raine, vol. IV, 1485–1509, will no. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Will from Lincoln translated in P.J.P. Goldberg ed. (1995), *Women in England c.1275–1525: Documentary Sources*, Manchester & New York, p. 94.

<sup>41</sup> F.W. Weaver ed. (1983), *Somerset Medieval Wills*, Stroud, p. 123.



possible to see the continuity between these sorts of bequests and the regular grants of clothing that the recipients would have expected during their master's or mistress' lifetime.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, clothing operated as an important instrument in social interaction and records reveal that social connections might be bolstered with the provision of clothing, whether it was a uniform or a less formal gift. These practices do not sit particularly comfortably with 'official' ideas about the legitimacy of clothing distributions, but it would be a mistake to assume therefore that they were in any way regarded as dangerous or improper. Liveries were clearly often given to individuals outside the strict customs that were established by legislation, without necessarily being used to create makeshift armies. The rather amorphous concept of the late medieval 'household' or 'affinity' probably precluded the hard and fast distinctions of the livery laws ever being completely applicable. More importantly, the need to display generosity as an aristocratic and gentry trait encouraged the practice of distributing new and second-hand clothing, among other gifts and rewards, in more informal ways.

From sources such as the gentry letters, and according to the complaints about ill-advised grants of clothing, it seems that the networks created through service were a fruitful source for rewards of clothing. That the 1463 sumptuary law could make some equivalence between the clothing allowed to the son and daughter of a man worth £40 per annum, and dress permitted for his servants, provides adequate measure of the sartorial privileges associated with connection.<sup>42</sup> The cultural identity of the medieval nobility was to a large extent made manifest through judicious performances of their role as providers of patronage and hospitality, and the granting of clothing was one way for this noble value of largesse to be emulated by gentry families. However, as the repeated requests for legislation restricting clothing payments to labourers makes clear, the challenge to sartorial order posed by generous grants of clothing was not regarded as a socially isolated phenomenon.

Medieval authorities were highly sensitive to the potential threats of unregulated movements of clothing and the legislative activity which appears in the records of parliament and local councils from the late fourteenth century onwards confirms that they regarded such movements as a problem in need of a solution. Their response, in the form of legislation, typically advocated greater regulation, applied using the traditional framework of rank and hierarchy. Significantly though, the intricacy of social relations in the later middle ages surpassed a simple equation of clothing with rank. Not only was rank often

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<sup>42</sup> 3 Edw. IV, c. 5, *Statutes of the Realm* ii, p. 400.

variable according to temporary associations, such as office holding or a period of honourable service, the use of clothing grants to bolster social relations - even to promote the recipient on the sartorial scale - in turn influenced the way that an individual's status would be assessed in social life.

The pervasive occurrence of informal gifts and allocations of clothing items, the use of hand-me-down items in wage payments and the grants of livery robes as gifts of courtesy each contributed to the apparent discrepancy between how clothing movements were meant to operate and how they actually did operate in late medieval society. Most clearly, these various gifts, payments and allocations show the importance of clothing distributions as a process in which individuals were implicated in social networks. In terms of assessing contemporary experiences of clothing, it seems clear that even with the obvious dominance of hierarchical attitudes to clothing, medieval social practice must be credited with a greater flexibility and resourcefulness than is often admitted.

The unique capacity of different items of clothing to display various connections of employment, patronage or association in so tangible and conspicuous a form was seized upon by late medieval culture. In both legal formulations and daily practice, the legitimacy of a person's clothing was determined largely by their social connections, both formal and informal. The clothing worn by an individual was interpreted as a key to their identity, but it was a strategic and self-conscious identity which might be adopted or rejected according to particular circumstances. The variety of practices surrounding grants and payments of clothing provided both the giver and the receiver with a unique opportunity to flaunt - or misrepresent - their social connections. As a tool for mapping social relations and advertising identity, clothing constituted an ideal medium, both in terms of its potent symbolic language (the connotations of style, colour and fabric) and its very materiality. Put simply, the use of clothing items as expressions of connection and affiliation by different groups and individuals in late medieval England was too effective in its irregularity for a complete consensus on its control to ever be achieved.

## Chapter Eleven

# Fashion, Finance, Foreign Politics and the Wardrobe of Henry VIII

Maria Hayward

Sir John Fortescue identified certain objects that exemplified royal magnificence and grandeur in his book *The Governace of England*. Not surprisingly clothing fell within this group and a king was required to buy

riche clothes, riche fures, other than be wonned to fall vndre theyerely charges off his wardrober, rich stones ... and other juels and ornaentes conuenyent to his estate roiall ... and do other such nobell and grete costes, as bi sitith is roiall mageste.<sup>1</sup>

While the Great Wardrobe, the principal royal repository for bulk purchases of cloth and furs, supplied many of the clothing needs of the king and his household, it did not have a monopoly. Henry VIII kept separate stores of silk either within his wardrobe of the Robes<sup>2</sup> or his palaces, which he could call upon for additional orders of clothes either for himself or others. Equally, he could buy items from merchants who brought their wares before the king. Indeed such extra commissions and purchases were defining evidence of royal magnificence according to Fortescue.

Henry VIII's wardrobe between 1516–26 is revealed by two documents dating from James Worsley's time as yeoman of the wardrobe of the Robes.<sup>3</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> C. Plummer ed. (1885), *Sir John Fortescue on The Governace of England*, Oxford, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> M.A. Hayward (1998), 'Repositories of splendour: Henry VIII's wardrobes of the robes and beds', *Textile History*, 29.2, 134–6.

<sup>3</sup> Worsley had a 'boke of delyuerance and discharge' where he recorded all of the 'kings Riche Robes' that he gave away at Henry's instigation between 20 December 1516 and 17

records provide details of the king's clothes and reveal the numerous items ordered by the staff of the Robes. Equally, as Fortescue indicated, the documents record that the very best materials were used to make Henry's clothes function as a visual expression of his magnificence. The quantity, variety and style of the garments in the royal wardrobe acted as an indication of Henry's wealth and taste. Imbued as they were with these layers of significance, the king used gifts of his own clothing, or garments made either from the same cloth as his own or by his own tailor, as perquisites that were highly prized by the recipients. This paper will start by analysing the contents of Henry's wardrobe and then consider how he used these clothes as an informal part of his system of patronage. The other papers in this section also consider the ways in which clothing functioned as a form of social and economic currency in this period. Rather than considering the king disposing of his own clothing, they explore the regular transference and disposal of clothing within a much broader social grouping. The distribution of livery and the way in which clothing was left in bequests ensured that items of dress circulated within society and frequently had a significance well beyond that associated with their financial value.

Not surprisingly, Henry VIII's clothes were numerous, spectacular and valuable, as befitted a king in his prime. Taking his outer garments as an example, Henry had twenty fur-lined 'Gounes, shamers, frocks, mantles and glaudkers' in 1521, thirty-three lined with silk and a further seven that were 'single' (not lined).<sup>4</sup> Between 24 August 1521 and 29 December 1525 Worsley received an additional fifty-seven items entered under the heading of 'Gounes etc' and he gave away thirty-five. His most expensive garment was a gown of purple velvet furred with sable valued at £430, while the sixty gowns present in 1521 were valued at £6,140, over 60 per cent of a total value of £10,391 2s 4½d that was given for Worsley's initial charge.<sup>5</sup> However, this figure did not include the 'goldsmiths work, pearls and unvalued stuff', or any pieces acquired after January 1521.

The composition of the king's wardrobe underwent some distinct, if subtle, changes between 1516–21 and 1547, the date of the next extant, *post-mortem*

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January 1521, BL Harley MS 2284. He also had an inventory or book of charge commissioned on 17 January 1521 into which new garments were listed until 1526, BL Harley MS 4217. Full transcripts of both documents will appear in M.A. Hayward (forthcoming 2005), *Dress at the Court of Henry VIII*, Leeds.

<sup>4</sup> See C.W. Cunnington and P. Cunnington (1954), *Handbook of English Costume in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 17–38.

<sup>5</sup> BL Harley MS 4217, f. 25r.

inventory of Henry's clothes.<sup>6</sup> The glaudekens, shamblers, stomachers, mantles and jackets, all fashionable in the earlier period, had gone by the 1540s. New styles included jerkins, Spanish capes and cassocks. While the gown was common in both periods, there was a much greater variety of types (nine to be precise) in the 1540s than there had been earlier. This proliferation of styles would continue into the second half of the sixteenth century and attract comment from Philip Stubbes in his *Anatomy of Abuses*. However, not all the changes can be attributed to fashion. The 1547 inventory did not include any of the bonnets, hoods and night caps found in the wardrobe in 1516–21 because they were stored elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

Gradual changes in the style of staple garments such as doublets and hose can be observed in the king's portraits, although visual evidence can be problematic. Not many of the extant portraits are firmly dated and those that there are, are usually half length, depicting only the upper body. Even so, as none of the king's clothes survive, portraits provide the best indications of cut and construction, as demonstrated by considering the changes revealed in three portraits spanning c. 1520–26. In a portrait c. 1520 by an unknown artist (Fig. 11.1) Henry VIII wore a shirt and doublet, both with low, round necks, a style that was to remain fashionable until around 1525.<sup>8</sup> This style was echoed in a double portrait of Henry VIII and Charles V of Spain.<sup>9</sup> Later portraits, such as the 1536 picture attributed to Joos van Cleve (Fig. 11.2) depicted Henry in a high necked shirt and low necked doublet, while a full-length image painted in the same year records a high necked doublet.<sup>10</sup> It seems likely that the doublets made for the king in this period followed these changes in cut and that a mixture of styles might be present at any one time.

Some of the changes in the composition of the king's wardrobe were more a matter of age than of fashion. Not surprisingly, the 1521 inventory of the athletic king Guistiniani described playing tennis included special clothes for hunting, stalking, riding and tennis. Henry also had the accessories and garments for horse and man required for jousting, running at the ring and other feats of arms. By 1547 these types of dress had almost disappeared from the king's wardrobe because the

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<sup>6</sup> BL Harley MS 1419, ff. 398r–415v, see D. R. Starkey ed. (1998), *The Inventory of King Henry VIII*, I. Only the cover remains of a third inventory commissioned in 1538, PRO SP1/133, ff. 234r–235v.

<sup>7</sup> See M.A. Hayward (2002), 'The sign of some degree?': The financial, social and sartorial significance of male headwear at the courts of Henry VIII and Edward VI', *Costume*, 36, 13–14.

<sup>8</sup> National Portrait Gallery, London.

<sup>9</sup> Private collection.

<sup>10</sup> The Royal Collection and the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.



**Figure 11.1** Henry VIII by an unknown artist, c.1520. (By courtesy of the *National Portrait Gallery*, London).

king's sporting activities were limited to very sedate forms of hunting. Trophies such as 'a greate tuske of a bore in a case of crimosyn veluete' had also gone by 1547, but numerous dog collars, liams and hawk hoods remained, indicating that the king still enjoyed the chase.<sup>11</sup>

Henry VIII was judged on his appearance, which was required to create an air of magnificence.<sup>12</sup> New clothes were usually ordered for all significant occasions and the quantity of clothes owned by the king bears this out. But sometimes plans went awry. For Henry's meeting with Francis I in 1520 a coat of white silver tissue was 'new couerd at guisnes with cloth of gold of siluer tissue with purpull saten' and a jacket of silver tissue 'newe clocked ... with crimosyn cloth of gold tisewe lyned with blacke saten'.<sup>13</sup> In this instance the need to provide spectacular dress while away from the resources of the Great Wardrobe forced the royal tailors to adapt existing garments.

Henry VIII's sumptuary legislation clearly stated that the most expensive furs, cloths and dyestuffs were reserved for royal use. The resulting hierarchy of materials was observed in Worsley's book of dispersals. The furs, including thirteen timbers and forty-one sable skins, were listed first. After this the various silks were given, ranging from cloth of gold to sarsenet, followed by a small amount of linen. Henry's clothes were made from five types of silk: 130 items from velvet, 104 from cloths of gold and silver, sixty-eight from satin, fifty-four from cloth of tissue or tilsent and three from damask. Fabrics incorporating metal thread - cloths of gold and silver, tissues and tilsents - were in the majority and were used chiefly for outer garments, while satin was more commonly employed for jackets, stomachers, doublets and hose lined with silk for summer wear. Sarsenet was often used for linings. With the exception of a single pair of hose, no outer garments were made from linen. The king's linen shirts were usually made by women, who were paid out of the privy purse.

The range of colours worn by Henry VIII can be suggested by his portraits. The three portraits mentioned above contrast black, crimson, or cloth of gold with the white of his linen shirt and the dark brown fur. The cloth of silver doublet worn in the Holbein portrait of c. 1536 recurs in other images, such as the Whitehall cartoon, so over-emphasising this fabric.<sup>14</sup> Cloth of gold predominates in other pictures of the king including the Barber Surgeons group portrait and the two historical pictures depicting *The Field of The Cloth of Gold* and *The Embarkation*

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<sup>11</sup> BL Harley 4217, f. 11v; BL Harley 1419, ff. 413r-415v.

<sup>12</sup> See M.A. Hayward (1996), 'Luxury or magnificence? Dress at the court of Henry VIII', *Costume*, 30, 37-46.

<sup>13</sup> BL Harley 4217, f. 5v.

<sup>14</sup> Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection.



**Figure 11.2** Henry VIII by Joos van Cleve, 1536. (The Royal Collection © 2003, *Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II*).



at Dover.<sup>15</sup> This quite limited palate of colours is at odds with the reality recorded in the wardrobe accounts and warrants. The colours favoured for livery at Henry VIII's court were black, tawny and russet. While the king's own wardrobe also made use of these, it went far further. Ten colours, along with plain cloth of gold and silver, were used for Henry's clothes.<sup>16</sup> Black was most prevalent, although a number of bonnets and caps inflates the figure slightly. Next in order of popularity were crimson, green and russet. The green was predominantly for coats, doublets and hose intended for hunting and riding. Individually, purple and plain cloth of gold and silver were relatively rare in comparison to green, crimson and russet, yet they still formed a substantial group. Thus the image projected in royal portraits tends to emphasise the colours traditionally associated with, and reserved for, royalty. In reality, the king wore a much wider range of colours.

The king's wardrobe recorded seasonal influences on dress in the form of coats and jackets 'furred for wynter' and 'lined for summer'.<sup>17</sup> The same division between fur and silk linings was also made for the gowns, which suggests that they followed a similar pattern, even though the clerk did not make the seasonal distinction explicit. Other references to the outsides of coats and gowns suggest that fur linings were put in for winter and taken out for summer, making efficient use of the expensive fur and giving the king the widest possible use of his garments.

In addition to those items for himself, the king ordered clothing for five main groups of individuals via the wardrobe of the Robes rather than the Great Wardrobe. The most significant group was the royal family - Catherine of Aragon and the princess Mary. The queen received twenty-seven items or sets of items, including a length of black tilsent woven with Catherine wheels.<sup>18</sup> Henry's jousting companions formed the most numerous group of recipients and they received bases, trappers, buskins and half coats for specific occasions. Some livery was provided by this route, such as 105 yards of black velvet for gowns for the eight gentlemen accompanying the Queen of Scots.<sup>19</sup> Diplomatic gifts included 16 yards of black tilsent given to the senior French ambassador at his departure.<sup>20</sup> Finally, small pieces of high quality cloth were given away as little presents. Most were

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<sup>15</sup> The Worshipful Company of Barbers and the Royal Collection.

<sup>16</sup> These were black, crimson, green, russet, white, plain cloth of gold, purple, plain cloth of silver, blue, tawny, yellow and carnation with 88, 60, 45, 43, 32, 25, 24, 20, 10, 10, 8 and 1 item respectively.

<sup>17</sup> BL Harley 4217, ff. 5r-v.

<sup>18</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, f. 29r.

<sup>19</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, f. 36r.

<sup>20</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, f. 27r.

given to a group of young men at court who were known as the minions.<sup>21</sup> Francis Bryan and Nicholas Carew were leading members of this group, which consisted of youthful royal favourites. They received a remnant of crimson tilsent and of green cloth of gold tissue respectively.<sup>22</sup> These small pieces of cloth presented Henry VIII with an easy way to provide close friends with a valuable yet not overstated gift. The clothing provided by this route indicates when and for whom the king would by-pass the Great Wardrobe and the groups were telling: family, close friends, diplomats.

The king's personal wardrobe, the clothing provision for his household and the textiles used at jousts and revels represented a substantial outlay both in terms of the quantity of cloth used and the amount of money spent to purchase the cloth. Considering the yardage first, Worsley's book of issue records the amount of cloth used during the time period covered by the volume. The total for cloth of gold and cloth of silver came to 4,439  $\frac{1}{4}$  yards. The quantities of other fabrics were equally substantial and included 1,224  $\frac{3}{8}$  yards of tissue and 2,273  $\frac{3}{8}$  yards of velvet. In all 12,789  $\frac{1}{8}$  yards were accounted for.<sup>23</sup> Of this, over 1,734 yards of cloth of gold and silver and 1,108 yards of velvet, were used for ephemeral events such as jousts. These figures are comparable with those for a silk store held at the palace of Whitehall and administered by Sir Anthony Denny between 1542–7. This Whitehall store replaced the store held by the wardrobe of the robes. During this period 13,287  $\frac{1}{8}$  yards and 4,243  $\frac{1}{4}$  ells of cloth and 33 pounds  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an ounce of passementerie passed through Denny's hands. The king had direct access to these subsidiary silk stores, which were often more fully stocked with luxury fabrics than the Great Wardrobe. He used them to augment his own wardrobe and provide livery and gifts for others and it seems likely that he was personally involved in the choice of fabrics and garments.

The textiles used for the king's clothes were very expensive. A piece of white cloth of silver raised with gold tissue, 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  yards in length, and given to Henry VIII by the French queen was valued at £23 6s 8d.<sup>24</sup> An examination of the chamber accounts provides an indication of how much Henry VIII spent on textiles (see table 1). The figures for 1520 were hugely inflated by pageantry for the Field of Cloth of Gold and indicate the scale of Henry's expenditure on this event.

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<sup>21</sup> See G. Richardson (1999), 'Most highly to be regarded': The privy chamber of Henry VIII and Anglo-French relations, 1515–1520', *The Court Historian*, 4.2, 119–40.

<sup>22</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, f. 25v.

<sup>23</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, ff. 24r, 38v, 47r, 51v, 53r.

<sup>24</sup> BL Harley 4217, f. 12r.

**Table 11.1** Expenditure on textiles recorded in the *King's Book of Payments*, 1516–1520.<sup>25</sup>

Year	Expenditure on cloth	Expenditure on revels/ceremonial	Total
1516	£1,050 17s 7d	£2,073 17s 4d	£3,124 14s 11d
1517	£975 14s 7d	£130 19s 0d	£1,106 13s 7d
1518	£3,336 9s 10d	£450 9s 5d	£3,786 19s 3d
1519	£3,178 19s 9d	£1,879 11s 5d	£5,058 11s 2d
1520	£10,480 8s 8d	£2,993 19s 0d	£13,474 7s 8de
<b>Total</b>	£19,022 10s 5d	£7,528 16s 2d	£26,551 6s 7d

The overall significance of textiles is stressed even further by looking at the period 1509–21. The four leading areas of Henry VIII's expenditure were ordnance (£50,739), textiles (£49,984), plate and jewels (£45,775) and the revels and court ceremonial (£22,670). The cloth payments were primarily for expensive silk fabrics bought direct from the predominantly Italian suppliers and then converted into either clothing or furnishings for the royal family and household. Revels and jousts would usually be held about five times a year and this figure also includes the costs of providing the ceremonial coats for the Yeomen of the Guard. It is telling that two out of the four categories were directly concerned with the ways in which textiles defined the appearance of the king and his household. This type of visual expression was at its height in 1520 for The Field of the Cloth of Gold, which explains the very high figures for this year. In view of the very high cost of the materials involved, it further explains why Henry VIII chose to get extra benefit from these textiles by making a gift of many of the items.

Henry's wardrobe was kept stocked with regular orders of new clothes and a small group of gifts including the 'spanish cloak of black frisado with a border of goldsmith's work' that Catherine gave her husband.<sup>26</sup> However, only a few items remained in the wardrobe through out the reign, including the king's ceremonial robes and several pieces with sentimental significance such as the garter and parliament robes of his elder brother Arthur.<sup>27</sup> The vast majority of the king's clothes were kept for a relatively short period and then given away.

On purely pragmatic grounds, the wardrobe would have faced a serious storage problem if Henry VIII had kept all of the clothes he acquired. During the forty-nine months covered by Worsley's book of discharge, the king ordered ninety doublets

<sup>25</sup> Based on data from PRO E36/215 and PRO E36/216.

<sup>26</sup> BL Harley 4217, f. 4v.

<sup>27</sup> BL Harley 4217, ff 1v. In 1521 the wardrobe also included 'an olde goune of purpull veluete syngle that was king Henry the vij<sup>th</sup>' but this had gone by 1547, *ibid.*, 3r.

over two months. The king's continued wish to be seen in the latest fashion would have ensured that he soon tired of clothes. He also bought some pieces against his better judgement. A Parisian jeweller, Jean Langues sold Henry two garments even though 'the king says he is too old to wear them but he offers 4,000 crowns for them both'.<sup>28</sup> Whether he bought them to wear or to give away as gifts is impossible to say.

The value of clothes at the Henrician court was both financial and symbolic. This can be demonstrated by the duke of Buckingham's choice of a doublet of cloth of silver as the gift he sent to Nicholas Carew in a bid to win his support in 1521. Henry VIII also used the clothing that he gave to his family, household and court circle to demonstrate his favour, in the same way that exchanging New Year's gifts with the king and the acquisition of offices and fees in the king's gift, could.<sup>29</sup> Receiving items of the king's own clothing was a sign of royal favour and it was spread widely, between eighty-six male and five female recipients. These garments acted as largesse, but Henry's generosity was tempered with prudence. The king gave away the garments themselves, with any integral surface decoration such as embroidery. But fur linings and guards were generally removed, as were jewelled buttons and other gold-work such as 'a small border of wreaths of goldsmith's work' from a doublet given away on 4 May 1520.<sup>30</sup>

Ninety-one individuals, pairs or small groups were recorded as having received items of clothing between 1516–21. By far the largest group of recipients, forty-seven to be precise, received just one item or a single group of garments such as a doublet and hose, suggesting that a key aim of this process was to share out this form of royal patronage and to make it as inclusive as possible.<sup>31</sup> For example, William Cornish, of the chapel royal, received a black velvet coat. A further thirty-one people received two or three items, including Sir William Kingston, who received a glaudekin and a matching set of doublet, jacket and hose.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, four individuals received sixty-seven garments or sets of garments between them. Nicholas Carew, described as being of Henry's 'own bringing up', was one of this group.<sup>32</sup> Carew received more items than anyone else and his share included nine gowns, three coats, eight jackets, nine

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<sup>28</sup> *LP* XII.i, 47.2.

<sup>29</sup> See M.A. Hayward (forthcoming), 'Gift giving at the court of Henry VIII: The 1539 New Year's gift roll', *The Antiquaries Journal*.

<sup>30</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, f. 8v. The 1542 Inventory of the palace of Whitehall also records the removal of jewels from the king's clothes, although in this case the garments were retained, PRO E315/160, f. 1r–v.

<sup>31</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, f. 8v.

<sup>32</sup> *LP* Add. I.i, 196.

doublets and seven pairs of hose. Carew and the rest of the minions were given sixty garments or sets of garments between them.<sup>33</sup> This must have acted as just one more indication of their closeness to the king. Perhaps more interesting are the fifteen items given to Sir Richard Jerningham, Sir William Kingston, Sir Richard Weston and Sir Richard Wingfield between October 1518 and October 1520. These knights of the body were promoted by Cardinal Wolsey and they temporarily held the king's favour when the minions were expelled from court, for over familiarity with the king, between May and September 1518. While these four older men only held sway for a short period, during this time they too shared in gifts of the king's clothes, indicating his acceptance of them.

Henry's jousting companions who competed at the tournaments in the years after his accession, received clothing for the jousts as well as benefiting from the king's generosity. Nine items went to Sir William Compton, groom of the stool, while six garments were given to Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk, between March 1517 and December 1519. Brandon acts as a good example of a man who falls into several different groups of recipients. These gifts to Brandon span the period when Henry was wary of the nobility, when he asked Wolsey to 'make good wache on the duke off suffolke on the duke off Bukyngam ... and [on] other whyche yow thynke suspecte'.<sup>34</sup>

Henry hid his concerns by maintaining his gifts of his own clothing to the nobility. Even Edward Stafford, duke of Buckingham, who Henry was right to be suspicious of, received a gown, jacket, doublet and hose in March 1518 and a shamer and doublet in December 1519.<sup>35</sup>

In December 1540 another batch of items was given away from the king's wardrobe of the Robes.<sup>36</sup> The pool of recipients was much smaller than in 1516–21 and they were predominantly members of the household, with a strong bias towards the privy chamber. The group included the three officers of the wardrobe of the Robes and Thomas Heneage, first chief gentleman of the privy chamber and groom of the stool. While Henry continued the practice of using his clothes as part of his pattern of largesse in the latter part of his reign, he no longer felt the need to spread his generosity so widely.

Gifts of clothing and accessories formed part of Henry's diplomacy and counter diplomacy, as indicated by 'a Riche swerde that was sent the king from the popes

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<sup>33</sup> Clothes were given to Sir Nicholas Carew, William Carey, William Coffin, the earl of Devon, Sir Edward Neville, Sir Henry Guildford and Francis Bryan.

<sup>34</sup> BL Additional MS 19398.

<sup>35</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, ff. 2r–v, 7r.

<sup>36</sup> SP1/164, ff. (LP XVI, 402).

holynes'.<sup>37</sup> However, in this context, it is the items given away that are of particular interest as gift-giving was bound up with ideas of reciprocity and obligation. A significant group of recipients of the king's clothes were French, reflecting the importance of England's rather volatile relationship with France. Henry started at the top of French society with Francis I. At the Field of the Cloth of Gold (7–24 June 1520) Henry gave the French king four doublets, the most spectacular of which was 'of cloth of gold baudkyn, the placards and sleeves wrought with flat gold and eight pairs of aglettes'.<sup>38</sup> Henry's generosity extended further and included Francis I's ambassador to England, his admiral, his master of the horse and ten others.<sup>39</sup>

Henry VIII also met Charles V in England from 26–29 May 1520 and then at Gravelines and Calais between 12–14 July. During this meeting only one item, a shamer of black tilsent, was given to a member of the imperial retinue, Hanibal de Carz.<sup>40</sup> However, further items were given away later including a jacket of white cloth of silver tissue to Laco, an imperial servant, and a riding coat of carnation cloth of gold and cloth of silver to Cezar, master of the emperor's horse, both valued at £40.<sup>41</sup> Laco also received a doublet of white tissue with a high collar welted with cloth of gold tissue tied with aglets, valued at £15 and given to Henry by Francis I in 1520.<sup>42</sup> While on the one hand wearing a fellow monarch's gift could indicate brotherhood, on the other, it might also imply subordination. This might explain why Henry got rid of Francis I's gifts of clothing fairly quickly. The implications of passing these gifts to a member of the Imperial retinue are more complicated.

The king's clothes could also act as perquisites rather than gifts and three of the four leading recipients were the officers of the wardrobe of the Robes. Between them they received forty-five items or set of items. Most were made from velvet, satin or damask but cloth of gold and tilsent also featured. A document of December 1540 indicates that the officers of the wardrobe were regularly given items of royal clothing as part of their due. Items 'issued wherof must be made ex<sup>n</sup> for thofficers fee' included a long night gown of tawny capha damask (minus the

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<sup>37</sup> BL Harley 4217, f. 10r. The russet velvet cap of maintenance decorated with the 'holy goste enbrauderd with perles' listed after the sword may also be a papal gift.

<sup>38</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, f. 9r.

<sup>39</sup> For Francis I's retinue see J.G. Russell (1969), *The Field of Cloth of Gold: Men and Manners in 1520*, pp. 205–8.

<sup>40</sup> BL Harley MS 4217, f. 5r.

<sup>41</sup> BL Harley MS 4217, f. 6r.

<sup>42</sup> BL Harley MS 4217, f. 7r.

sable lining) and a long night gown of black damask edged with black velvet and lined with budge.<sup>43</sup>

What the recipients of the king's bounty did with his old clothes depends on a range of considerations. Sumptuary legislation apart, Henry VIII's clothes would only have fitted some of his close friends, like Charles Brandon and Sir Edward Neville, who shared the king's broad build. However, for most men including the youthful William Carey, who was only allocated 2½ yards for his doublets rather than the usual 3 yards, they would have been far too large. Equally, the five female recipients would have had little personal use for pieces of male clothing and in acknowledgement of this two of them were given pieces of female dress instead. For example, Mistress Cole received two fore-quarters and a sleeve from a gown of crimson velvet on velvet.<sup>44</sup> However, the other three received items of Henry's dress that they could have kept as a keepsake, given to a male relative or recycled. Other, equally unsuitable items included the child's tabard and kirtle of crimson velvet given to John Copinger and the woman's gown of purple velvet given to William Wise.<sup>45</sup> These two gifts suggest that Henry also dispersed clothing previously worn by his wife and child (or possibly himself as a child).

It seems likely that the recipients had new garments or small furnishing textiles made from the fabric. The quality and colour of the fabric used to make the king's clothes were often inappropriate for the status of the recipient. William Woodhouse, a spear of Calais received a doublet, hose and jacket of purple velvet embroidered and cut with cloth of gold.<sup>46</sup> It is likely that Woodhouse sold this garment, so realising a percentage of its financial value, rather than wearing it or recycling it for his own use.

Some of the subtle social and political nuances that textiles and dress conveyed at Henry VIII's court were summed up in the verse ascribed to Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk, after his marriage to the king's sister Mary in 1515

Cloth of gold do not despise  
 Though thou be match'd with cloth of frieze  
 Cloth of frieze be not to bold  
 Though thou be match'd with cloth of gold.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> SP1/164, 130r (*LP XVI*, 402.2).

<sup>44</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, ff. 3r–v.

<sup>45</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, f. 3v.

<sup>46</sup> BL Harley MS 2284, f. 7r.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in S.J. Gunn (1998), *Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk c. 1485–1545*, Oxford, p. 55.

Cloth of gold was readily equated with royalty and so was highly suited to the king's younger sister, just as it gave its name to the meeting of Francis I and Henry VIII in 1520. Frieze, however, was a cheap woollen fabric, and too humble a choice for Brandon, who had been elevated to the nobility as a consequence of his close friendship with Henry VIII. However, this motif of linking types of cloth with social rank would have had resonance in a society defined in and by sumptuary legislation and where the nuances of cloth, fur and dyestuff marked out an individual's social standing and aspirations. These nuances underpinned Henry VIII's ideas about his royal status, as demonstrated by his own wardrobe. They also explain why Henry's wardrobe acted as a source of private largesse that he used to cultivate favour and good will within his court and household. Rather than being seen as second hand, Henry's ownership of the garments lent them extra cachet for their recipients, whether they chose to keep the items, sell them or recycle the 'kings Riche Robes'.



## Chapter Twelve

# Reworked Material: Discourses of Clothing Culture in Early Sixteenth-Century Greenwich

Elisabeth Salter

### Introduction

This essay explores representations and perceptions of clothing by townfolk in the period c. 1500–1560. In the absence of other personal records, the main source of evidence is the last will and testament, which provides details about the lifestyle choices of ordinary individuals. The discourses of clothing bequests in testamentary evidence are enmeshed in a broader discourse of testamentary provision. Each testament is unique, using particular, individualised, styles of description. These indicate personal preferences, and allegiances, both of which may draw on family tradition, custom and legal requirements for their construction. The purpose of this essay is to show how consideration of the descriptive details of clothing bequests may provide access to perceptions of clothing as gifts; and how the specific context of an individual last will and testament may be important for interpreting the meanings of these clothing bequests, for both testators and beneficiaries.

The concerns of this essay are with the practices of clothing bequests and what they can reveal about perceptions of clothing by ordinary individuals, rather than with theories about clothing. ‘Theoretical’ evidence concerning clothing is considered in Joanna Crawford’s essay, in this section.<sup>1</sup> Crawford’s use of statute and chronicle might be considered evidence of ‘formal’ perceptions of clothing in contradistinction to what she terms at the end of her essay, ‘the informal aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> Crawford, Chapter Ten in this volume.

clothing distributions'. Using this dichotomy, the personalised nature of bequest literature presumably makes it 'informal'.<sup>2</sup>

The testaments used in this essay are drawn from the town and port of Greenwich. Sixteenth-century Greenwich was a cosmopolitan place. The town and its people experienced numerous cultural influences. There were, for example, influxes of European and internal traders using the port and creating significant migrant populations. The presence of the royal court based in the fashionable Greenwich Palace, also attracted and welcomed international political figures and scholars from England and Europe. The cultural tastes of foreign traders, the royalty, their cohorts and their guests, brought new and exotic objects and ideas through this town. Being proximate to London, Greenwich's sixteenth-century inhabitants had contacts with the capital's trading systems, family networks, pious, and charitable interests.<sup>3</sup>

In Greenwich, the descriptive details given to bequeathed items of clothing provide a rich picture of the garments and jewellery experienced by medieval and early modern individuals. Such descriptions include styles, materials, colours and fashions. Greenwich testaments c. 1500–1560, are full of such details, like Katherine Styles' bequest to her son, William, and Emma his wife, in 1531.<sup>4</sup> The clothing she left them included a best gown, a best girdle of gilt harness and a kertill of damask. Her jewellery gifts to them were her best beads of mother-of-pearl together with a ring of gold that had a stone. This bequest also included a goblet of silver-gilt with a cover and half a dozen silver spoons.

The people of Greenwich also enjoyed the clothing fashions ascribed to London life. Some individuals even identify the provenance of their clothing by referring to the capital. In 1523, for example, Thomas Astley a yeoman of the King's larder, described the material of his fox furred gown as 'London russet', and in 1535, Thomas Marshall bequeathed a gown of 'London russet' furred with rabbit.<sup>5</sup> These are some of the fascinating details revealed in the Greenwich testaments and there are many more, all with very specific individualised descriptions of clothing and other material goods. To analyse these descriptions in general terms is problematic, which makes it difficult, and perhaps inappropriate, to make generalised conclusions about sixteenth-century Greenwich testators' perceptions and experiences of clothing culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. Bourdieu (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, for the wider debates about distinctions between theory and practice.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. CKS DRb Pwr 1–12; PRO PROB 11/9–28.

<sup>4</sup> PRO PROB 11/9/24/66.

<sup>5</sup> CKS DRb. Pwr. 7/285; PRO PROB 11/25/24/173.

## Method

This essay begins by presenting a theoretical justification for analysing the ‘discourses’ of Greenwich clothing bequests. The word ‘discourse’ is used here because it conveys the particularity of the language of a testament; the system of referentiality within one given testament; and the possibility for a testament’s inclusion, negotiation and consideration of vocabularies derived from other discourses such as those of the law court, market, and church.<sup>6</sup> After reviewing the background to the proposed approach to clothing bequests, two case studies present detailed evidence to indicate the possibilities of this analysis. The first uses an individual will to examine the interpretation of detailed evidence for clothing bequests within gifts made of other goods; the second examines the use of clothing gifts within a group of individuals who have an occupational affinity.

This analysis of clothing forms part of a wider project investigating the consumption of domestic goods by peasants and townsfolk in the period, c. 1400–1560. During this transitional phase between ‘medieval’ and ‘early modern’ society, even in one region there are significantly diverse attitudes towards consuming everyday and luxury material goods, which are not solely based on wealth.<sup>7</sup> And these attitudes change at varying rates. By focussing on material from one town, this essay seeks to look beyond regional dynamics to consider and query whether it is possible to ascertain personal perceptions of clothing items from the testaments of Greenwich residents. The purpose is to assess evidence for individual perceptions of clothing within a specific urban culture rather than to extrapolate from the general evidence provided by the various regulatory statutes, which theorise contemporary perceptions of clothing culture. Finding that large-scale statistical analyses are not appropriate for this endeavour, I propose some possible ways of interpreting personal perceptions of clothing items mentioned within the ‘discourses’ of testamentary bequests.

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<sup>6</sup> R. Chartier (1988), *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, trans. L.G. Cochrane Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell, pp. 10–11.

<sup>7</sup> E.E. Salter (2004), ‘Some differences in the cultural production of household consumption in three north Kent communities, c.1450–1550’, in C. Beattie, A. Maslakovic and S. Rees Jones, eds, *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe, c. 850–1550: Managing Power, Wealth and the Body*.

## Sources for Clothing Culture

Evidence from north Kent, and particularly Greenwich, is a rich source for studying the consumption of material goods, including clothing, by townfolk.<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this investigation, it is the qualitative evidence of detailed descriptions and subtle distinctions between descriptive modes within and between particular testaments that is used to assess the perspectives of the consumers of Greenwich. The special and highly symbolic circumstances in which testamentary evidence is produced makes it necessary to consider the symbolic significance of the ‘data’ contained within it. For this, the quantitative findings of a straightforward databasing approach are not appropriate.<sup>9</sup> Qualitative evidence is recoverable from the extensive detailed descriptions given to particular goods in the bequest literature. As with any literature, the last will and testament is subject to certain generic constraints. This is a document produced in very particular circumstances, by individuals considering their death. The will is a record of a person’s specific intentions for the post-mortem replication of household and family identity, at a practical and symbolic level. Wills provide valuable partial glimpses, but do not reveal the extent of the property and wealth enjoyed and transmitted by an individual during their lifetime.<sup>10</sup> The goods and property

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. L. Weatherill (1988), *Consumer Behaviour & Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760*, London: Routledge, which investigates the period c. 1660–1760, and for a discussion of Kent, see pp. 52–3. For an analysis of the consumption of goods c. 1550–1600 in east Kent see, C.T. Richardson (1999), ‘The meanings of space in society and drama: Perceptions of domestic life and domestic tragedy c. 1550–1600’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent, pp. 58–64, and *passim*. M. Johnson (1993), *Housing Culture. Traditional Architecture in an English Landscape*, Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, p. 139; and see the discussion of Weatherill’s approach in A. Schurman, and G. Pastoor (1995), ‘From probate inventories to a data set for the history of the consumer society’, *History and Computing*, 7, 3, 126–134, esp. 127; also, Brewer and Porter (1993), ‘Introduction’, in *Consumption and the World of Goods* ed. J. Brewer and R. Porter, p. 5. For comparisons between east Kent and north Kent see also Salter (2004).

<sup>9</sup> Charter (1988), pp. 34–35 discusses qualitative analysis with reference to Carlo Ginzburg’s proposal that, ‘the ways in which an individual or a group appropriates an intellectual theme or a cultural form are more important than the statistical distribution of that theme or form’; also, Schurman and Pastoor (1995), *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Spufford (1974), *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 55–6; R.G.A. Lutton (1997), ‘Heterodox and orthodox piety in Tenterden 1420–1540’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent p. 9. But for the negative view of these

bequeathed carry with them significant aspects of an individual's identity; the individualized description given to an object confers on it a 'biographical' status.<sup>11</sup>

Susan Crane suggests that 'clothing could provide the stuff for several books 'the social life of things' and 'the cultural biography of objects', the ways crafted and manufactured products operate in people's daily lives'.<sup>12</sup> But to examine testamentary evidence of clothing in isolation would be to go against the purpose of this essay to see bequests of clothing within a discursive context that includes a range of other every-day and luxury material goods.

The kind of evidence used here (testamentary), is partial, specific and symbolic in its purpose, moment of production and instances of reception, and this essay investigates the interpretation of individual perceptions of clothing within that symbolic sphere.<sup>13</sup> This approach allows questions to be asked about generalised definitions of the symbolic meaning of a particular kind of commodity, such as clothing. How, for example, are personal relationships to such goods represented in relation to the cultural role of clothing in urban society? And, what does their representation indicate about that cultural role?<sup>14</sup> Annette Weiner's concept of 'keeping while giving' is useful here, because this seems to accommodate the fluid boundary between the private and public experiences and perceptions of the 'heirloom goods' bequeathed in Greenwich. Her discussion is based on what she terms 'inalienable possessions'; these are 'land rights, material objects, or mythic knowledge', which, '...as they move in time and space become the carriers of more information and greater authority than other kinds of things'.<sup>15</sup>

It has been proposed that the highly symbolic moment in the life-course to which testamentary evidence relates influences the goods mentioned within these documents. For the beneficiary and the testator, the very particular context in

possibilities see C. Burgess (1985), "'For the Increase of Divine Service": chantries in the parish in late medieval Bristol', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36, 46–65, pp. 46–7.

<sup>11</sup> J. Hoskins (1998), *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*, New York and London: Routledge, pp. 7–9.

<sup>12</sup> S. Crane (2002), *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing and Identity During the Hundred Years War*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. A. Appadurai (1986), 'Introduction: commodities and the politics of value', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–64, esp. p. 56; I. Kopytoff (1986), 'The cultural biography of things' in Appadurai, ed. (1986), p. 68, and the discussion of anthropological approaches by Richardson in the introduction to this volume.

<sup>14</sup> Hoskins (1998), p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> A.B. Weiner (1992), *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving*, Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, pp. 6–8.

which these (heirloom) goods are given must be of special significance, and the nature of that significance must be embedded within very particular cultural contexts.<sup>16</sup> An examination of how such goods are ‘received’ by a beneficiary, is an examination of issues associated in current terminology with ‘reception’. In modern studies of reception, it is now customary to propose that different ‘readers’ of one ‘text’ might have different understandings of that text depending on their own cultural background.<sup>17</sup> This acceptance of different readings is akin to the possibility for a whole range of explanations to be given for a single cultural event, or action.<sup>18</sup>

There are two distinct, but intertwined strands for which the reception of the testament may be considered. The first and obvious instance is the reception of the goods by the particular beneficiary. The second instance in which a kind of ‘reception’ occurs is in the production of the bequests by the testator.<sup>19</sup> Here, ‘reception’ concerns the processes of the decisions, affected by family tradition, custom, and personal preference, which are assessed and prioritised in the construction of the bequest from a particular collection of various goods, including clothing. The possibility of multiple readings was discussed during the Clothing Culture Conference,<sup>20</sup> and it was concluded that there is always a range of meanings for particular symbols or texts and that these meanings are mediated by the boundaries of convention. As Roger Chartier proposes, it is another matter to decide what such meanings might be, and the possibility of interpreting the nature of such meanings lies in the close consideration of detailed evidences, and cultural process.<sup>21</sup> This essay explores where such possibilities may lie within evidence from the last will and testament.

In practice, the discussion of multiple meanings within the testamentary discourse is more complex than this, because most objects are not given as single items. But it is my contention that the very multiplicity of goods contained within a single bequest is significant for understanding the meanings of specific goods such

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<sup>16</sup> A. Weiner and J. Schneider eds (1989), *Cloth and Human Experience*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, especially the introduction, pp. 1–25.

<sup>17</sup> J.L. Machor and P. Goldstein (2001), *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Study*, New York and London: Routledge.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, P. Rabinow and M. Sullivan eds (1979), *Interpretative Social Science: A Reader*, Berkeley: University of California Press, for Ricoeur’s theoretical discussion of the complex possibilities for interpreting meaningful action.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Chartier (1988), pp. 40–41, for related arguments concerning consumption as production, during practices such as reading.

<sup>20</sup> At which some of the essays in this volume were first given as papers.

<sup>21</sup> Chartier (1988), pp. 12–13.

as items of clothing. The range of goods with which a single item of clothing is given could be seen to mediate the meaning of the clothing item for the beneficiary, and this mediation may be based on the beneficiary's awareness of local practices of giving which might include a hierarchy of gifts according to the number and type of items which compose it. And, considering for a moment how the testator decides the ways to apportion gifts, it is also my contention that the meanings of an individual bequest containing multiples of goods is mediated by the content of the other bequests in the same will, and that the testator manipulates these meanings using whatever goods he or she has to hand. Any single items of clothing given within this context are also therefore indicative of a particularly significant symbolic meaning.

The logical result of the pragmatic manipulation of symbolic meanings in the specific situation of will making, is that the testator him/herself is constructing, at that instant, the symbolic sphere of his/her testament. More than citing the possibility for multiple meanings, then, it is important to understand that symbolic meanings are constructed by a particular testator in response to a combination of factors including that testator's own contingent knowledge of symbolism, the specific situation in which the testator finds him/herself, and the goods he or she has to hand. It may also be that the testator does not have a fully coherent understanding of this resulting symbolic sphere constructed in his/her will. To suggest this is to take on theoretical debates about the interrupted and disrupted nature of cultural representation.<sup>22</sup> In the following section, three specific examples are given to illustrate the complexity of the discourses of clothing bequest. An important question is whether it is possible to assess the relative importance and values of these gifts for the various recipients (and testators). Do these different gifts within this testamentary discourse belong to a hierarchy of giving that has been constructed by the testator? Is there anything about clothing which makes it function differently from other types of bequest?

### Case Study 1

The discourse of Bartholomew Flamank's will of 1534 shows how he used a range of different kinds of clothing to construct his gifts.<sup>23</sup> This example illustrates the way that the meaning of the bequest of particular items of clothing may be mediated by the composition of the other gifts within the same testament. Flamank

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<sup>22</sup> Amselle, J.L., *Mestizo Logics: anthropology of identity in Africa and elsewhere*, translated by C. Royal (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1998) p.2.

<sup>23</sup> PRO PROB 11/25/14/91.

gave these items to men and women; some garments are given alone and others are part of a composite gift, which might also involve money, or specialist equipment, or jewellery.

A close reading of Flamank's will suggests that one of his gifting strategies was to use single items of clothing. These gifts include the single gown he gave to his host and his host's wife as well as that given to one of his executors and to another man of unspecified relationship to him. Bartholomew also constructs three other gifts using single items of clothing. Two of these three individuals, John Cornish and Geoffrey Holland, receive a crimson velvet doublet. The relationship between these beneficiaries and the testator is not described. The other single item of clothing is a riding coat, which Bartholomew gives to his brother. Most of Bartholomew's gifts are constituted from a range of garments as well as other items. The descriptive details in this will provide some clues to Bartholomew Flamank's strategy for ordering his gift giving. The following analysis begins with the 'unusual' bequests within this narrative, as they shed some light on interpreting the possible hierarchies.

Two bequests of gold rings, for example, appear to occupy a position of unusual significance within Flamank's narrative. One ring is described by its shape, it is 'made like a harte'. This stylish ring is given to a Mistress Millewe of Bucklersbury in London, the only woman in the will given this title. The only other jewels mentioned in the will, described as, 'my other two Rynges of golde', are given to Elizabeth Branston, probably the wife of Hugh Branston, one of Flamank's executors, and the only other named woman to receive an object from him. Perhaps these gifts of gold rings represent particularly important relationships between testator and recipient. The monetary value of these gifts was probably much higher than the items of clothing given by Flamank. But in the specific context of this testament, which mainly employs clothing bequests, these gifts of jewellery are unusual, and are made all the more special by the fact that they are both given to the only female beneficiaries. But even between the two jewellery gifts some distinction is being made. We do not know the shape of the two 'other' gold rings given to Elizabeth Branston. The shapes must not be important for either the purposes of identification or for the symbolism of the gift. That Millewe's ring is described clearly as 'harte shaped' in contrast, invests this shape with some particular significance separating this gift from that received by Elizabeth Branston.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the description is designed to show a very special bond between Bartholomew Flamank and Mistress Millewe. It is not possible to elucidate the precise nature of such a bond.

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<sup>24</sup> Whether 'harte' refers to the shape of a hart or heart is unclear.



There is one other bequest in this will, which stands out from the sets of clothing. Laurence Egysfelde receives from Bartholomew, 'a bowcase of waynscott, a sheff of arrowes and a black hunting staffe'. Giving this set of specialized objects might also be intended to convey an impression of the special relationship between testator and recipient. Did these two men go hunting together when Bartholomew was alive? If they did, perhaps Flamank is, here, constructing an heirloom, which will use the shared experiences of two men in order to keep the memory of Flamank alive with Egysfelde in the future.

These 'unusual' gifts provide some possible clues as to the ways that precise descriptions are used, by Flamank, in the hierarchisation of his testamentary gifts. But does this type of analysis work with the more ordinary bequests of clothing? Three of the clothing gifts are very similar, being a single gown given to each of Richard Ryder, Thomas Hall, called his 'host', and his host's wife who remains unnamed. The three gowns seem to be of roughly the same quality, being lined and having fox fur on them; two of them are 'medley' coloured, and the material is not mentioned. It seems at first that these three similar gifts are intended, within this testamentary discourse, to place these three recipients on a similar level. But the host's wife is given an incomplete gown, 'lacking the foreslevys'. Perhaps by giving her an incomplete garment, Flamank is positioning her slightly below the other two men in the gift hierarchy. Perhaps this reflects her gender.

The inequality or equality of Flamank's composite gifts seems more difficult to assess. The various clothing items given to John Holland and Henry Page may in fact be equivalent in terms of practical value and symbolic meaning. John Holland receives, 'a doblet of fustian *with* stoxkes [stocks] and a partelet of blake velvett and two shirte clothes'; Henry Page receives, 'the base of my Rich cote and the slevys of the same and my best halberd'. But a greater range of clothing as well as money is given to Thomas Fitton, named as Flamank's servant. He is to receive, 'myn old Ryding coat my gowne facyd with Sarcenet my partelet of tawny velvett, two cappis two of my best shirts a Kendall Jerkyn and an Angell noble'. This final bequest may reflect this testator's particular regard for his servant, however going by the number of items may be misleading. The riding coat given to Fitton is described as 'old', which may be a deliberate contrast to the single gift of 'my best' Ryding Cote', that Flamank bequeaths to his brother, the supervisor of his will. At the same time the oldness of this garment might serve to describe the nature of the relationship between Fitton and Flamank. Perhaps he was a long-serving and loyal servant.

When he made his will in 1534, Bartholomew Flamank constructed a range of gifts constituted from specialized tools and garments, money, complete and incomplete items of ordinary and fine clothing, and jewels. It is not possible to know the precise symbolism conveyed by these gifts, and it is likely that Flamank

did not have clear-cut definitions of the symbolic significance of each gift. However, the above consideration of the discourse in which these gifts are situated provides some hints about the intentions Bartholomew Flamank had when he constructed these gifts, and the experiences his beneficiaries had of receiving them.

The discussion of Flamank's will is based on descriptive and qualitative details that would be lost by a system of analysis that divides the goods bequeathed in a number of wills into categories such as clothing, silverware, and furniture; and this would also lose sight of the subtleties of the relative meaning constructed discursively within one particular will. This example indicates that examining the internal coherence, or discourse, of a will document provides a clue, in the absence of other evidence, to a medieval individual's experience of the gift that they receive and of the choices made by the gift-giver. The implication of this is that the qualitative study of small numbers of these documents provides a particular kind of evidence about contemporary perception that the quantitative analysis of large samples does not provide.

## Case Study 2

The second case study indicates the possibilities for interpreting the use of clothing bequests amongst testators who belong to a specific group. Testaments survive, amongst the Greenwich archive, for members of the moveable royal household of Henry VIII and Edward VI.<sup>25</sup> Close reading of their textual construction indicates the nature of this group's shared identity and the ways that clothing bequests are used to celebrate this. The testaments show that these men came from all over England, as well as Wales, Scotland and Ireland; and from Flanders and the Low Countries. They worked as yeomen of the guard and armoury; cooks, larder servants and cellarers; court musicians; and gentlemen of the king's chapel and vestry. The language of their bequests provides evidence for the formation and perpetuation of relationships within the moveable household, between what in contemporary terminology are called 'fellows'.

The role of clothing in these bequests appears to be significant; and this may be a reflection of the importance of clothing as a currency of favour in the royal household, as discussed by Hayward.<sup>26</sup> Although, a piece of negative evidence to show that not all the important clothing enjoyed by the members of the household was later converted into bequests: the black velvet coat which Hayward notes was

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<sup>25</sup> The testaments used in this analysis are dated between 1514 and 1559.

<sup>26</sup> Hayward in this volume, *passim*, esp. pp. 174-6.

given to court musician William Cornish by the King, is not mentioned in Cornish's will.<sup>27</sup> The relative lack of other bequests such as property amongst these royal householders may also indicate their itinerant occupations, which may not have given them time to develop residential preferences and locational investments.

The testamentary bequest of gifts by the members of the royal household to their 'fellows' is frequent. For example, in 1540, Roger Elys, a yeoman of the guard, gave gifts of clothing to three 'fellows'.<sup>28</sup> To Richard Trout, Elys gave, 'my doublet of russet saten white and yellow color'; to John Cornish, 'a doublet of blacke velvett ffringed with gold at the hande and brest'; and to another fellow, 'a new shirte with a white bande made of white threde'.<sup>29</sup> This gifting practice of giving clothing to individuals called 'fellow', appears at first sight to be an attempt to define and identify this group as a distinct unit, perhaps with shared cultural references and behaviours, and occupational dressing codes and tastes. For this group of people therefore, clothing appears to occupy a particularly important position in the discourses of bequests, having a set of specific symbolic values that separate clothing from other goods. But the clothing bequests are not only used to symbolically define the group of fellows. Roger Elys, for example, does not only give clothing gifts to his 'fellows'.<sup>30</sup>

Roger Elys's other clothing gifts indicate his more general interest in clothing culture that may have been informed by his position in the royal court.<sup>31</sup> Some of these bequests are extensive and complex. To his daughter, Lettice, Elys also gave, 'all the rest of my shirtes ... to make Smockes...' instructing that these should be converted by his daughter's guardian, mistress Kittowe, with the help of Joanna Weston. Weston was also to receive a garment for remaking, described as, 'my best gowne forefaced with blacke damaske, lined with cotton, welted with cremsyn velvet, to make her a gown'. Elys also mentions his tailor, called 'Bryce', who dwelled at Southwark. To him he bequeathed a barred chest already at the tailor's house, and, 'a tawney cote or a russett cote newe dressed with the lynying to the same'. Elys was evidently not only interested in the fashions of newly made clothes, he also operated at the same time within a currency of remade clothing.

Of the clothing bequests made within the royal household group, a closer inspection reveals that it is possible for testators to use clothing bequest in order to make distinctions in their relationships with particular individuals within the group.

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<sup>27</sup> PRO PROB 11/21/13/96; Hayward esp. p. 174.

<sup>28</sup> PRO PROB 11/28/7/55.

<sup>29</sup> This is probably the same John Cornish that Flamank mentions.

<sup>30</sup> PRO PROB 11/28/7/55.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Hayward *passim*.

For a number of the royal household's testators, there is a clear preference for remembering individuals of the same occupational position as themselves, and this includes the bequest of clothing. Robert Skinner, for example, a gentleman of the King's chapel, is strongly associated with his own occupational group in his will.<sup>32</sup> Skinner mentions four gentlemen of the King's chapel. To Philip Church he gives his best doublet, one pair of tawney hose, his best shirt and best cap; the other three gentlemen John Tyll, Robert Philpot and Adam Grome, are mentioned because of their debts to Skinner.

For the self-definition of members of this affinity, both broad and narrow occupational categories were important. It was possible for individuals to advertise their identification with general areas of responsibility within the household such as the kitchen or chapel, for example, as well as with the distinctive grades and statuses occurring within those occupational groups. Clothing bequests were used to make distinctions within and between these occupational spheres. For example, Richard Carpenter bequeaths, '... to 11 of my company of the pantry, to grooms and pages 6s8d and to the sergeant and gents each a ring of gold...'.<sup>33</sup> But to a specifically named member of his 'company', called 'Nicholas of the pantry', Carpenter gives his second doublet. Perhaps this bequest of clothing is used to signify the special relationship between these two men, within their company.

Other more complex sets of occupational and familial ties are also expressed using a mixture of clothing bequests with other goods. In Richard Carpenter's will, he also mentions a John Carpenter, butcher of the King's chamber.<sup>34</sup> The gifts that this 'fellow' receives - a coat of satin, one 'royal' coin, one featherbed and one flockbed - are more substantial than those received by Carpenter's other fellows, perhaps indicating the prioritisation of this blood relationship. Emotional ties to particular items of clothing are also sometimes used to express the continuity between generations and the complex sets of close relationships that this causes. Robert Colley, for example, gives to William Nevell, his son, a doublet of crimson which Colley's fellow George Duckforth had bequeathed him.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> CKS DRb. Pwr. 8/38.

<sup>33</sup> CKS DRb. Pwr. 7/43.

<sup>34</sup> CKS DRb. Pwr. 7/43.

<sup>35</sup> PRO PROB 11/22/8/59.

## **Conclusion**

The emotionality of the final example reaches right to the centre of this essay's purpose. Robert Colley's bequest is just one example indicating the detailed evidence for perceptions of clothing culture available on close analysis of the last will and testament. These documents even provide access to the textual construction of memories during inter-generational transmission.

Reading these testamentary narratives of clothing culture indicates the complexity of meanings that may be attributed to selected items of clothing, both by the testator and the recipient. This is dependent on the specific context within which each item is found, in terms of both the single bequest and the range of other bequests that constitute the discourse of a single testamentary narrative, and in terms of the conventional use of these items in other such narratives. That the symbolic meanings of bequeathed items of clothing are dependent on and mediated by other bequeathed items such as furniture, kitchenware and money, begs the question of whether it is appropriate to consider 'clothing' as a bequest category in its own right. From my interpretation of testamentary evidence, I am inclined to say that such categorisation needs very careful consideration.

This essay has sought to make a claim for the last will and testament as a subtle narrative, which gives access to personal understandings of clothing culture in the sixteenth century. These are understandings that may be influenced by custom, tradition and occupation, and commemorative of personal friendships and momentous events. The symbolisms of particular bequests of material culture generally, and of the clothing that this includes, are chosen, constructed and hierarchised according to a combination of influences, ranging from pragmatic necessity driven by what items were available, to conventional systems of signs associated with gift-giving practice.

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## Section Four

# Discourse, Body, Gender

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## Chapter Thirteen

# ‘This one poore blacke gowne lined with white’: The Clothing of the Sixteenth-Century English Book

Helen Smith

Metaphors of clothing and nakedness, of books as dressed and undressed bodies, occur time and again in the dedicatory and prefatory materials of the early modern printed book. Books are described as well- or poorly-clad figures, or, alternatively, are fantasised as items of clothing, patched together to form garments. Thus, Edward Hoby, as he describes his own inadequate translation, imagines his book as a rustic yokel stripped of its foreign elegance and dressed instead in a the ‘clownish guise’ of a ragged vernacular,<sup>1</sup> while in Thomas Nashe’s *Pierce Penilesse his supplication to the Diuell*, the grotesque figure of Greedinesse is clothed in a ‘capouch’ of written parchment, and his wife, Dame Niggardize, sports ‘an apron made of Almanackes out of date (such as stand upon Screens, or on the backside of a dore in a Chandlers shop)’.<sup>2</sup> This essay draws upon recent work in the rapidly growing discipline of book history to explore the implications of these insistent tropes - the clothed book, and the book as clothing - both as literal descriptions of the material text, and as ways of conceiving a variety of modes of reading and textual ownership.<sup>3</sup> Central to my argument is the idea, propounded most

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<sup>1</sup> Anon (1595), *The Historie of France: The Foure First Bookes*, London: John Windet, Sig. A4v.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Nashe (1593), *Pierce Penilesse his supplication to the Diuell*, London: Abell Jeffes, for I. B., Sig. Av.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent survey of the current state of the field of book history see Cyndia Susan Clegg (2001), ‘History of the Book: An Undisciplined Discipline?’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54, 221–45. A range of texts is collected in David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery eds (2002), *The Book History Reader*, London: Routledge.

vigorously by George Lakoff, that we must take metaphor seriously as a way not only of describing but of shaping the world around us.<sup>4</sup>

As in the other essays in this section, by Andrea Denny-Brown, Elizabeth Hallam, and Catherine Richardson, clothing is revealed to be both metaphor and reality: a concrete description of the appearance of the physical book that at the same time literalises that book as an object for consumption; a system of signification, shaping and circumscribing the way we read both text and dress; a way of imagining the reader's vexed relationship to bodies of knowledge; a strategy to market or to express ownership of both text and book. As the essays in this volume make clear, clothing in the medieval and early modern periods was deeply valued, often highly symbolic, and understood to signify on many different levels. This essay argues that sixteenth-century books participated fully in these real and symbolic economies, dressing themselves in the language of clothes, but also put on as clothing by the knowledgeable reader, offering ways to present oneself and to interpret, even to strip away, the clothes of others.

### 'This one poore blacke gowne'

In the epistle 'To the Gentlewomen Citizens of London' which closes Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*, the author warns his female readers to shun the theatre at all costs if they wish to retain a reputation for chastity. However virtuous a woman may be, if she chooses to display herself in the public theatre, she should expect to be judged accordingly: 'For this is generall, that they which shewe themselues openly, desire to be seene'.<sup>5</sup> One of the central tenets of a range of attacks on the theatre of the 1590s was that audiences used the space of the playhouses to flaunt both sumptuary laws and moral prescriptions, displaying themselves in extravagant and expensive costumes with as much vigour and imagination as the lavishly-dressed actors themselves.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, George Lakoff (1980), *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: Chicago University Press; Annette Kolodny (1975), *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Lives and Letters*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; Susan Sontag (1989), *Aids and its Metaphors*, London: Penguin.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Gosson (1579), *The Schoole of Abuse*, London: Thomas Dawson for Thomas Woodcocke, Sig. F2v.

<sup>6</sup> As Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass comment in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 'Attacks upon the acting companies combined a critique of the actors as shape-shifters with an awareness that

In particular danger were women, who, increasingly visible as consumers of sumptuous and luxurious clothing, attended the public theatre not only to see but to be seen. A female audience member, Gosson insisted, laid herself open to having her activity and dress read awry by the searching eyes of the male theatregoer. In a language suffused with references to opulent clothing, from a 'pearle crowne' to a 'soft shooe', he warned the female playgoer that both her costume and the bare fact of her presence in the literary marketplace exposed her to the charge of being, and to the abuses targeted at, a wanton and abandoned woman. 'If you doe but ... ioyne lookes with an amorous Gazer, you have already made your selues assaultable, & yelded your Cities to be sacked'.<sup>7</sup>

Such a fate very publicly befell one theatrical woman of the 1560s, as John Day, the printer of Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* or *The tragidie of Ferrex and Porrex* revealed in the preface to his 1570 edition. The title-page of this work declares that the play was presented at court, 'before the Queenes Maiestie, about nine yeares past', although this performance at Whitehall was actually the play's second staging, the first having occurred two weeks earlier at the Inner Temple as part of the Twelfth Night celebrations.<sup>8</sup> According to John Day, some considerable time after the play's performance, a young man 'that lacked a litle money and much discretion', sold a manuscript text to a printer, 'W.G.' (William Griffith), who went on to issue an 'excedingly corrupted' copy.<sup>9</sup>

Day describes the scandalous treatment of the play in terms that are not only clearly gendered, as several commentators have pointed out,<sup>10</sup> but also distinctively dressed, explaining that Griffith has behaved:

euen as if by meanes of a broker for hire, he should haue entised into his house a faire maide and done her villainie, and after all so bescratched her face, torne her

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the theater staged and marketed new fashions in clothes through actors and audience alike', p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> Gosson (1579), Sig. F2v.

<sup>8</sup> The court performance took place on January 18<sup>th</sup> 1561/2, and was, perhaps surprisingly for a play concerning 'matters of governance', performed by royal command. For a reading of the play's political topicality see Mark Breitenberg (1988), 'Reading Elizabethan Iconicity: *Gorboduc* and the Semiotics of Reform', *English Literary Renaissance*, 18, pp. 194–217.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville (1670), *Gorboduc, or the Tragedie of Ferrex and Porrex*, London: John Daye, Sig. A2r.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Diane Purkiss (1992), 'Material Girls: The Seventeenth-Century Woman Debate', in Claire Brant and Diane Purkiss eds *Women, Texts and Histories, 1575–1760*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 69–101.

apparell, berayed and disfigured her, and then thrust her out of dores dishonested. In such plight after long wandring she came at length home to the sight of her frendes who scant knew her but by a few tokens and markes remaying.<sup>11</sup>

The book's shame and status as a victim are to be read in its, or rather her, torn clothing, yet, conversely, it is also the rags and shreds of her original dress - the 'few tokens and markes remaying' - that allow *Gorboduc's* 'frendes' to recognise their former companion at all. Having recognised her

They, the authors I meane, though they were very much displeased that she so ranne abroad without leave, whereby she caught her shame, as many wantons do, yet seing the case as it is remedillesse, have for common honestie and shamefastnesse new apparellled, trimmed, and attired her in such forme as she was before.<sup>12</sup>

Rather than heed Stephen Gosson's stringent recommendation that the gentle female theatregoer should 'close vp your eyes, stoppe your eares, tye vp your tongues' and 'keepe home', *Gorboduc's* 'frendes' chose to re-clothe the text and release her again onto the literary marketplace, Day insisting, 'I do not dout her parentes the authors will not now be discontent that she goe abroad among you good readers, so it be in honest companie'.<sup>13</sup>

Still, the imagined maiden remains dishonoured: her case is remediless. In an environment where printers struggled to establish the trustworthy nature of their texts, the appearance of sartorial probity was an essential marketing tool for both book and printer, yet, as Day was aware, such an appearance could never remain entirely under the printer's control, certainly after it left the printshop, and often before, according to the evidence of errata lists and compositorial mistakes.<sup>14</sup> It is only the text, and not the wrongs she has suffered, that can hope to be re-dressed, and Day is left uncomfortably aware that a second fall into dishonest company is made more likely as a result of the first. The anxious insistence upon the text's honesty, and the explicit association between its trustworthiness and its printed appearance, mean that the feminised *Gorboduc* participates in concerns about the deceptive nature of dress in the early modern period: the constant awareness that

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<sup>11</sup> Norton and Sackville (1670), Sig. A2r.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Sigs. F4v; F4r.

<sup>14</sup> For an extended examination of the manufacture of textual credit in this period see Adrian Johns (1998), *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

clothing is more likely to mask a lurid past than to transform the wearer's status and character.

The possibility of another assault upon the honour of Norton and Sackville's play must be made yet more probable by the fact that Day's claims to a renewed textual probity are spurious. As Sir Walter Greg and I. B. Cauthen have shown, the only substantial change Day made to Griffith's text was the excision of an eight-line passage in Act 5 dictating absolute submission to a monarch.<sup>15</sup> Both Greg and Cauthen conclude that Day set his version of the play (Q2) from a copy of Griffith's Q1, either repeating, in the terms of his own prefatorial strategy, the violence of his predecessor upon the manuscript body of the text, or unjustly slandering the female theatregoer who had dared to expose herself to public view.

If her second exposure to the readerly gaze, 'new apparelled' in the type and printer's marks of John Day, should lead to a second fall, her publisher insists

the poore gentlewoman wil surely play Lucreces part of her selfe and die for shame, and I shall wishe that she had taried still at home with me, where she was welcome: for she did neuer put me to more charge, but this one poore blacke gowne lined with white that I haue now geuen her to goe abroad among you withall.<sup>16</sup>

This delightful image of a 'poore blacke gowne' has clear connotations of modesty and sobriety: an appropriate item of apparel for a retiring gentlewoman. More concretely, however, Day's carefully chosen phrase is also a literal description of the appearance of the printed page. The text is printed in black letter, 'an all-encompassing term', as Bain and Shaw describe it, 'used to describe the writing of the Middle Ages in which the darkness of the letters overpowers the whiteness of the page'.<sup>17</sup> In the most recent edition, that of Cauthen for the Regent's Renaissance Drama Series, a predominantly white page bears traces of black, while in Day's version an overwhelmingly black body is surrounded by a thin lining of white space. Griffith also used a black letter font, dressing his text in the same sombre garment, so that the slippage in Day's text between the torn apparel, original attire, and 'new' black gown of the book becomes more revealing of his own textual sharp practice than of Griffith's alleged acts of violence.

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<sup>15</sup> Sir Walter Greg (1970), *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, London: Bibliographical society, vol. 1, p. 115, and I. B. Cauthen Jr. (1962), 'Gorboduc, Ferrex and Porrex: The First Two Quartos', *Studies in Bibliography*, XV, 231–33.

<sup>16</sup> Norton and Sackville (1670), Sig. A2r.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Bain and Paul Shaw (1998), 'Black letter: An Overview', *Printing History* XIX:2–XX:1, p. 4.

Continuous blocks of black letter type, used by Gutenberg in an attempt to mimic as closely as possible the manuscript productions of medieval scribes, were gradually displaced by the roman and italic fonts introduced by Aldus Manutius in imitation of the new and fashionable humanistic script.<sup>18</sup> By the late sixteenth century, black letter was intricately entangled with basic literacy and the vernacular, and was used extensively for ballads, pamphlets, schoolbooks and horn-books. English readers with only a limited education and rudimentary reading skills often had access solely to black letter, characterised by Keith Thomas as ‘the type for the common people’.<sup>19</sup> In ‘dressing’ their texts in a black letter font, Day and Griffith thus appealed to a popular audience, not to the educated humanists who, along with the Queen, had witnessed her initial courtly appearance.<sup>20</sup> The clothing of the book, like the clothing of its reader or owner, participated in a

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Stanley Morison (1972), *Politics and Script: Aspects of authority and freedom in the development of Graeco-Latin script from the sixth century B.C. to the twentieth century A.D.*, edited and compiled by Nicolas Barker, Oxford: Clarendon Press, particularly chapter 6.

<sup>19</sup> Keith Thomas (1986), ‘The meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England’ in Gerd Baumann ed., *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 99. As Charles Mish is careful to point out ‘the change-over from black letter to roman in the history of English printing has not ... ever been carefully documented or dated’, ‘Black Letter as a Social Discriminant in the Seventeenth Century’, *PMLA*, 68 (1953), p. 628. Mish tentatively concludes that the change probably took place around 1590, but suggests that in play quartos the change took place somewhat earlier, indicating that Day’s text appeared on the cusp of this change.

<sup>20</sup> This is not to suggest that Day deliberately chose a black letter font specifically for this particular text. Although he was quick to follow continental models for roman fonts, in part thanks to his own expertise as a type-founder (Geoffrey Dowding (1961), *An Introduction to the History of Printing Types*, London: Wace & Company Ltd., p. 53), Day was still, in the early 1570s, primarily using black letter fonts, with roman letters reserved for title pages and prefatory material. This practice reflects his core output of the ABC and Catechism and the Sternhold and Hopkins metrical Psalms for which he held the patents, and suggests at least that Day felt *Gorboduc* was likely to appeal to a readership that associated him with such accessible works. For a detailed discussion of the different modes of textual circulation during this period see Arthur F. Marotti (1995), *Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Other useful sources include Roger Chartier (1989), *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern England*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Cambridge: Polity Press; Anthony Ian Doyle, et al. (1975), *Manuscript to Print: Tradition and Innovation in the Renaissance Book*, Durham: University of Durham Library; and Anthony Grafton (1980), ‘The Importance of Being Printed’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2, 265–86.

carefully coded signifying system which described and defined its social status, its honesty and credit-worthiness, and even its gender.

### The Clothing of the Book

Yet like the textiles whose language and whose forms they mimicked, the clothes of the written or printed text both performed its inclusion in certain social and economic categories, and threatened to disrupt those categories by opening them to scrutiny and interpretation. Just as Gosson recommended that the female theatregoer should beware of displaying herself in lavish clothes, so too, in a period when a book risked the possibility of being dismissed as 'Deformed and polluted Linnen' as John Taylor complains in his appeal 'to the most mondifying, clarifying, purifying, and repurifying, cleanser, clearer, and reformer of deformed and polluted Linnen, *Martha Legge* Esquiresse', the outward apparel of a book was an essential indicator of its status and expected readership.<sup>21</sup> In the case of printed texts particularly, the clothing of the book was understood to indicate the typographical and material markers of the printed pages, rather than the figured binding of the book, since this was a period in which most books initially ventured forth into the marketplace unbound or 'naked', like, as Edward Topsell expresses it in his dedicatory preface to Henry Holland's *Historie of Adam*, 'the beautifull limbes of a naked body lacking garments'.<sup>22</sup>

Without being sure of a ready market for their texts, publishers, printers and booksellers were unlikely to risk commissioning a costly binding, or going to the expense of binding multiple copies. For this reason, the choice of font, of paper, the size of the sheets, decorated and emblematic frontispieces, and, increasingly, the title, were vitally important to the publisher or printer seeking to find or to circumscribe an audience.<sup>23</sup> The only books that were consistently sold ready-

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<sup>21</sup> John Taylor (1624), *The praise of cleane Linnen. With the commendable vse of the lavndres*, London, E. Allde for Henry Gosson, Sig. A3v.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Holland (1606), *The Historie of Adam, or the foure-fold state of Man*, London, printed by T.E. for Thomas Man, Sig. ¶v.

<sup>23</sup> In *Pierce Penilesse*, Thomas Nashe comments in detail upon the textual strategies used to appropriately apparel a book in 'A priuate Epistle of the Author to the Printer'. He insists 'Now this is what I would haue you to do in this second edition; First, cut off that long-taild Title, and let mee not in the for:front of my Booke, make a tedious Mountebanks Oration to the Reader' (Sig. A2v). For a discussion of the development of advertising strategies and the importance to these of the material forms of the text see Paul J. Voss (1998), 'Books for

bound were steady and predictable sellers such as schoolbooks, and certain religious or devotional works. Usually these were bound very plainly in cheap materials, paper perhaps, or limp vellum: dressed for use and not for display. In most cases, however, it was up to the purchaser to decide on an appropriate binding for their new-bought book, if indeed they decided to have it bound at all. Where they did, the custom bindings bestowed on books in sixteenth-century England can be seen to participate in many of the concerns associated with the giving of clothing: display, service, familial networks, and charitable gifts.

There is no doubt that many sumptuous bindings were produced during the early modern period. These extravagant examples are, however, exceptional, and most often functioned as bids for patronage, reflecting more or less accurately the known tastes of the recipient.<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth I, it seems, was particularly fond of red velvet bindings, and there is a lovely example in the Folger Shakespeare Library of a tiny red velvet volume, elaborately decorated with seed pearls, created for Elizabeth by the calligrapher Esther Inglis.<sup>25</sup> Such extravagant materials were unique to Inglis's bindings for Elizabeth and James I, and suggest perhaps that the sumptuary legislation that dictated who could wear which fabrics was re-enacted in the status-conscious patronage politics of the gifted book. Other particularly rich bindings, especially those featuring jewels and precious stones, were often to be found on bibles, which, through their elaborate covering and prominent place in the church, became transformed from text to monument, furniture, or storehouse of wealth, as the extravagant apparel of the book usurped the signifying power of the text.<sup>26</sup>

Sale: Advertising and Patronage in Late Elizabethan England', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 29, 733–56.

<sup>24</sup> Mirjam M. Foot (1993), *Studies in the History of Bookbinding*, London: Scolar Press, especially chapter 53.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of Esther Inglis's bindings see Georgianna Ziegler (2000), "More than Feminine Boldness": The Gift Books of Esther Inglis', in Mary E. Burke, Jane Donawerth, Linda L. Dove and Karen Nelson eds, *Women, Writing and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, pp. 19–37.

<sup>26</sup> As Alex Walsham points out, many of these bindings were designed to be transferred from book to book, indicating that the value lay in the binding, rather than its necessary association with the holy text. Such books were often neither text nor clothing, but essential parts of the holy furniture. 'Kissed in the course of the service, they were crucial pieces of equipment for the celebration of the miracle of the mass - in at least one case a resplendent binding was redeployed as the pax itself. Often enclosing fragments of the bones and other remains of martyrs and saints, book covers were sometimes indistinguishable from reliquaries', Alex Walsham (2004), 'Jewels for Gentlewomen: Religious Books as Artefacts



As other essays in this collection, particularly those of Roze Hentschell and Claire Bartram, make clear, extravagant clothing was only a distant prospect for most people, yet was freighted with an excess of symbolic capital, functioning as a site for the construction and defence of the boundaries of status, gender, and nation in the pages of books and pamphlets. This focus on the sumptuous and extreme has been reinscribed not only by historians of clothing but by bibliographers, students of the clothing of the book. In Mirjam Foot's words, betraying a certain sympathy for the sober dress-style assigned to Day's edition of *Gorboduc*, 'The attraction of fine materials - soft and luscious leathers, creamy vellum, rich fabrics and, largely in earlier days, precious metals and glimmering stones - has been known to lure many a scholar away from the straight and narrow path of learning'.<sup>27</sup> Most English books, even those belonging to enthusiastic collectors, remained unbound or simply bound, and the way in which early bibliophiles chose to clothe their books tells us much about the status and use of their collections in the late sixteenth century.

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester's copy of Marcus Antonius Coccius's *Le Historie Vinitiane* was bound in brown calf, an expensive and durable material, and gold-tooled.<sup>28</sup> Naturalising the foreign text through Leicester's insistence on using only English binders, the design, common to all his commissioned, and many presentation, bindings is a simple one with his crest, the bear and ragged staff, taking centre stage.<sup>29</sup> It is significant that Leicester chose to impose his crest, an indisputable mark of ownership, on the previously naked, or, according to some early modern authors, 'unliveried' book.<sup>30</sup> Encased within Leicester's household livery, the book, though not necessarily its author, became an object of his patronage, assured of both protection and employment, at least for as long as it remained a useful servant or interesting companion. Indeed the extent to which books could become intimate members of a household is highlighted in the binding

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in Late Medieval and Early Modern England', in R.N. Swanson ed., *The Church and the Book*, Studies in Church History, 38, Boydell and Brewer for the Ecclesiastical History Society.

<sup>27</sup> Foot (1993), p. 300.

<sup>28</sup> Sabellicus Marcus Antonius Coccius (1554), *Le Historie Vinitiane*, Venice: British Library C.183.a.25.

<sup>29</sup> P. J. M. Marks (1998), *The British Library Guide to Bookbinding History and Techniques*, London: British Library, pp. 25–6.

<sup>30</sup> Most famously, in the letter in which Sir Philip Sidney dedicated his *Arcadia* to his sister, Mary Herbert, he hopes that she will afford his naked and deformed 'child' 'the liverye of your name; which ... is worthy to be a sanctuary for a greater offender', *The Countesse of Pembroke's Arcadia*, London: John Windet for William Ponsonbie, 1590, Sig. A4v.

of one of the few extant copies of Edmund Campion's *Decem Rationes*. The cover of Bishop King's copy at Winchester is formed from an old parchment deed relating to the property and domestic arrangements of the Bellamy family of Uxenden Hall.<sup>31</sup> Swaddled in their domestic concerns, the book immediately, and dangerously, since seditious and Catholic books were one of the prime targets of the pursuivants, identifies itself as a cherished member of the Bellamy household, showing the extent to which the clothing of the purchased book could allow the owner to assimilate the text into the household, whether as a liveried servant or a family member, and treading a fine line between the display of power and possession - the idea of the book as willing servant - and that of familial ties - the book as partner in a process of consultation and dialogue.

For Edward Topsell, the act of 'clothing' the book was definitely a function of use rather than display. Explaining his editorial interventions in the text of Henry Holland's *Historie of Adam*, he tells the reader that his intention was

to contriue it and bring it into such a fashion as might be plaine and intelligible to the English reader ... And therefore reading it, I found many things in the margent which were ordained for the page, and because I found in it a great number of pithy and substantiall points curiously and not vulgarly handled ... I strained my selfe, for the honour of God and my loue to the dead, both to marshall all things according to his meaning (so neare as I could) and also to put upon his fatherlesse Orphan, such garments and attire as my poore abilitie could provide.<sup>32</sup>

Engaged in the charitable act of gifting clothes, explored by Joanna Crawford and Sheila Sweetinburgh elsewhere in this volume, Topsell recreates the text in his own intellectual image, engaged in an apparently beneficent act of giving that also becomes a means of asserting possession, calling attention both to the orphan's previously abject status and to his own munificent generosity.

Many readers similarly clothed, and thus colonised, the text through the use of organising strategies, whether in the form of marginalia, indices, or the binding together of complementary texts.<sup>33</sup> Dressing their books in their own organisational

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<sup>31</sup> Edmund Campion (1581), *Rationes decem quibus fretus, certamen aduersarijs obtulit in causa fidei*, Henley-on-Thames: Stephen Brinkley; STC 4536.5. Copy held in Winchester Cathedral Library.

<sup>32</sup> Holland (1606), Sig. ¶2v.

<sup>33</sup> For detailed case studies of several studious dressers of the text see James Nielson (1993), 'Reading Between the Lines: Manuscript Personality and Gabriel Harvey's Drafts', *Studies in English Literature* 33, 43–82; William Sherman (1995), *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press; and Steven Zwicker (1998), 'Reading the Margins: Politics and the Habits of

habits, these interventionist readers also dressed themselves, wearing their knowledge more or less lightly in a courtly environment where the knowledge which the humanist courtier derived from his reading was expected to be permanently on display in the sprezzatura creation of a dazzling exterior.<sup>34</sup>

### The Book as Clothing

The act of clothing oneself in order to display both dress and knowledge was frequently exploited in the formal portrait, a format in which the book could once again become an item of clothing; an accessory that represented certain aspects (whether real or desired) of the sitter's interests or knowledge. In the well known Appleby triptych, commissioned by Anne Clifford, for example, books form a hugely important part of the detailed background, from her youthful reading matter of Montaigne's *Essays* and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* on the left-hand panel, to a much more godly collection of devotional works on the right.<sup>35</sup> This change in reading habits is part and parcel of the growing maturity and sobriety that leads from the elaborate and detailed child's dress of the infant Clifford, to the sober and respectable habit of the elderly lady represented in the right-hand panel.

On a yet more concrete level, Alex Walsham has discovered a number of decorative book covers, including some sixteenth-century girdle covers which, strapped around the waist, housed the carrier's miniature devotional or liturgical texts (some 32° or even smaller), and which feature in several Renaissance

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Appropriation', in Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker eds, *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, pp. 101–116.

<sup>34</sup> For one compelling example see Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton (1990), 'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy', *Past and Present*, 129, 30–78. Natalie Zemon Davis points out that this strategy might also be employed to direct readers and prevent independent interpretation, particularly of religious texts. 'Everyone is admitted to preaching, no matter how unlearned, said Brother Gilles; need seeing words be more dangerous than hearing them? The answer was to make the bare text safe by clothing it with orthodox exposition', p. 222, 'Printing and the People', in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays by Natalie Zemon Davis*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the books contained in the triptych, see Mary Ellen Lamb (1992), 'The Agency of the Split Subject: Lady Anne Clifford and the Uses of Reading', *ELR*, 22, 347–68.

portraits of women.<sup>36</sup> Rather than providing emergency access to the word of God, these were items of clothing and display, albeit clothing that suggested an intimate and almost osmotic relationship with the holy text, absorbing the book into the religious self by wearing it on the body.<sup>37</sup> Dressing and ordering both body and mind, texts were intricately interwoven with the signifying systems of cut and fabric explored elsewhere in this volume, on display and hence available for interpretation by the discerning reader or the hostile critic like Stephen Gosson.

These signifying systems, however, demanded considerable skill if they were to be interpreted correctly. Representations of the difficulty of ‘reading’ clothing, as exemplified in the pained attempts of the female narrator of Christopher Goodwyn’s 1523 verse narrative *The maydens dreame compyled*, suggest that it was not only through an understanding of the significance of the book’s clothing that readers could formulate an approach to the text, but that the analytical skills engendered by their reading could assist the book owner in the correct interpretation of costume and textile. The narrator of Goodwyn’s text, the maiden of the book’s title, is defined as courteous, attractive and full of youthful innocence. Her own apparel is simple: ‘so sweetely besene / All correspondent, vnto your swete age’.<sup>38</sup> In a dream she is approached by two women, and it is only through a detailed analysis of their clothing that she is able to identify her mysterious interlocutors.

Also what were these Ladyes, I toke busy kepe  
That had with me reasoned, in so straunge wyse  
Then theyr apparell, I dyd well aduise  
Wherein were gret letters, which I dyd rede with ease  
Alwayes newe thynges, both meruaylously please.

These letters forthwith, I began for to spell  
And set them togyther, with all myne entent  
As a mayden that coulede not, rede very well

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<sup>36</sup> See for example the 1567 portrait of Anne Browne, Lady Petre, attributed to Steven van der Meulen, and shown in Sir Roy Strong (1969), *The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 128.

<sup>37</sup> As Mirjam Foot points out, ‘wearing a book as part of one’s apparel indicates a greater intimacy between the owner and the text, than if it had been merely put on a shelf, suggesting an appropriation or incorporation of the Word of God into the body and soul of the wearer’, p. 63, *The History of Bookbinding as a Mirror of Society*, London: British Library, 1998.

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Goodwyn (1542), *The maydens dreame compyled*, London: Robert Wyer for Richard Bankes, Sig. A2v.

Yet at the last, I knewe what they ment  
The names of these ladyes, that were so gent  
In them were contryued, wherefore to my mynde  
He that well sercheth, shall alway well fynde.<sup>39</sup>

The names of the two women are 'Amours' and 'Shamfastnes', and, as we would expect, their characters are reflected and expressed in the texts of their garments, with the 'Rychely arayed' Amours standing in stark contrast to the 'Symple rayment' of her chaste counterpart.

The black-letter form of *The maydens dreme compyled* links it to the schoolbooks and hornbooks of the earliest attempts at literacy, and the text itself functions as a reading lesson far more explicitly than does John Day's later black letter *Gorboduc*. In his authorial prologue, Goodwin insists that his text should be used as a mirror in which his readers, whom he identifies as 'yonge virgyns, of eche degre' should 'lerne and se'.<sup>40</sup> It is possible to imagine a young girl's boasting triumph at deciphering 'with ease' the 'gret letters' of the text, as well as her sympathetic understanding of the description of a painful reading process in which the letters must be individually deciphered and then set together to form words. Yet it is not only letters that the young reader is being asked to decipher. She is also receiving an object lesson in the interpretation of clothing, reading aright the elaborate courtly costume that spells 'Amours' and the simple and unaffected dress of the chaste 'Shamfastnes'. As Andrea Denny-Brown points out, the fashionably dressed body is presented as an open book, and the interpretive skills demanded in this context are facilitated and shaped by the simple 'blacke gowne' of the didactic text.

## Conclusion

The clothing of the early modern book participated in all the social and symbolic economies of the real clothes whose terms it borrowed, indicating status, accessibility, personal and familial links; circulating in networks of sale, patronage, gift and exchange. It participated in the mores of showy display and mimicked the often-flouted sumptuary laws, placing and describing its user, but threatening social categories and distinctions in its commitment to surface appearance and display. Yet the links between books and clothing were more intricate than these straightforward parallels might suggest. Worn on the body, or tricking out the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Sig. A3v.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Sig. A1v.

lineaments of a university education, books became clothing, and at the same time, in their didactic or discursive purpose, taught or prompted readers to apply their hard-earned literary skills to the interpretation of dress.

Books and letters, however, could become not only part of, but entirely subservient to, both dress and fashion. As John Lyly wryly observed: ‘Printers and Taylors are bound chiefly to pray for Gentlemen, the one hath so many fantasies to print, the other such divers fashions to make, that the pressing yron of the one is never out of the fyre, nor the printing presse of the other any tyme lyeth still’.<sup>41</sup> Both books and clothes are part of a system of ‘fashion’ and a burgeoning consumer culture that binds them closely together in the early modern imagination, creating a compelling language of dress and ornament that is at once metaphor and reality. The textual victim of fashion’s fickle nature might even be ripped apart to wrap its textile counterpart, since ‘we commonly see the booke that at Christmas lyeth bound on the Stacioners stall, at Easter to be broken in the Haberdasshers shop’.<sup>42</sup> Dressed up for the marketplace, the material book was not only consumed but destroyed, worn for a season by its reader, then torn apart to pad and wrap new clothes, suffering at violent hands the indignities that John Day imagined for his rescued *Gorboduc*. Yet at the same time, the endless recycling of clothes played an essential part in the youthful British paper trade, driven by the massive expansion in the production of books.<sup>43</sup> Inherited, given as gifts or sold second-hand, clothes, like books, were unpicked, re-cut and re-shaped to form new garments. Eventually, however, as happened also to the vulnerable book, this endless use and re-use took its toll, leaving little more than rags: rags which, collected, pulped and processed, went to form the naked bodies of many more early modern books.

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<sup>41</sup> John Lyly (1579), *Euphues, The Anatomy of Wit*, London: Thomas East for Gabriel Cawood, Sig. A4v. Lyly also links books and clothes in his mocking celebration of the fickleness of both literary and sartorial fashions.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> For a description of this process see D.C. Coleman (1958), *The British Paper Industry, 1495–1860: A Study in Industrial Growth*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

## Chapter Fourteen

# ‘Havying nothing upon hym saving onely his sherte’: Event, Narrative and Material Culture in Early Modern England

Catherine Richardson

This essay investigates the relationship between speech and materiality: the way people talked about material culture within a specific discourse. It examines how deponents in ecclesiastical court cases marshalled descriptions of clothing in relation to the legal questions they were required to answer. The crimes which could be prosecuted in ecclesiastical courts included those of tithe dispute; matrimonial contention; sexual misconduct of all kinds; contests over testamentary issues; and the whole range of slanderous utterances.<sup>1</sup> Between the mid sixteenth and the mid seventeenth centuries, these courts saw an unprecedented increase in business,<sup>2</sup> and their popularity made them central to the maintenance of moral order and the definition of social norms. The reform which they were attempting relied upon the essential premise that it is possible to define human actions clearly in order to compare them against established standards, and thus to draw clear boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Descriptions of material culture are therefore used by deponents to delineate social and moral

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed account of the distinctions between types of cases, see M. Ingram (1987), *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 2–3, and for the position of ecclesiastical justice within the wider legal context pp. 27–9.

<sup>2</sup> J.A. Sharpe (1983), “‘Such disagreement betwix neighbours’: Litigation and Human Relations in Early Modern England”, in John Bossy ed., *Disputes and Settlements, Law and Human Relations in the West*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 168; Ingram (1987), pp. 13–5, sees it beginning after 1570.

categories of action. Clothing forms a key part of this process, but its relation to the body and its connections to consumption and display additionally give deponents access to complex moralised discourses.

This essay therefore shares the general focus of the section on the way material culture is figured, and functions, in words. The depositions evince an interest in the conceptual link between clothing and the body which shows similarities to Andrea Denny Brown and Elizabeth Hallam's material, but here the connection is approached from the perspective of moral propriety - how far and in what contexts it is possible to describe human intimacy. With Helen Smith's work this essay shares an understanding of clothing as a superbly flexible sign: using its materiality metaphorically.

Since Natalie Zemon Davis's study of French pardon tales, *Fiction in the Archives*, historians have been alerted to the relationship between deponents' need to produce convincing stories in court, and their employment of narrative techniques in the construction of their evidence. Davis defines her use of the term fictional as referring to the 'forming, shaping and moulding elements: the crafting of a narrative'.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent work on English ecclesiastical court depositions has exposed the effect which the processes and techniques of the court itself had on the structuring and recording of the evidence. Laura Gowing characterises her source material as 'a mediated, rearranged, and possibly rewritten version of the real words [the court officials] heard', but one which could at the same time be individualised and original.<sup>4</sup>

Depositions in these courts move between oral and literate cultures in interesting ways. Aware of the kind of words which are likely to instigate legal proceedings, deponents witnessing events discussed the words which they heard and sometimes wrote them down at a later stage. In court, they were asked a series of questions about what they heard and saw, in response to which they related a spoken narrative. The historian, however, is left with the official written record of that narrative, framed according to the rarely-recorded original questions (interrogatories) shaped by interjections from court officials trying to elicit evidence the deponents have failed to give, and finally translated from everyday speech into a suitable legal form. The descriptions of material culture persist through all these processes of translation because they have significance in both popular and legal discourses.

The developing acknowledgement of the crafting of depositions to produce evidence which is meaningful to both deponent and court demands that attention is

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<sup>3</sup> N.Z. Davis (1987), *Fiction in the Archives*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Gowing (1996), *Domestic Dangers, Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 47.



paid to the formal aspects of the language in which the evidence is recorded, and this makes a detailed analysis of their structure essential. Theories about narrative form make it possible to investigate the *significance* of each element of the evidence presented, and the role of information about material culture within the deposition as a whole. Deponents at first glance appear to present unmediated evidence of situations and events. If, however, as Hayden White argues, 'Every narrative, however seemingly 'full', is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out',<sup>5</sup> then the criteria for selection must be a perceived relevance, both to the question asked and to the deponent's understanding of the *meaning* of what happened. The depositions offer a consensus of social knowledge and legal proof, one in which the *choice* of which pieces of the former might constitute the latter is made firstly by the deponent who decides what it is appropriate to say, and secondly by the clerk who decides what it would be useful to record.

White argues that we have, in our contemporary accounts of the past, 'a notion of reality in which 'the true' is identified with 'the real' only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity'.<sup>6</sup> Those events which are presented in narrative form are perceived to be true because they appear 'real'. Their status as things which 'really happened' is achieved through the pre-eminence of narrative as the supremely mimetic form for the representation of experience. The ordering of narrative elements which deponents offer organises their memories of events into a suitable form: narrative becomes the form of *truth*. But narrative is also the form of *reality* in these cases because of its capacity for illusion. All the elements employed in these narratives are crucial to this process as they create a mental image which increases the plausibility of the actions by giving them a believable, concrete context. Just as the status of the case is affected by the telling of a believable story, so the status of the deponent is increased by the effectiveness of their employment of narrative elements. As the mimetic qualities of their representation work to deny other interpretations of the essential facts of the case, so the witness appears more credible.

Those items of information which are included in the deposition achieve a pertinence and a significance by default. Barthes suggests that, 'a narrative is never made up of anything other than functions: in differing degrees, everything in it signifies. This is not a matter of art (on the part of the narrator), but of structure; in

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<sup>5</sup> Hayden White (1987), *The Content of the Form, Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> White (1987), p. 6.

the realm of discourse, what is noted is by definition notable.<sup>7</sup> In a courtroom where the evidence is shaped by the need to provide a record of pertinent information this is almost self-evidently true. The pressures of time and legal protocol clearly preclude the recording of irrelevance, and this has the effect of giving all details of the record a degree of parity of significance. This applies to material culture in interesting ways. It is the material context for human events which ties them down, which gives them the illusory permanence of a location. The time and place at which an event took place, those present, their spatial position in relation to one another, details of their appearance and of the room in which they were gathered: these are the elements of the deposition narrative which suggest factuality - the detailed reconstruction of 'total recall'.

In these cases of personal misdemeanour, courts were plagued by the perennial problem of making legal proof out of the personal experience and communal knowledge of small communities where everyone knows everyone else's business very well. Some types of case were more problematic than others in this respect. Taking one book of depositions at random, deponents are asked to offer 'proof' of their interpretation of questions which seem difficult to answer definitively. The following examples suggest the significance of material proof: 'how do you know that the children are his daughters?; to which the answer is 'because he kept them and called them so';<sup>8</sup> 'how do you know there was once a house on a given spot'; to which the answer is that 'there is a walnut tree and diverse shards of tile now remaining.'<sup>9</sup> The latter question demands and receives a much more objective form of proof than the former - evidence of the material presence of something which is now absent. The stock answer to questions about knowledge: 'that there is common fame blown thereof',<sup>10</sup> linked as it is to a general sense of public opinion, provides little legal satisfaction. In marriage and adultery cases in particular, deponents' knowledge is in reality likely to revolve around shady impressions about the visceral areas of human interaction: touches, glances, suspicions. The kinds of question dealt with below, those of testamentary fraud, breach of the promise of marriage and sexual incontinence and adultery, have therefore been chosen for the increasing difficulty of obtaining objective proof. Meaning is unstable as it relies upon subjective opinions about human relationships, and it is here that clothing can offer particularly pertinent evidence.

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<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes (1977), 'Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London: Fontana, p.89.

<sup>8</sup> CCA: PRC 39/9 f. 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 24v.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 79.

## Testamentary Dispute

John Abery came to the court in Canterbury to depose in a testamentary case in 1542. The case concerned the validity of the will of Thomas Sutchnie, and the interrogatory which produced the following answer appears to have asked what he knew about the events surrounding the making of Sutchnie's will. His answer is essentially a model of the simplest kind of narrative description of the legally-key elements of an event:

...the Monday at afternoon about three of the clock next after the assention day last past this deponent was present in Nethersole's house, aforesaid, with Forstall, and one Cassyr, and Nethersole, and no more, in the hall of the same house, where and when Thomas Sutchnie setting upon a stool by the fire in a russett cote with other clothers, of his own free will desired this deponent to read his testament which Forstall had written before. Whereupon this deponent setting upon a formes end on the right hand of the testator did read the same testament.<sup>11</sup>

Abery offers the court a description which insists upon the inseparability of event and context. He does not give details of the will, its content or the way in which it was read. Instead he offers an image, one which fixes the will-reading within a specific corner of a particular room on a given occasion. Moving from the time, to the location, to the physical position of those present, Abery proves that the event took place by recalling its material details. Implicit in this type of representation of events is the notion that the image was retained because of the significance of the occasion, and is therefore available in the memory to be produced as proof of the veracity of the actions contained within it.

This is the simplest form of narrative because it is inseparable from the court's concerns with the physical and temporal location of events as a proof of their occurrence. It is also the safest form of description for the deponent, who is able baldly to state his presence (and with it the fact that the will was indeed read) without giving any details of his practice in respect of the testament which might be open to interpretation. We might ask, in that case, why he adds the detail of the testator's clothing, as it is linked to neither time nor place nor the event of will-making?

The russet coat offers an authenticating detail of memory. By adding it, Abery transforms his legally satisfying statement of the fact that the will was read into a narrative image of the *way* it happened. This verbal image-making is powerful

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<sup>11</sup> CCA: X.10.2, f. 43v, 1542.

evidence of his presence, substantiating memory and therefore the truth of his tale. If we examine the evidence of clothing which Abery provides, it is possible to see just how powerful an illusion his simple narrative creates. He describes the testator as wearing a ‘russett cote with other clothers’, which purports to give the court an image of Suchnie as he heard his will read to the men seated in the hall. A russett coat, however, is one of the least specific items of clothing he could have described: almost a uniform of the less-than-wealthy, it is an item which was unlikely to strike anyone as anything other than ordinary, almost generic.

Clothing is tied up with identity and recognition because it is such a fundamental part of the visual image of the individual within the community - one of the essential tools of social recognition, and more easily quantifiable and demonstrable than, for instance, their gait.<sup>12</sup> Wills and inventories suggest that the lower down the social scale the cases reach, the less likely it would be that those being described would own more than one outfit of working clothes and one of ‘holiday’ clothes. What we are seeing in this and similar narratives is most likely to be the most common, perhaps ‘typical’, mode of dress for this person or at least this kind of person, and one which, above all, the court would not be surprised to find them wearing. There is an unrecoverable interrelationship between plausibility and memory here, but it is one which does not detract from the mimetic *effectiveness* of the detail.

Clothing is part of the authenticating process which transforms memory into the narrative form of a memorially-constructed event then, but it also has more subtle and complex roles to play. In addition to strengthening the truth-value of the narrative by making it more convincing, this mimetic detail also has the capacity to comment directly on the wider context of the deposition: it forms an answer to an implicit question about the *validity*, as opposed to the mere existence, of Suchnie’s will. The subtle addition of the detail of the clothing defends Abery’s reading of the significance of the event for judging testamentary legality. Testamentary disputes revolve around a nexus of concerns about correct practice and proper

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<sup>12</sup> See for instance CCA: PRC 39/8, where the court tries to establish the value of some articles of clothing. The couple in question were married for 3 years, ‘during which time this deponent was almost continually conversant and acquainted with the said Walter Marshall and his said wife and did almost daily see and perceive what apparel the said Marshalls wife did use and wear’. She believes she didn’t wear the cassock ‘of a puke colour layed with fringe and lace’, ‘during her life above 5 or 6 times at the most, but the kirtle she did more comonly and usually wear’. The woman’s father says that his daughter did not wear the cassock more than four or five times, ‘for if she had worn it this dept being her father and she dwelling very near to him must as he supposeth see it worn’ ff. 162–3.

process. The will must be written at the dictation of the testator, and then read back to them in public and confirmed as a true record of their wishes. At all stages in this process, the connection between the spoken and the written form of 'will' must be maintained within the context of the 'sound mind' of the testator - his (or less frequently her) ability to *know* his own will is a prerequisite for all of these processes. It is not immediately clear what the specific concerns were in this case, but Abery is careful to use narrative elements whose flexibility allows him to address the whole range of possible anxieties in a tangential way. The mention of the russet coat makes a statement about the condition of Thomas Sutchnie which is *related* to the proof of sound mind. He is up and dressed; still a part of the social world which demands appropriate outer attire in the presence of friends and neighbours. The description of his dress defines the event as one in which all participated equally and as equals, rather than one characterised by the hasty ministrations of charity to a dying man.

The description of clothing here employs and exploits a concept of social interaction, for which it is necessary, and which it therefore comes to symbolise. Soundness of mind is very hard to 'prove' as it is an impression gained through tiny signs and in relation to past experience of the person concerned. In some cases, the question is posed to deponents as a specific interrogatory, and when this is the case it is usually addressed by stating that the testator answered all the questions which were put to him directly, or recognised all those present and called them by their names. The courts seem prepared to accept the physical state of the testator, the impression that he is an active part of the scene as described, as persuasive implicit evidence on this point, however, and the status of clothes as defining elements of human interaction maps onto their place within the narrative of the events in question.

Descriptions of material culture are useful here precisely because they give deponents access to the fabric of daily life - they materialise the ordinary, the everyday, through the identification, for instance, of rooms and seating positions. Details of clothing form a specific category within this evidence, as they make it possible to describe the attitudes and approach of the individuals involved in the situation - their own perception of the event implied by the way they have dressed themselves for it.

### **Breach of Promise**

The use of clothing as a gauge of the character of social interaction is also apparent in cases which investigate breakdowns in marriage negotiations. These cases are dependent upon deponents' ability to reconstruct the developing nature of a

couples' relationship in order to prove that events have advanced to a point where they were legally bound to end in a wedding. In theory, this should merely be a case of proving that a 'hand-fasting' or formal engagement had taken place, but in practice the court was also interested in how the couple behaved towards one another (whether there was mutual affection); whether gifts and tokens had been given and accepted (a very useful way of *firmly* establishing the duration of the relationship and separating it from friendship or general social interaction); and the extent of preparations for a marriage ceremony itself.<sup>13</sup>

The tokens given between couples as a part of the courtship process offered a much more satisfyingly tangible proof of the movement towards marriage than the description of a 'common fame' of a relationship.<sup>14</sup> However, clothing's unique relationship with the body makes it a particularly significant kind of token, according to its capacity to carry intimate meanings in a very public way. Giving a hat as a symbol of commitment is clearly different to giving a basket of strawberries or a chamber pot, irrespective of the parity or disparity of their value.<sup>15</sup> Such gifts were often given in public, but clothing would additionally be worn on subsequent occasions, thereby broadcasting the acceptance of the gift and all that it symbolised. The small amounts of clothing which people of low social status actually owned would make any changes in their appearance all the more noticeable. Mathew Rayner's relationship with Elizabeth Chamber, for instance, was cemented through the gift of jewellery, and the deponent notes its capacity to broadcast their mutual affection on the body: he 'hath a gold ring of the said Elizabeth which he this deponent did see Mathew yesterday weare'.<sup>16</sup> Giving and receiving an object which affects the way another person is seen, their image within the community, is both a curiously intimate and a very decisive gesture of involvement, as clothing gifts uniquely negotiate the distance between individual emotion and the consolidation of shared meanings.

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<sup>13</sup> Ingram (1987) Chapters 4 & 6 esp. pp. 197–8; O'Hara, Diana (2000), *Courtship and constraint: rethinking the making of marriage in Tudor England*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> For discussion of these tokens as a whole see O'Hara (2000), Chapter 2. Of the 301 cases she studied, 57% made reference to tokens, one third of which were of clothing, making it the second largest category after money. O'Hara draws out many subtle threads of the symbolism of these items, but she is surprisingly reticent about the specific function of items of clothing as diverse as a silken point and a worsted nether bodice.

<sup>15</sup> See the table of goods given, O'Hara (2000), pp. 87–91.

<sup>16</sup> CCA: X.10.8 f. 120, 1561.

Following on temporally from the cumulative structure of gift giving, the chain of events leading up to the marriage ceremony itself also used this facility of clothing, as a particular kind of advertisement of intent. Several cases describe the purchase of the wedding apparel, and they characterise it as an event in which family and friends participate. Godly Knowler and Stephen Hannyng, for instance, take a party of friends to Mr Rose's shop in Canterbury 'to bye woollen cloth for to make the said Godly Knowler a cassock and a pettycote...[and]... the same tyme Mr Rose or his servant delivered certen woollen cloth unto Stephen Hannyng and entered the price into the shop book'.<sup>17</sup> The wish of the couples to have friends and family present to aid in decision making and to share excitement and anticipation identifies such purchases as semi-ritualised occasions considered by all those present to be a significant step on the road to marriage. There are important economic considerations too, evinced by the court's interest in the value of the purchases. The group of interested parties ensure that the fabric is fitting for the bride - appropriate in relation to other more explicitly financial settlements that may have been made in the context of the marriage negotiations.

Purchases of wedding apparel are made in order to dress the bride suitably: in a way which is fitting for and indicative of her new husband's social status; and in new clothes, ones which stress her altered state from maid to wife, from potential partner to another man's possession. Marriage must have been one of the few times in the life of a woman of low to middling status when she had the chance to choose, with consultation, a whole outfit to be made especially for her. These clothes are a part of the process of making a woman unique to one man then, but they also contribute to the fashioning of a 'wifely' identity. Their purchase offers an opportunity to construct a model of appropriate behaviour in cloth. Conduct literature repeatedly stressed the relationship between dress and proper wifely behaviour, linking it to the definition of personal and household honesty, and to the expression of chastity and obedience.<sup>18</sup> The purchase of wedding apparel must

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<sup>17</sup> CCA: X.10.16, f. 296, 1576.

<sup>18</sup> Dod and Cleaver, for instance, suggest that the duty of a wife towards her husband is threefold, 'First, that shee reuerence her husband. Secondly, that she submit her selfe, and bee obedient vnto him. And lastly, that she doo not weare gorgeous apparel, beyond her degree and place, but her attire must bee comely and sober, according to her calling.' p. 218, *A godlie forme of householde government...*, London: Printed by Felix Kingston, for Thomas Man, 1598. The Homily of the State of Matrimony also reminds listeners of Saint Paul's injunction to a wife that, in addition to covering her head, 'all other of her raiments should express both shamefastness and sobriety', p. 541, *Certain Homilies Appointed to be*

have provided a context for consideration of the way cloth and decoration define the combination of status and morality.

The purchase of wedding apparel is used in these cases to show a movement across a conceptual gulf. Along with her relocation in a different house and family comes a reclothing, a new identity as one half of a partnership. Deponents use changes in individuals' clothing as a way of investigating transformed relationships, and they are sensitive to the symbolic significance of both the acceptance of gifts and the purchase of fabric. Having given Mathew Rayner the ring which everyone saw him wearing, Elizabeth Chamber tries to represent her participation in the next set of socially defining practices as a consequence of family duress, and in doing so she underlines her awareness of their significance: 'she confessith that measure was taken her of wedding garments, which measure she suffered to be taken for feare of her father and mother's displeasure'.<sup>19</sup> She has passed from the acceptance of garment tokens into a participation in the ceremonial relationship between clothing and marriage.

Rather than trying to recreate a sense of habitual behaviour, as was the case in testamentary disputes, clothes here represent extraordinary images of altered identity. Within their ceremonial power, their capacity to mark changes in human states, is an acknowledgement of their transformative abilities: they are the form of a new identity, embodying the change to married life in their very newness, and the ideals of wifely honesty in their distinction from previously-owned types of apparel. There is a conflation of the legal boundaries which the court is trying to maintain (between a liaison and a commitment) and the altered identity which new clothing offers. The clarity of material change to the bodily image is a symbol whose social and legal significances underline and reinforce one another.

### **Sexual Incontinence**

The final category of misconduct considered here is that of sexual incontinence, an area of human behaviour in which direct proof is very hard to offer. Clothing is used by deponents as a way of separating out different types of social interaction by working against the perceived types of activity which might offer grounds for denial such as a convenient rest, for instance. Examples include Agnes Butterwick, found with a male friend from Ashford, 'the man in his shirt and she in her smock';

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*Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory*, London: S.P.C.K (1851).

<sup>19</sup> CCA: X.10.8, f. 121v, 1562.



a certain Raulfe and Whiter, found, 'the said Raulfe havyng nothing upon hym saving onely his sherte and his nightcapp',<sup>20</sup> and Selherst and the widow Joan Port, discovered by his brother Christopher, 'she lying in her smock and he in a sleveles trusse'.<sup>21</sup> These couples are alone together, but it is their state of undress which defines an *event*: they are not on their way elsewhere and others are not about to join them. Because their relationship has progressed to a more intimate stage, they have removed the clothes which demonstrate their status and mediate relations between them in a social context.

As has been true for all the different kinds of case considered here then, the nature of human interaction is accurately defined through the identification of what the parties wore and how they wore it. Whereas the marriage cases relied upon clothing's capacity to broadcast personal interaction in public, however, these depositions attempt to identify a private action whose nature should be defined by the absence of other parties, the lack of audience. Here, the connection between the reputation of the deponent and the evidence they give is exceptionally, painfully, fraught and narratives must be constructed with enormous care. First, deponents must implicitly explain their presence at the event without giving the impression that they watched rather than intervening to stop it. This kind of passive involvement was frowned upon by the courts.<sup>22</sup> The giving of evidence to an extent presupposes a physical act of witness, and in most types of case such testimony is highly prized: it is this primacy of personal presence which grants the realistic descriptions of the scene-as-witnessed their value. However, giving a clear picture which embeds the action firmly in the context of a shared space, as happened in John Abery's testamentary deposition, is clearly not advisable in these cases. Second, witnesses must offer proof and explication without describing events to which it would be unseemly for them to give verbal form in the formal context of the court. As a mimetic portrayal of the scene and a detailed description of the actions are both highly undesirable, the remaining strategy seems to be a narrative which does not aim at mimesis, and only offers a partial portrayal of the event which deponents have witnessed.

The tension of the threat to reputation which such cases involve is demonstrated in the almost palpable sense of the intimacy of physical proximity in the testimony of Joanna Fisher, a young household servant. Asked to provide proof of her mistress's infidelity, she relates the following tale: 'her maister being then

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<sup>20</sup> CCA: X.10.4, f. 52v, 1549.

<sup>21</sup> CCA: X.10.6, f. 234, 1558.

<sup>22</sup> The spatial connection between deponent and event is explored in more detail in my *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy*, forthcoming, Manchester University Press.

from home', she says she heard 'hyr Dame, lyenge in the same chamber, go downe. And after warde aboute mydnight in the same night she dyd heare a man pullinge of[f] hys hose at hyr dames bedde in the same chamber, who she saith was the said Stephen Raye'.<sup>23</sup> This works as legal proof because Joanna is taken to 'know' it is Raye because he has been there before, and to 'know' what he is doing because the sound is one with which she is familiar, making the scene just as clear to her as if she had been able to see him. The disparity between hearing and seeing is permitted partly because evidence in such a case is hard to come by, and partly because it makes it possible for Joanna to tell a story which avoids impropriety. Presumably she hears much more than the sliding off of a pair of stockings, but her modesty prevents her from revealing it. Instead she presents a euphemistic metonym for the act to which she has been a partial witness.

Clothing therefore offers a way of saying more than it is possible to disclose verbally. The sensitivity of its connection to real bodies is almost visceral in Joanna's narrative, and her story employs the sensuousness of the sound as a way into the physicality of sexual pleasure, a gesture towards material presence which bodies forth Stephen Ray, naked in the court's imagination through the verbal removal of his lower garments.

Reading this evidence for metonymic presentation back into the other descriptions of partly-dressed couples it is clear that, just as intercourse is transmuted into the removal of garments, so it is actually nakedness which is being described in the identification of underclothes. The presence of these *single* garments stands for their absence on other parts of the body. This resistance to displaying the body verbally suggests the complex morality of the discourse in which clothing is involved in the courts. By providing euphemisms for bodily revelation and sexual acts, deponents actually make their stories more credible: they are able to insist upon immorality through their resistance to describing events in more detail. Their substitution of a description of clothing declares their relatively superior morality through the intentional tangentiality of its pertinence. Descriptions of material culture indicate an end-point of the verbal in a narrative situation governed by propriety.

Many of the other papers in this volume have suggested the ways in which clothes themselves create social groups by making visual distinctions: between men and women, rich and poor, chaste and immoral. Similarly how they are worn, the time, place and manner of their connection to the human body, signals the nature of social interaction. But it is in the representation of the very different circumstances of sexual immorality that clothing reaches its most complex

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<sup>23</sup> CCA: X.10.7 f. 318, 1567.

narrative function, carrying the greatest weight of legal information. There is a reversal of function here, as sexual liaisons have the least use for clothing - the ultimate human intimacy steps beyond the negotiation of social identity to a private, emotional contact, in which undressing symbolises the primacy of the physical over the social. In the court, this hierarchy of significance of the material of social distinction (less important the more private the action becomes) is reversed. Clothing offers a vocabulary of moral propriety in which its physical proximity to the flesh is translated into the conceptual nearness of analogy and euphemism. 'Touching' takes on its additional early modern meaning of 'treating' in the sense of 'concerning' or 'mentioning',<sup>24</sup> as the verbal description of the removal of dress fabricates the mental image of what is revealed. Naked bodies are appropriately reclothed through language, and vulnerable reputations are covered in descriptions of the material.

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<sup>24</sup> OED Prep no. 2: 'In reference or relation to; as to, respecting, regarding; in the way of mentioning or treating of; concerning, about.'

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## Chapter Fifteen

# Rips and Slits: The Torn Garment and the Medieval Self

Andrea Denny-Brown

Robes made of scredes,  
Grisely othes and grete medes,  
Flaterers and false dedes,  
Has schent Englund.<sup>1</sup>

The late medieval fashion for ‘shredded’ attire uniquely captured the English imagination. Fashionable men and women displayed themselves in clothing whose edges and surfaces were disrupted in various ways, from slashed openings or slits in the sides, sleeves, leggings, and skirts of garments, to decorative incisions, and jagged or dagged sleeves, hats, scarves, and hems. This type of cutting, slitting, and perforation of garments emerged as early as the twelfth century and grew more elaborate until the mid-seventeenth.<sup>2</sup> The discourse around the clothing style,

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous single stanza thought to be from the fifteenth century, from MS Corpus Christi College Oxford 274 f. 155. See Thomas Wright ed. (1861), ‘Epigrams on the Public Extravagance’, in *Political Poems and Songs* II, London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> In England, garments slitted and laced at the sides appeared in the twelfth century, and some dagging appeared in the thirteenth century, but the heightened use of slashing and dagging grew to popularity in the mid fourteenth century. See Herbert Norris (1999), *Medieval Costume and Fashion*, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, pp. 82–3; Stella Mary Newington (1999), *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, Rochester, New York: Boydell Press, pp. 5, 9–13, 103; Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane (1997), *Dress in the Middle Ages*, trans. Caroline Beamish, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 69, 79, 90; Joachim Bumke (2000), *Courtly Culture*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, New York: The Overlook Press, p. 146. On regulatory responses to these fashions, see Alan Hunt (1996), *Governance of the Consuming Passions*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, pp. 46, 250, 353. For useful

however, seems to have intensified in the course of the virtual revolution of European dress that emerged in and around the 1340s. In this period the rounded, loose, toga-inspired, less emphatically-gendered garments that had been worn for centuries suddenly became tighter and tailored, with fitted sleeves and torsos, conspicuous hip belts and accessories, elongated limbs and pointed hats, dramatically-shortened doublets for men, and finally, the aforementioned penchant for slitted and slashed extremities.<sup>3</sup> In response to those changes, chroniclers condemned clothing for being ‘dagged & ket, & on every side desslatered’ [slashed and cut, and on every side slitted]; sumptuary legislation regulated ‘slashings, jagged edges or fripperies’ according to gender and social status; and secular literature reported the nuances of ‘cutted,’ ‘torn’ and ‘toslytered’ garments.<sup>4</sup>

This discourse was part of a much larger moralizing rhetoric meant to counter the dramatic changes in attire and sartorial self-presentation in this period. Such rhetoric was common in sumptuary laws, sermons, conduct books, and satirical works, and emerged as a particularly prevalent attempt at social control in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as recent studies have suggested, descriptions of clothing also helped to construct a type of sartorial consciousness, one that, in addition to structuring power relations, staged vestimentary self-definition in relation to a much larger network of cultural images and associations.<sup>6</sup>

illustrations see John Peacock (1994), *Costume 1066–1990s*, London: Thames and Hudson. I group these fashions together not necessarily because of their relation in medieval clothing composition, but because of their identification in the discourses of the day.

<sup>3</sup> These changes generally began with courtly circles, but eventually permeated all levels of society, including that of the peasants. Christopher Dyer (1990), *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 175–77.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich W.D. Brie ed. (1908), *The Brut, or the Chronicles of England*, EETS 136, London: Oxford University Press pp. 296–7. This text is based on similar complaints in the *Chronica Johannis de Reading et anonymi Cantuariensis*, 1346–1367, ed. James Tait, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1914, pp. 88–9. For regulation of this fashion, see ‘A Statute Concerning Diet and Apparel’, 37 Edward III, 1383, *Statutes of the Realm*, London: Dawsons, 1963, I. pp. 380–81.

<sup>5</sup> Claire Sponsler (1997), *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. xi–23, and (1992), ‘Narrating the Social Order: Medieval Clothing Laws’, *CLIO* 21, 265–83; John Scattergood (1987), ‘Fashion and Morality in the Late Middle Ages,’ in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, Suffolk: Boydell Press. For an overview of European dress, see Diane Owen Hughes (1992), ‘Regulating Women’s Fashion’ in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber ed., *A History of Women*, Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, pp. 138–58.

<sup>6</sup> For an understanding of clothing descriptions in relation to courtly culture and identity, for example, see Susan Crane (2002), *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity*

My aim, in examining a range of medieval English discourses about cut and slashed garments, is thus twofold: first, I will explore how the discourse of cut clothing seems to emphasize and problematize new processes of garment-making in this period. Second, I will explore the way these discourses imagine sartorial self-fashioning within a greater iconographical heritage, one in which the torn or cut garment figures prominently in ideologies of corporeal integrity and fragmentation, of social and spiritual community and exile, and of aestheticized and sexualized violence against the body. Like the other essays in this section, my underlying interest concerns the material and intellectual exchanges involved in identity construction and representation. Although my work concerns the pre-modern rather than the early modern self, I believe one can see here the seeds of what Catherine Richardson refers to in her introduction as ‘narrative strategies for translating lived experience’: in this case, specifically, an impulse to give voice to new modes of making, wearing, and understanding clothing.

At its most basic, the late medieval English fashion vocabulary belies a certain interest in the *cutting* of cloth or clothing. For example, borrowed from Old French *tailleur*, (‘to cut’) were the words *taille*, meaning in Middle English either a ‘slash, [or] cut’ in general or ‘a style, fashion, manner in which cloth is cut’ in particular, and the related *taillour*, or tailor.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the phrase ‘cutted clothes’ could refer either to specific styles - such as the new short cut of male jackets or the slitting and dagging of garments - or it could be used more generally to describe the new mode of fashions or a scantily-dressed person wearing such clothing.<sup>8</sup> While Chaucer’s Parson, for instance, refers to the ‘horrible disordinat scantnesse of clothyng,’ in laymen who wear ‘kuttet sloppes or haynselyns’ [‘cut coats or short jackets’], contemporary poems advocating reform depict ‘cutted’ garments as symbols of the vanity, greed, and corruption among the religious.<sup>9</sup> Fifteenth-century conduct books similarly single out for condemnation ‘clothis ... cutted on the buttoke even about the rompe,’ and go so far as to identify men who wear

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*During the Hundred Years War*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; and E. Jane Burns (2002), *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Taille’; ‘taillour.’ *MED*, ed. Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn, John Reidy, and Robert E. Lewis, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952–2001.

<sup>8</sup> *MED*, ‘cutten,’ v. 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Parson’s Tale* 421. All citations of Chaucer are from Larry D. Benson ed. (1987), *Riverside Chaucer*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. W. W. Skeat ed. (1866), *Peres the Ploughmans Crede*, EETS 30, London: N. Trübner, 11.296; ‘The Complaint of the Ploughman,’ Wright I.2.332.

slashed and slitted clothes as '[c]uttid galautes'.<sup>10</sup> Such language accentuates the medieval perception that clothing was essentially inseparable from the body it dressed. The expressions 'cut clothing' and 'cut gallants' for instance, not only read as if the garments had been cut or slashed while *on* the wearers' bodies, but suggest a certain aesthetic of fragmentation: the fashionable body 'cut' into pieces, the material rent that is both the source and the symbol of the moral rift.

Unlike today, people of the medieval world were generally quite aware of how and by whom their clothes were made,<sup>11</sup> and thus would most likely also have been aware that the new fashions not only presented the body in a newly fragmented way - arms, torso, and lower body all separated as distinctly-shaped units, arguably for the first time in western secular attire - but that they were literally *made* from newly and uniquely cut fragments of fabric. In contrast to the clothes preceding this period, which generally were made of large rectangular pieces of cloth simply sewn, draped, and gathered, a process which wasted as little cloth as possible and ensured that the garment could be reused many times and many generations over, the new tailored fashions of the fourteenth century were 'cut to fit'.<sup>12</sup> That is, they were made from multiple smaller and precisely-shaped cuts of cloth, a process which created a more fitted garment but also wasted more cloth and was much less functional as a second-hand garment.<sup>13</sup> Sleeves were no longer T-shaped and cut together with the torso of the garment, for example, but were made separately, rounded at the top and then set into small, high armholes.<sup>14</sup> The male doublet, one of the most dramatic innovations of the period, was also cut to fit from several

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<sup>10</sup> Charlotte D'Evelyn ed. (1935), *Peter Idley's Instructions to His Son*, London: Oxford University Press, 2.B.44; John Russell (1868), *Book of Carving and Nurture. Early English Meals and Manners*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS 32, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 20.305. John Harding's *Chronicle* further attests both to the terminology and the lasting predominance of the fashion, stating that '[c]ut werke was greate both in court and tounes, / Bothe in mennes hoddis and also in their gounes.', H. Ellis ed. (1812), *The Chronicle of John Hardyng*, London: F.C. and J. Rivington, cxcii.

<sup>11</sup> Although the processes of acquiring clothing varied according to social class and location, in general cloth needed to be purchased first, and then taken to the tailor or doublet maker to be cut and sewn into a specific garment. The exception is second-hand clothes, although these too were often re-cut and sewn by the local tailor. Pipponier and Mane (1997), pp. 27–36.

<sup>12</sup> Newington (1999), p. 3; Crane (2002), pp. 13–14.

<sup>13</sup> Hughes (1992), pp. 141–2.

<sup>14</sup> Newington (1999), p. 3.



pieces of cloth.<sup>15</sup> Women's skirts and male hose were separated from the torso by the conspicuous hip-belts adorned with accessories such as hanging purses and knives. And finally, additional cuts in the form of slits, slashes, and perforations elaborated and enhanced the new shape of the garments (in the case of dagged hems and edges of capes, hoods, and sleeves), revealed luxurious undergarments, linings, or bare skin beneath (in the case of slashed sleeves and torsos, slits in male skirts and gowns, and in women's side-less gowns), and created access to inner pockets and the belt of the under-tunic (as in women's slit pockets).

The discourse of 'cut clothing' thus in many ways embodies the intricacies of late medieval clothing culture, merging as it does the material processes of a garment's construction with its appearance and perceived morality, and hence revealing the fascinating multivocality of pre-modern fashion vocabularies. In the fifteenth-century epigraph to this article, for example, the fashion for slitted and slashed garments is used to invoke the greater cultural disorder evident in contemporary England. Typical of the sensational and nationalist language used by moralists in the medieval period, here 'robes made of shreds' manifest materially the breakdown of truth and order evident in people's deceitful and destructive conduct (consisting, in this poem, of the often-targeted 'horrible oaths', 'great rewards', 'flatterers', and 'false deeds'). Yet arguably the most powerful condemnation of the fashion comes from the alliterating onomatopoeia between the sartorial *screded* and the abruptly *schent* (harmed, ruined, disgraced) England, which ensures that the listeners *hear* the violent tearing and cutting that their ornamentally-slashed garments ostensibly perform. The fashionable body thus effectively becomes an active weapon of destruction.

In the following sections of this article I will explore more specific examples of the late medieval representation of slitted and slashed garments, with an eye toward how these depictions create a perception of contemporary fashions as inherently disruptive in *how* they are made, as well as their aesthetic and social relevance. Aiding me in this discussion is my understanding of the transgressiveness of what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has termed a culture's 'acts of cutting'. These 'acts of cutting', which include plowing, weaving, and circumcision, as well as killing and sacrifice, figure prominently in what Bourdieu calls the 'unofficial' knowledge and practices of the *habitus*, or the 'minor rites'

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<sup>15</sup> This innovation underscores the association between secular and knightly attire in this period, as plate armour was similarly made from distinct, individually-shaped pieces of mail rather than the draped chain mail garments of former centuries. Piponnier and Mane (1997), pp. 61–5; Anne Hollander (1994), *Sex and Suits*, New York: Kodansha, pp. 40–5.

that both subvert and accompany a culture's dominant, normalizing discourses.<sup>16</sup> According to Bourdieu, these acts of cutting indicate an 'unnatural division' of order that transgresses sacred limits (212–13). Moreover, as part of culture's unofficial knowledge, they are often associated with the 'ambivalent figures' of a society (in Bourdieu's examples, blacksmiths and old women [200–01,213]). As I will show in my subsequent discussion, late medieval depictions of sartorial rips and slits construct a series of similar associations involving the manifold transgressions of cutting and of those who wear 'cut' clothing. In this way the slitted and slashed garment speaks to a much larger symbolism in which the fashionable body works as a point of intersection for a collection of greater cultural movements and questions.

### Dagges and Daggers

Medieval fashion historians seldom agree about the aesthetic and material influences on slitted and slashed garments.<sup>17</sup> One constant, however, seems to be its perceived link to knightly attire. This connection manifests itself on several levels, as can be seen by the multifarious uses of the term *dagge*. This popular fourteenth-century fashion for ornamental strips of cloth cut into the hems and sleeves of garments was not only etymologically connected to a knight's dagger (Middle English *dagges* relates to the Old French *dague*, dagger), but was also inextricably linked to the weapon in shape and construction.<sup>18</sup> *Dagges* could denote both the knife-like points on the edges of garments and the incisions that made the points; the verb *daggen*, likewise, could describe both the process of ornamenting garments with *dagges* and the action of 'piercing with a pointed weapon'.<sup>19</sup> Occasionally *dagge* was used to identify the dagger itself rather than the dagger-like decoration.<sup>20</sup>

Slashed and dagged clothing was part of the greater European aesthetic in the fourteenth century in which lay attire took on the virile look and form-enhancing

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<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu (1980), *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 200–1. According to Bourdieu, 'the *habitus* - embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product', p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> See n.2 above.

<sup>18</sup> *MED*, 'dagge,' n.1.

<sup>19</sup> *MED*, 'dagge,' v.2.

<sup>20</sup> *MED*, 'dagge,' n.2.

sharpness of innovative knightly plate armour.<sup>21</sup> As Stella Mary Newton puts it, fashionable clothing was literally ‘punctuated by decorative accents produced by pointed daggers, the sharp metal points of laces and conspicuous buckles’.<sup>22</sup> The sharp pointed knives and daggers worn in the belts of most fashionable types in this period (men, women, knightly, lay, and religious) were a common target themselves in late medieval satires of the fashionable, in part due to their role in the sartorial emphasis and enhancement of the male sexual anatomy.<sup>23</sup> Yet they maintained their association with violence: a dagger was inherently known as the instrument of the kill; it was alternately called a *misericorde* because it was ‘used to inflict the ‘mercy stroke’ and deprive a wounded antagonist of life’.<sup>24</sup> Although aesthetically the sharp extended points of the sartorial *dagges* at the edges of garments complemented (and were complemented by) these ornamental daggers, inspiring the recurrent complaint that the fashionable were ‘more like to tormenters and devils in their clothing ... than to men’,<sup>25</sup> the discourses around the fashion often focussed more intensely not on the protruding sartorial points, but on the implied violent cutting and slicing of the garments.

For example, when Chaucer’s Parson, the exemplar of medieval sumptuary outrage, complains vehemently that contemporary fashions have ‘so much pownsonynge of chisels to maken holes, so much daggyng of sheres’ [‘so much punching with blades to make holes, so much slitting with shears’, 417], he clearly emphasizes the violent and repetitive puncturing and slicing of the garments with sharp metal blades. Though his ostensible purpose is to decry the shredded clothing as ‘wast of clooth in vanitee’ (416), his vivid description of the literal penetration of the clothing by various types of artisans’ knives suggests a striking parallel narrative to the imagery of the knife-like ornament of the *dagges* themselves. In

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<sup>21</sup> Hollander (1994), pp. 40–5; Piponnier and Mane (1997), pp. 61–70.

<sup>22</sup> Newington (1999), p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Codpieces and *poulaines*, long pointed shoes stuffed to stand erect, are other examples of the erotic focus of male dress in this period. See Jacqueline Murray (1996), ‘Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages,’ in Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage eds, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, New York: Garland Publishing, pp. 133–34. On women wearing daggers, see G.H. Martin ed. (1995), *Knighton’s Chronicle 1337–1396*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 94–5; on priests in ‘paltokes and pyked shoes and pisseris longe knyves’, see William Langland (1995), *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, London: J.M. Dent, XX.219. On the general social importance of ornamental knives, see Piponnier & Mane (1997), p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> Herbert Norris (1927), *Costume and Fashion: Volume II: From Senlac to Bosworth*, New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, p. 222.

<sup>25</sup> Brie ed. (1908), *The Brut*, p. 297.

this narrative, the tailor who wields the shear is likened to the sculptor, the carpenter, or the metal-worker who wields the chisel, and the disruptive processes of punching and dagging clothing invoke the contentious processes of the medieval artisan.<sup>26</sup> By association, the fashionable body that wears this garment not only displays the disruptive acts of cutting that entail its own construction, but manifests a more general preoccupation with the violent modes and marks of artificial (man-made) creation.

The symbolic juxtaposition between the slicing blade and the slashed medieval garment was more often used to symbolize violent battle wounds and the crossing of the ultimate mortal boundary into death. Executioners, for example, perhaps in a literalization of Death's sharp scythe or of the third Fate Atropos, who snips the thread of life with her shears, were known to don slashed garments as they performed their ritualized killing.<sup>27</sup> In a different way, popular vernacular literature fetishized the battle-torn garments of the medieval knight. For example, the much-anticipated death of Raoul de Cambrai, one of the most violent and memorable characters of the medieval French *chansons de geste*, is dramatically conjured by his mother Alice in a vision in which Raoul returns home from battle dressed in a garment of rich green silk that has been torn to shreds.<sup>28</sup> This image of sartorial violence presents a sanitized, courtly version of the battle wounds enthusiastically described throughout the rest of the epic, in which the variously cut, slashed, and pierced shields, hauberks, and chain mail of the knights regularly perform as open wounds through which their entrails and lifeblood issue and seep. Another variation of this theme surfaces in the legend of *La Cote Mal Taillée* told in Mallory's *La Cote Male Tayle* [the ill-fitted or ill-cut coat]. *Male Tayle* is the nickname of a Knight of the Round Table who wears the shredded coat that his father had worn when he was murdered in his sleep. The shredded coat constructs the knight's identity in more ways than one: it is a reminder of the brutality of the knight's un-chivalric, unknown enemies (those who hack men to pieces in their sleep), but it also prefigures the verbal violence of his lady Maledysaunte, who figuratively cuts the knight to shreds with her sharp tongue. When he first

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<sup>26</sup> On the crafts associated with these specific blades, see *MED* 'chisel'; 'shere'. On the medieval perception of artisans as dangerous makers, see Lisa H. Cooper (2003), 'These Crafty Men': Figuring the Artisan in Late Medieval England', unpublished PhD, Columbia University, Chapters 2–3.

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell B. Merback (1999), *The Thief the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 142.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Kay trans. (1992), *Raoul de Cambrai*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, CLXXIV.3340.

volunteers to take over her difficult quest, for instance, his lady makes a point of warning him that his skin will soon become as shredded as his coat.<sup>29</sup>

In medieval romance, the slashed knightly garment more often represents an eroticized violence mediated through the visual and material exchanges between the armoured knights and the ladies for whom they fight. This includes not only the knight's own hacked-up armour and attire (usually *sans* blood and guts), but also the sartorial love tokens that he wears in battle. As E. Jane Burns has recently discussed, material tokens like ladies' sleeves play a powerful role in the 'real or allegorical battlefield of love' of courtly literature.<sup>30</sup> Post-battle, the pierced and slashed love-token gains even more erotic status, as we can see in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, in which the young enamoured Obilot proudly re-dons her torn sleeve after her champion Gawain returns it to her.<sup>31</sup> In a striking example from the same text, the knight Gahmuret wears one of his wife's white silken shifts - 'as it came from her naked body' - over his hauberk whenever he jousts; when he returns home safely, Herzeloide puts the same tattered and pierced shift 'over her bare skin' (61). In this case the torn shift clearly embodies the couple's mutual and all-consuming love and lovemaking (the poet emphasizes that they quickly went through eighteen silk shifts), but the reader is never made to lose sight of the very real violence that the torn garment represents. For when Gahmuret dies in battle, Herzeloide once again attempts to don his final pierced and bloody shift, this time recognizing the torn garment in much the same way Alice does in *Roaul de Cambrai*: as a symbol of the rift of death (65–6).

Chaucer evokes this tradition when he carefully constructs the beauty of his most famous lover, Troilus, through the knight's war-torn attire:

And ek to seen hym in his gere hym dresse,  
So fressh, so yong, so weldy semed he,  
It was an heven upon hym for to see.

His helm tohewen was in twenty places,  
That by a tyssew heng his bak byhynde;  
His sheeld todashed was with swerdes and maces,  
In which men myghte many an arwe fynde  
That thirled hadde horn and nerf and rynde.

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<sup>29</sup> Eugène Vinaver ed. (1973), *The Works of Sir Thomas Mallory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, II.462.10.

<sup>30</sup> Burns (2002), p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach (1980), *Parzival*, trans. A.T. Hatto, New York: Penguin Books, p. 201.

## (II. 635–642)

[And also to see him dressed in his apparel  
 he seemed so fresh, so young, so vigorous,  
 It was a heaven to see him.  
 His helmet was hacked in twenty places,  
 Which hung down his back by a lace;  
 His shield was broken to pieces with swords and maces,  
 In which men might find many arrows  
 That had pierced horn and sinew and skin.]

The ‘heaven’ that is Troilus at this moment comes in large part from the contrast between the images of his forceful and youthful body (‘so fresh, so young, so vigorous’) and the pierced and broken armour that adorns him: the violence of the recent battle (the hacking, breaking, and piercing) still seems to emanate from the tattered remnants of armour that hang from his body and shield (the ‘horn’, ‘sinew’, and ‘skin’). Much like the aforementioned ‘scredes’ that have ‘schent England’ in the opening epigraph of this essay, the sounds of Chaucer’s carefully-chosen words (*tohewe... tyssew... todasshed... thirled*) invite the reader/listener to experience aurally and viscerally the clashing, slashing, and scraping of metal weapons against armour that Troilus’ body performs. The image encapsulates both the danger of the battle and our attraction to that danger: the erotic power of those who negotiate the liminal space between life and death. Troilus’ performance here clearly prefigures the violence of his end: his ‘slayed’ heart (V.1686), the ‘bloody strokes’ and sharpened spears in his final battle with Diomedes (V.1759–60), and his sudden tragic slaying by Achilles (V.1806). Yet this merely heightens his appeal; few could remain unmoved when Criseyde, who gazes down on Troilus’ dramatic display from her window, feels instantly love-struck.

Augmenting this romantic depiction of the torn-up knightly garb is the anecdote that, at least in some areas of medieval Europe, the fashion for slashed secular attire actually *began* with the direct imitation of war-torn knightly attire. One story, for example, recounts that when the Swiss soldiers who defeated the Duke of Burgundy at Nancy in 1477 returned home in garments triumphantly patched with strips of material from the Duke’s luxurious banners and tents, the Swiss-German people quickly appropriated the style for their own.<sup>32</sup> Although the historical accuracy of this story is obscure (in part because the fashion in question clearly

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<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Charles H. Ashdown (2001), *British Costume from Earliest Times to 1820*, New York: Dover Publications, p. 211. I have not been able to confirm this episode in any medieval sources.

emerged before 1477), it is true that discourses around the knightly donning of slashed clothing often depict a sudden and almost uncontrollable desire for imitation by the non-military populations that came in contact with them. The *Knight of La Tour-Landry* identifies the fashion with 'Englisshe men and other men of were', and specifically warns his French daughters against the seductive novelty of the fashions by stating that only women of loose morals wear such 'array of straunge contrey'.<sup>33</sup> In a similar way Peter Idley's *Instructions to his Son* narrates a series of deadly misfortunes brought to the wearers of a certain vain knight's coat, which is 'al to-Iagged with pesis on euery side' [all jagged with pieces on every side].<sup>34</sup> After the owner's murder, the poor wisely refuse the coat because it is 'so...Iagged, and torn /...spilt and lorn' [jagged and torn...ruined and forsaken, II.234–5]; however, an insouciant clerk eventually dons the garment, only to be quickly consumed in a 'sodeyn wildefeire' of God's fury (II. 227).

### Open Sides and Overdone Pride

Regardless of how the fashion for slitted and slashed garments actually entered late medieval secular culture and imagination, it soon became associated with a long tradition in which the torn garment symbolized various elements of spiritual and philosophical self-fashioning. The torn garment was an age-old symbol of the abject: the ragged and exiled leper, for instance, and the threadbare garment of the poor, hard-working peasant.<sup>35</sup> Yet the symbolism was also specifically used by the Christian penitent. Lynn Staley situates the tradition of the 'foul' garment within the discourse of clerical purity in fourteenth-century England, for example, and articulates well the depth and breadth of the torn garment as a symbol of conflicting spiritual and material concerns in this period.<sup>36</sup> Although Staley does not specifically address the role that the contemporary fashion for torn garments might have played in this greater discourse, the imagery and language of 'the torn shirt of penitential self-regard' (30) that she analyses often invites comparison with

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Wright ed. (1868), *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, EETS 33, London: N. Trübner, pp. 30–1.

<sup>34</sup> *Idley's Instructions* II.184, MS. B2.

<sup>35</sup> On the torn garment of the leper, see Leviticus 13; R. I. Moore (1990), *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, Cambridge, MA.: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 62–5, 97. On ragged clothing as indicative of the 'costume rhetoric' of the 'stoic laboring peasant,' see Laura F. Hodges (2000), *Chaucer and Costume*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, pp. 213–18.

<sup>36</sup> Lynn Staley (2002), 'The Man in Foul Clothes and a Late Fourteenth-Century Conversation about Sin', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 24, 1–47.

the ‘shredded’ luxury garments that so perturbed contemporary moralists. This is particularly true in regard to the garment specifically torn or slitted at the side of the body, as in a passage from *Cleanness* in which the man in foul clothes is described as dressed ‘[i]n on so ratted a robe and rent at the sydez’.<sup>37</sup> The ‘side’ of the body was highly symbolic in the Middle Ages: it was the location of the creation of Eve (from Adam’s rib/side) as well as Christ’s fifth and final wound. It was also a powerful erogenous zone and the site of much sartorial playfulness in Western attire, from the laced female gowns of the twelfth century to the slitted, open-sided garments of men and women in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The homiletic tradition held up these fashionable garments open or slit at the side in moral and spiritual contrast to the side wound of Christ. The symmetry of the images - the slits in clothing meant to reveal the luxurious, often colourful undergarments or lining beneath, and the pierced side wound meant to invite intellectual penetration in the tradition of Doubting Thomas - made the comparison especially evocative as a meditative tool. The profundity of the allusion can be seen in this popular Middle English lyric in which Christ compares contemporary fashionable appearances to his own:

Open thou hast thi syde,  
 Spaiers longe and wide,  
 For veyn glorie and pride,  
 And thi longe knif astrout-  
 Thou art of the gai route;  
 Myn with sperē sherpe  
 Y-stongen to the herte,  
 My body with scourgēs smerte  
 Bi-swongen al aboute.<sup>38</sup>

[Open you have your side,  
 [With] slits long and wide,  
 For vainglory and pride,  
 And your long knife sticking out-  
 You are of the gay crowd;

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<sup>37</sup> Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron eds (1978), *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 144. I have modernized the thorns in this passage.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas G. Duncan ed. (1995), ‘Jhesus doth him bymene,’ *Medieval English Lyrics 1200–1400*, New York and London: Penguin, p. 136. For a similar passage attributed to Saint Bernard, see *The golden legend; or, Lives of the saints, as Englished by William Caxton*. New York: AMS Press, 1973, 1.72–3.



My [side] with spear sharp  
 Stabbed to the heart,  
 My body with painful scourges  
 Beaten all about.]

In comparing the extravagant superficiality of the fashionable slit with the ascetic suffering of the pierced and beaten body of Christ, this poem unwittingly asks its listeners to really *examine* their lavishly-clothed bodies. The fashionable body, like the body of Christ, is presented as a text to be read and understood, a site for contemplating the wounds of the conscience.<sup>39</sup> For in its mirrored juxtaposition of cut sides and sharp knives, the poem suggests not only that fashionable slits and decorative knives inflict and malign Christ's suffering (the 'longe knif astrout' actualizing, yet superficially, Longinus' spear in Christ's side), but also, by association, that such instruments of 'vainglory and pride' represent the wearer's own self-inflicted wounds.

This image was especially popular in relation to female clothing: 'Christ opened his side for the redemption and salvation of many,' the fourteenth-century English Dominican John Bromyard pronounces in condemnation of women's sideless gowns, '[a]nd these others open their side for lascivious and carnal provocation, and for the perdition of those who behold them.'<sup>40</sup> Margery Kempe takes a similar stance when she describes her pre-revelation self as wearing dagged clothing specifically to entice men: 'Hir clokys also wer daggyd & leyd wyth dyurse colowrs be-twen the daggyys that it schuld be the more staryng to mennys syghth and hir-self the more ben worshepd' [Her cloaks were also dagged and underlaid with diverse colors between the dagges, so that it should be more glittering to men's sight and she be more admired.]<sup>41</sup> In these examples the penetrative act is not the literal cutting of the garment, but the male act of looking through the feminine garment. This type of penetrating gaze could be metaphorical as well as material, as in the simple but telling refrain from the conduct book *The Good Wife Taught her Daughter*: 'Ouerdone pride / Makyth nakid syde, / My leue

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<sup>39</sup> On Christ's body as a book written in red ink, and on the cross-cultural accessibility of this type of passion imagery in England, see J.A.W. Bennett (1982), *Poetry of the Passion: Studies in Twelve Centuries of English Verse*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, pp. 39–40, 59–61.

<sup>40</sup> Qtd in G.R. Owst (1966), *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 397.

<sup>41</sup> Margery speaks of herself in the third person. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds (1940), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, EETS 212, London: Oxford University Press, A.9.15–18. I have modernized the thorns in this passage.

childe.’<sup>42</sup> In this way slits and dagges were situated within the greater trope of the feminine body’s penetrability, a tradition that itself combines concepts of feminine sexual openness - the vagina as an opening or a tear - and concepts of masculine sexual violence - the phallus-as-knife.<sup>43</sup>

At other times this association between fashionably-cut garments and feminine penetrability was explicitly related to the construction of the garments. In addition to deriding men’s ‘cut’ doublets, for instance, one fourteenth-century English chronicler also chastises the men’s new long gowns for being cut at the side, ‘in the style of women’s clothes,’ rather than at the front, ‘as is proper for men’.<sup>44</sup> The chronicler even ridicules the colloquial terminology of the new garments: ‘This garment has an apt name, being called *gown* in the vernacular, and well called, since it is said that “gown” derives from *gounyg*, which ought properly to be pronounced *wounyg*, that is to say, “wide open to mockery”’ (131–2). Here the feminine cut of the English male garment is presented as marking the wearer’s greater cultural perversion and abjection: his stupidity (*gounyg* links to *gounie*, simpleton; *wounyg* to *wanhoga*, idiot), depravity, and defiance (*wounyg* also connotes *wohness*, crookedness, or perversity), as well as his overall vulnerability or ‘openness’ to ridicule.<sup>45</sup> Such discourses clearly associate the new cut of fashionable clothing with a number of transgressed boundaries, including perimeters of mental, moral, and corporeal normalcy. Here, however, it is the author’s gendered merging of sartorial and linguistic instability that remains most striking, as it emphasizes the perceived dangers of changing what might be called the material vernacular, or the vestimentary codes that designate gender and social standing in every day life. Tellingly, the fact that the new male gown is cut ‘in the style of women’s clothes’ does not seem to mark the wearer as female, but rather leaves him in between designations, somewhere in the balance between *gounyg* and *wounyg*: ultimately ‘open’ to translation and to mistranslation.

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<sup>42</sup> Tauno F. Mustanoja ed. (1948), *The Good Wife Taught her Daughter*, Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran, 165.110–12. On related chroniclers’ complaints that female clothing is ‘so tight that their nude bodies could be seen through their clothing’, see Newington (1999), p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> On medieval concepts of the ‘open’ or ‘torn’ feminine body, see Joyce E. Salisbury (1996), ‘Gendered Sexuality’, in Bullough and Brundage eds, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, p. 87; Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset (1985), *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 44–5.

<sup>44</sup> Frank Scott Haydon ed. (1858–63), *Eulogium Historiarum sive Temporis*, London: Longman, Brown, Green et al., pp. 230–1. Qtd in Rosemary Horrox (1994), *The Black Death*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 131–2.

<sup>45</sup> My understanding of these words is based on Horrox (1994), p. 132 n.17.

## **Conclusion**

In this study I am not necessarily arguing that the discourse of cutting that I have described dominates late medieval English fashion discourses, but rather, that in looking at such discourses in isolation we can see how deeply cultural associations and assumptions about acts of cutting influenced perceptions of sartorial self-representation. As I have discussed, on the one hand there was a strong tradition that associated the imagery of shredded garments with romanticized knightly violence, weapons, and attire. Popular vernacular literature in particular imbued the symbol of the cut and slitted garment with the chivalric cult of appearance, a sense of visceral excitement, adrenaline, and danger: the equivalent of today's weathered motorcycle jacket.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, the garments were also moralized as depicting various spiritual, social, and economic rifts: the deeply symbolic loss of material stability and corporeal integrity that alternately could indicate the penitent's commitment or the wearer's lost way. Together such discourses give us an idea of the emerging sartorial consciousness of this period, an 'embodied history' which enables us to better understand the late medieval material world and the individual's place in it.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> On the cult of appearance in the chivalric code, see Pignonier and Mane (1997), p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> Bourdieu (1980), p. 56.

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## Chapter Sixteen

# Speaking to Reveal: The Body and Acts of 'Exposure' in Early Modern Popular Discourse

Elizabeth Hallam

Speaking to reveal, using words to expose what was previously hidden, bringing to light what had been secluded were central preoccupations in the popular discourse of early modern England. For complex reasons of a social, political and religious nature, women and men in the later sixteenth century were increasingly compelled to use the spoken word in social commentaries which would disclose to wider communities the intimacies of the body, dimensions of sexuality and ultimately the inner qualities of morality and spirituality. This chapter explores the significance of the spoken word in relation to the body and its visual appearance within patterns of social interaction and discursive practice. It attends to the social and cultural ramifications of speeches, as perceived in a society where the work of the tongue could serve the purposes of both God and the Devil; where word of mouth could operate as a marker of social inclusion or radical exclusion; where speech could work magic, inflict physical damage, or help in healing. Here the focus is on popular conceptions of the spoken word as expressed by middling and lower social groups, not as an exclusively auditory medium, but rather as a form which was seen to possess visual and perhaps material dimensions. The embodied act of speaking and the perceived effect of words often operated to re-shape social and physical appearances in the eyes of particular communities. Verbal dynamics were important in the production of early modern visual and material cultures, including those associated with the body and its social manifestations. The spoken word could be seen to situate, define and expose the body as a site at which social status and morality, together with a wide range of social and spiritual transgressions, were displayed. Early modern popular perceptions and uses of the spoken word could render this form both visually operative and materially significant. Thus, when analysing material cultures of clothing and, more broadly, the social and cultural appearance of the body, we need to address the varied relationships obtaining between the verbal and the visual in popular discourse. Spoken words,

visual images and material objects were interrelated in social practice and this verbal/visual nexus crucially affected the apprehension of bodily surface, shape and form.<sup>1</sup> This chapter proceeds by examining aspects of embodied speaking, the effects of words in rendering the body visible and the dynamics of speech and visual image in bodily exposure, transformation and regulation. The gendered dimensions of these processes were complex in that perceptions of the bodies of both women and men were implicated in popular discursive action, but it was the female body that was to be most visibly aligned with grotesque physicality.

Gaining access, as a cultural historian and anthropologist, to words uttered in the early modern period is notoriously difficult. Reliant as we are upon representations surviving in the form of written texts, visual images or material objects, we are forced to imaginatively reconstruct the soundscape of a very different culture. The material analysed in this chapter is selected from an extensive study of gender relations and ritual in an early modern urban context, which drew primarily upon the accounts of witnesses given in the Canterbury Church Courts between 1580 and 1640.<sup>2</sup> These manuscript sources offer meticulously detailed representations of social life during that period. The value of church court records is now widely recognised among social historians in terms of what they potentially reveal about the practices and attitudes of social groups below the level of the gentry.

The work of the post-reformation church courts was driven by attempts to consolidate a Protestant state church, to encourage stronger religious commitment and to eradicate abuses and distractions from spiritual observance at all levels of society.<sup>3</sup> The orderly patriarchal household was represented as an ideal which reflected and underpinned the order of the state.<sup>4</sup> Linked to this at the parish level, the middling groups, who occupied the official church positions, sought to regulate forms of disorderly play such as drinking, gaming and participation in popular festivities. Furthermore local official concern with social and spiritual disorder as well as sexual immorality was heightened, as Ingram has shown, by economic

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<sup>1</sup> Relationships between the body, speech and material objects are explored in E. Hallam and J. Hockey (2001), *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, Oxford: Berg.

<sup>2</sup> E. Hallam (1994), 'Crisis and Representation: Gender and Social Relations in Canterbury and its Region, 1580–1640', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> M. Ingram (1987), *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>4</sup> S. Amussen (1988), *An Ordered Society. Gender and Class in Early Modern England*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Relationships between ideologies of household order and interpretations of these by women and men in practice are discussed in L. Gowing (1996), *Domestic Dangers. Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

problems such as rising population, increased unemployment and vagrancy, and the growth of poverty.<sup>5</sup>

The church courts extended jurisdiction over matters of spiritual and moral significance, including slander and defamation, pregnancy outside of wedlock, working and gaming on Sundays, failure to attend church, the practice of physic and midwifery without licence, testamentary disputes, breach of contract in marriage arrangements and failure to pay tithes. Legal procedures could be initiated by the parties involved or by churchwardens who were required to present offending persons to the courts. The cases heard in court were fully documented, including the depositions of witnesses which were recorded by the court personnel. As a result we have rich, albeit manuscript, records of everyday social interaction, which describe the actions and speeches of women and men of all social ranks from the city elites, through middling householders and tradesmen to servants of the most modest means.

There are difficulties involved in the reconstruction of everyday speech from what are semi-ritualised, legal texts produced by literate male members of the legal apparatus. Here we are faced with problems of historical excavation and interpretation. With such documents we have to acknowledge the degrees of translation and structuring to which they were subjected in the processes of their production. Witnesses' accounts were framed and shaped by legal questioning and the requirements of evidence. Nevertheless, 'the courts' procedures and interests were such that they opened up a space in which witnesses spoke as fully and in as much depth as they could with regard to the issue at hand. This often led to extensive narratives in which witnesses reported spoken dialogues characteristic of urban social life in the street, the household, the parish church, the market, and the alehouse. Clerks recording witnesses' testimony were sensitised to the salience of the spoken word and took care in the recording of reported speech, especially in cases that could turn upon the exact verbal expressions that had been used by the parties involved.

It was within the arena of the church courts that numerous witnesses swore oaths before speaking what they knew to be the truth. Upon entry into the court, held in Canterbury Cathedral or in a parish church in the city, witnesses performed a ritual of truth-telling by kissing the Bible and swearing before the eyes of God that what they were about to reveal was absolutely true. Thus when witnesses were asked by the court what they thought would be the outcome of deliberate lies they answered that perjury would endanger or damn the soul, lead to the loss of life or

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<sup>5</sup> Ingram (1987).

stand as a ‘greate offence unto god’.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, legal punishment for sins in the form of penance required that the guilty party confess to their transgressions before God and the spiritual community of the parish church. The church courts were thus a powerful, dedicated machinery of disclosure, legitimated on spiritual grounds and expert in the deep extraction of information which could reach into every aspect of the lives they sought to regulate.

The legal imperative to provide truthful statements before God, to speak honestly and without design or malice, was also encoded in lay respectability. The basis of orderly sociability was founded upon conduct that was honest, quiet and free from deceit - and these aspects of conduct were required in order to preserve relationships within the marital unit, between masters and servants, among neighbours and between the church and laity. Remaining silent on issues of communal concern, concealing or seeking to suppress information and refusing to confess to what was suspected as a moral transgression, for example illegitimate pregnancy, were all highly problematic.<sup>7</sup>

Within both legal and informal popular discourse there existed a drive to uncover, to expose for public consumption and evaluation a wide range of intimacies which might threaten the stability of the household and the wider spiritual community. Popular acts of exposure, conducted through the spoken word, and often culminating in verbal conflict and violence, were performed with the use of a particular repertoire of images. Focusing upon the body, its appearance and adornment, and accompanied by gestures and actions, early modern popular speech drew upon a hybrid mix of metaphors and conventions from sermons to drama, cheap printed pamphlets and illustrated broadsides. As Watt has indicated with regard to this predominantly oral culture ‘the most influential media were those that combined print with non-literate forms’.<sup>8</sup> In this context, the boundaries between the written word, the visual image and the spoken word were fluid as, in their reception and dissemination, these forms of communication were constantly appropriated and interwoven. The interaction of the verbal and the visual formed a creative process in popular discourse that can be read as significant in the articulation of certain modes of embodiment, either clothed or unclothed.

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<sup>6</sup> Cullen v Cullen (1595), CCA: X.11.5., fols. 23, 26, 29, 31–35, 40, 54–55, *J/J* 1, fols. 149–150; Cugly v Beverton (1607) CCA: PRC 39/29, fols. 159, 161, 165–168.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Trusser (1596) CCA: *J/J* 2, f. 100.

<sup>8</sup> T. Watt (1994), *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550–1640*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 7.



## Speaking Bodies

For women and men in the later sixteenth century the spoken word was a key resource in the local negotiation of status, reputation and authority. Once spoken, words commenting on the conduct of others were repeated, disseminated and elaborated sometimes to the extent that they became widely known as ‘common reports’ or ‘flying speeches’.<sup>9</sup> The maintenance of good name and fame - signalling respectability and high regard within the neighbourhood, parish or city - was essential in social, economic and religious transactions. With a sound reputation and good credit women and men were socially recognised as honest, dutiful, morally clean, sober, sexually chaste and pure, quiet and neighbourly. Considerable social tensions and anxieties were generated when a good reputation was threatened by verbal accusation. Laura Gowing has shown that in London by the 1630s, litigation concerning slander formed the bulk of the church courts’ work and that furthermore these cases were increasingly instigated by and fought between married women of middling rank. She argues that early modern courts became primarily a forum for the ‘discussion of women’s sexual honour’. Gowing’s study explores the use of a language of insult in the reproduction of women’s subordination and as a means by which women could exert moral authority in relation to other women. Arguing that women were both the main targets and the agents of verbal insults and that, unlike men, their reputation rested almost exclusively upon their sexual morality, Gowing examines early modern insults, especially the verbal imagery associated with the ‘whore’, as a matter of ‘female concern’.<sup>10</sup> Gowing highlights the centrality of the whore in the cultural composition of insults, but it is also possible to trace other patterns of verbal imagery across multiple trajectories that suggest a range of different representational possibilities and processes operating within popular discursive domains.

Early modern speech, while constructing particular gendered relations of difference, power and authority, was also a significant cultural form through which ideas about the body, morality and spirituality were conveyed. Here speech can be identified as a key cultural resource which was deployed by both women and men as a form of social agency and as a regulatory device. To arrive at a broader understanding of the spoken word as a means by which bodies were socially constituted and transformed we must attend to embodied acts of speaking and the ways in which speech was perceived as a medium that fashioned bodily appearance.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, *Bailey v Hovendon* (1623) CCA.: X.11.19, fols. 137–144.

<sup>10</sup> Gowing (1996), pp. 37, 109.

Speech was seen as an embodied act which carried implications for both the body of the speaker and the bodies of those to whom speech was addressed. Carla Mazzio notes that in early modern religious, anatomical and literary works, the tongue occupied an ambivalent position, being both powerful and vulnerable. This was a liminal bodily organ mediating ‘word and flesh’, bodily interior and exterior, self and other, individual and collective.<sup>11</sup> While the tongue issued material regarded as signs of the self, this member was also difficult to master and could make visible the baser aspects of the body and its fleshy impulses. If speech was regarded as bodily action it was also part of a representational system in which the exterior of the body was interpreted as a visual manifestation of inner qualities: the ‘body and its adornment is the “habyte and apparayle of the inwarde mynde”’.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, a dimension of what Elias identified as the civilising process was the ability to compose and conduct the body so as to maintain its purity, propriety and the integrity of its boundaries.<sup>13</sup> Speech that seemed lacking in control exceeded bodily boundaries and the limits of social respectability from the point of view of middling social groups aiming to mark their distance from disorderly lower social sectors.<sup>14</sup> Transgressive speech could disrupt the ideal of the classical body with its emphasis on bounded, controlled borders where ‘its protuberances and offshoots were removed ... its apertures closed’.<sup>15</sup> By contrast with the classical body, the grotesque body was not constrained by clearly defined boundaries and it provided the ‘basis of abuses, oaths and curses’.<sup>16</sup> Developing through popular festive performances, the grotesque image of the body emphasised open orifices, bodily processes, the gaping mouth, buttocks and anus: ‘the outward and inward features

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<sup>11</sup> C. Mazzio (1997), ‘Sins of the Tongue’, in D. Hillman and C. Mazzio eds, *The Body in Parts. Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, London: Routledge, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> A. Bryson (1998), *From Courtesy to Civility. Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 108.

<sup>13</sup> See P. Stallybrass (1986), ‘Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed’, in M. W. Ferguson, M. Quilligan, and N.J. Vickers eds, *Rewriting the Renaissance. The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>14</sup> Bryson argues that a new concern with appropriate speech and its social effects developed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conduct literature. She discusses socially approved modes of speech as aspects of bodily demeanour and control that constituted civility within elite circles concerned with the maintenance of social distinctions in A. Bryson (1998). Bryson also notes the social conditions of the city in which middling ranks might adopt the manners of elites to boost their status in relation to lower social groups.

<sup>15</sup> M. Bakhtin (1968), *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Bakhtin (1968), *Rabelais*, p. 27.

are often merged into one'.<sup>17</sup> In popular discourse the tensions and interplay between the respectable and the grotesque in the related domains of body and speech were extensively explored.

Verbal references to the tongues of both women and men highlighted their disruptive potential. Accusations levelled at men included: 'busie fellow of his tongue', or an 'ill tongued fellow [who] will be drawn to sett his tongue at sale to speake untrewths'.<sup>18</sup> In 1627 the tongue of one William Tomes was heard to 'walke wonderful lowde and apace' conveying a noisy lack of control exhibited through the mouth.<sup>19</sup> Directed at women, terms such as 'a blasphemous woman of her tongue' and 'a very false wench of her tongue' identified spiritual impurity and deceit issuing forth from women's mouths.<sup>20</sup> For a woman to be called a 'whore of her tongue' introduced a further bodily dimension to the sins of speech: the whore's tongue was not only 'loose' of speech it also signified a looseness of body.<sup>21</sup> Linked as it was to the genital organs, the tongue of the whore exposed the corruption of her lower body.

For both women and men the unruly tongue exposed 'profane' or 'base' bodies which polluted the prevailing spiritual and social order. Both were subjected to the regulatory force of informal verbal accusation and formal legal examination. However it was the systematic punishment of the female tongue that was publicly displayed in rituals of control and purification. Women themselves often attempted to counteract the contamination of other women's 'rayling' and 'scolding'. When women recommended, for instance, that a woman's tongue should be 'coold', this was a reference to the unruly bodily heat and anger that was expressed through the mouth.<sup>22</sup> Other women made open threats in response to women's talk, as in an encounter when one woman declared to another that she 'would cutt her tongue out of her head'.<sup>23</sup> The gender specific treatment of women's tongues was most visible when they were threatened with removal and silencing. This was elaborated through visual images in which the head and tongue of the female scold was caged within a bridal (Fig. 16.1). Here the ideology of male control and women's duty to

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<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin (1968), *Rabelais*, p. 318.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor & Williamson v Ellis (1586) CCA: X.11.1, f. 86; Courle v Fairman (1631) CCA: PRC 39/42, fols. 95–96, 117–123.

<sup>19</sup> Tomes v Tomes (1627) CCA: X.11.16, fols. 220–226.

<sup>20</sup> Chandler v Kennistone (1635) CCA: PRC 39/43, fols. 64, 108, 115, 126, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Slape v Redford (1590) CCA: X.11.2, fols. 100, 137–142.

<sup>22</sup> Banks v Turpy (1622) CCA: X.11.19, fols. 80, 96.

<sup>23</sup> Stedwick v Harbert (1607) CCA: PRC 39/29, fols. 155, 157, 184–187, 216, 233, 240.



Figure 16.1 *Scold in a bridle*, c. 1655. (By permission of the *British Library*).

remain quiet and obedient is exaggerated and at the same time the imagery of woman as tamed animal is brought into play.<sup>24</sup>

Verbal and physical violence used to still the disorderly tongue was legitimated, if only on a symbolic level, in the Bible, where, in Proverbs 10:31 for instance, it was stated that 'The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out'.<sup>25</sup> Thus, a hierarchy of tongues was established whereby the one that was validated attempted to eradicate the other. The dissemination of the sacred Word highlighted the necessity of certain forms of speech. In sermons listeners would be urged to address the corruption of their bodies by holding 'God always before our eyes, and often to hear, read and meditate on his Word, and to follow his will revealed therein'.<sup>26</sup>

While God was revealed through the Word, and meditation upon his Word saved the flesh from its inherent corruption, in popular print images were employed to reveal the supposedly corrupting force of women's words. The moralising conventions of advice issued from the pulpit were adopted in broadsides such as *Tittle-Tattle; Or the Several Branches of Gossiping* (c. 1603) which focused on women's bodily and linguistic misdemeanours. In this image the minister holds an authoritative position and the dominant message of the print is a 'Warning' that all 'Gossips' should 'leave off Tittle-Tattle' (Fig. 16.2). This image and its accompanying text exhibit a diversity of spaces inhabited by women and disrupted by their words and actions. At the childbed 'Their tongues they cannot hold' as they drink and tell 'Fine stories'. At the market they continue to drink and in the bake-house both maids and mistresses alike will not be 'control'd' in their story-telling. In the alehouse, women are 'Jovial' with 'Skull and Belly' full of drink, while at the Church 'fine Ladies' attend not to the minister's words or to their inner spiritual condition but to 'spy' 'New Fashions'. Again concerned with their surface appearances women attend the hothouse, this time naked, to make their 'rough Skin smooth', to 'beautify' and 'Their Skins to purify'. Breaking into a great 'Quarrel', they beat one another at the conduit and then at the riverside, instead of washing dirty clothes, women become 'Scolding Sluts' and 'wrangling Queens', fighting rather than working. Through this image, the spaces of women's work, worship and ritual were exposed as zones of disorderly rabble as their

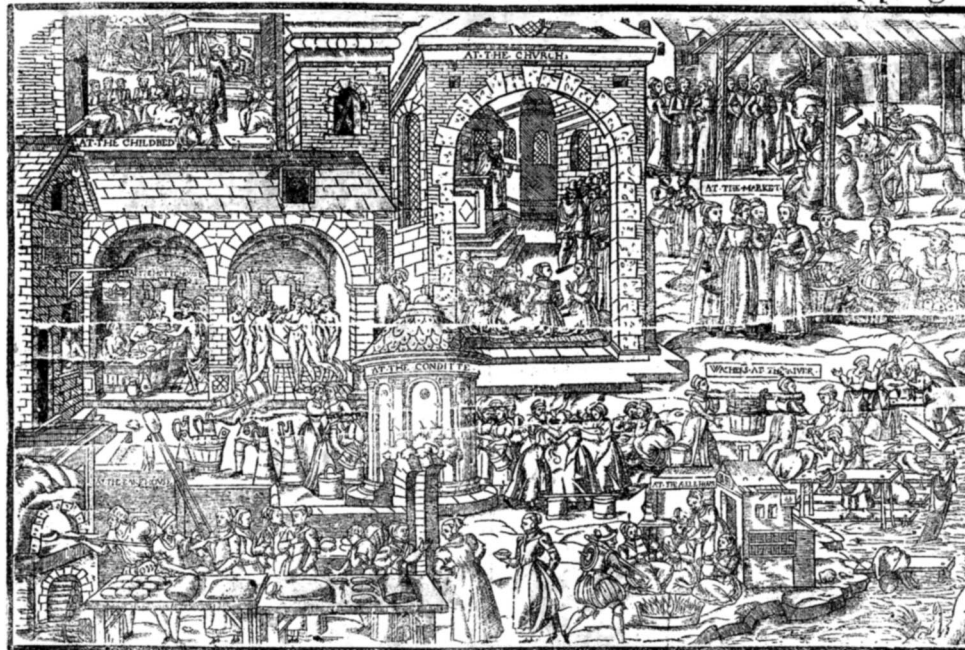
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<sup>24</sup> Scolding and its punishment between 1560 and 1640 are discussed in M. Ingram (1994), "'Scolding women cucked or washed": a crisis in gender in early modern England?', in J. Kermode and G. Walker, *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, London: UCL Press.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Mazzio (1997), p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> W. Teblich (1621), *Pauls complaint against his naturall corruption*, London: John Dawson, p. 25.

# Tittle-Tattle; Or, the several Branches of Gossipping.



AT Child-hed when the Gossips meet,  
Five Stories we are told,  
And if they get a Cup too much,  
Their Tongues they cannot hold.  
At Markets when good Housewives meet,  
Their Market being done,

Together they will crack a Pot,  
Before they can get Home,  
The Bake-house is a Place you know,  
Where Males a Story hold,  
And if their Mitres will press,  
They shall not be content.

At Alehouses you sit how jovial they be,  
With every one how jiggling;  
For till the Skull and Billy be full,  
None of them will be jiggling.  
To Church the Ladies do resort,  
New Fashions for us dress;

And when you sit Church-forness  
Of some their Story,  
You shall see enough of this Branch  
Of death is beauty;  
Five Gossips with it every Week,  
Their Skins so poorly,

At the Convent being for their Turn,  
The Quaver it grows gentle,  
That up in Arms they are at last,  
And see another Year.  
Walking at the River's Side,  
Good Husbandry take Delight;

But folding their eyes out as we see,  
Like cringing Quaver they fight,  
Then Gossips all a Warning note,  
Pray read your Tongue to spite;  
Go knit, and sew, and sew, and sew,  
And loose off TITTLE-TATTLE.

Figure 16.2 *Tittle-Tattle; Or the several Branches of Gossipping*, c. 1603. (By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum).

rattling tongues and unruly bodily urges were linked to drunkenness, dirt, violence, and vanity. It was at the site of the female body that wider anxieties about the dangers of speech and sexual immorality were made most visible.

In another version of this print, *The Market Place* (c. 1603), the minister is no longer present in the church, the pulpit is empty and the Devil has entered this sacred space to blow with a pair of bellows into the ear of a woman (Fig. 16.3). Women were represented as receptive to the sounds of the Devil delivered through an object known to inflame fleshy passions and perhaps playing on the sound of bellowing, clamorous noises of an animal nature. To listen to this was to be filled with the noise of the Devil, visualised here as an inversion of The Word of God and perhaps the transgressive root of women's talk. Indeed the association of women's tongues with the Devil occurred in pamphlets such as Joseph Swetnam's that warned men against women 'for with her cruel tongue she will ring thee such a peal that one would think the devil were come from Hell'.<sup>27</sup>

While the female physical form in its lustful, uncontrollable, distracted and dirty condition was regarded as particularly prone to the excesses of the body, the primary means to combat these was, again, the spoken word. Images such as *Tittle-Tattle* can be seen to encode and condense aspects of a vast vocabulary of popular morality that was used in everyday speech and which drew its symbolism, metaphors and imagery from the body, and its appearance, bodily processes and transformations. Nakedness, clothing, eating, drinking, sex, pregnancy, the beaten, damaged or sick body, bodily wastes and dirt, all provided a powerfully visual symbolism which was used in the verbal combat for reputation.

The gendered relations of this popular discourse were complex as both men and women could be marked as other in relation to the community of the respectable. The 'good names' of men were impaired or damaged when they were suspected of immodest and immoral conduct and labelled through speech as 'base fellow', 'burnte arse', 'rogue', 'codpiece priest', 'drunken knave', 'pisspotty knave', 'prickloose taylor' and 'gamester'.<sup>28</sup> The public hurling of such terms exposed the fleshy illicit pleasures in which men had secretly indulged, and

<sup>27</sup> J. Swetnam (1985), 'The Arraignment of Lewed, idle, froward, and unconstant women' (1615), reprinted in K.U. Henderson and B.F. McManus, *Half Humankind. Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, p. 215.

<sup>28</sup> Arnold v Lonely (1623) CCA: PRC 39/36, fols. 166–167, 172–180; Devinson v Crosse (1605) CCA: PRC 39/27, fols. 116–117; Collard v Skynner (1623) CCA: X.11.19, fols. 153, 158, 165–172; Goodwin v Allen (1594) CCA: X.11.6, fols. 271–272; Barton v Lightfoot (1614) CCA: X.11.7, fols. 135–138, 145, 149, 179–181; Master v Reinolds (1627) CCA: PRC 39/39, fols. 26–27, 30, 41–42, 44–46.

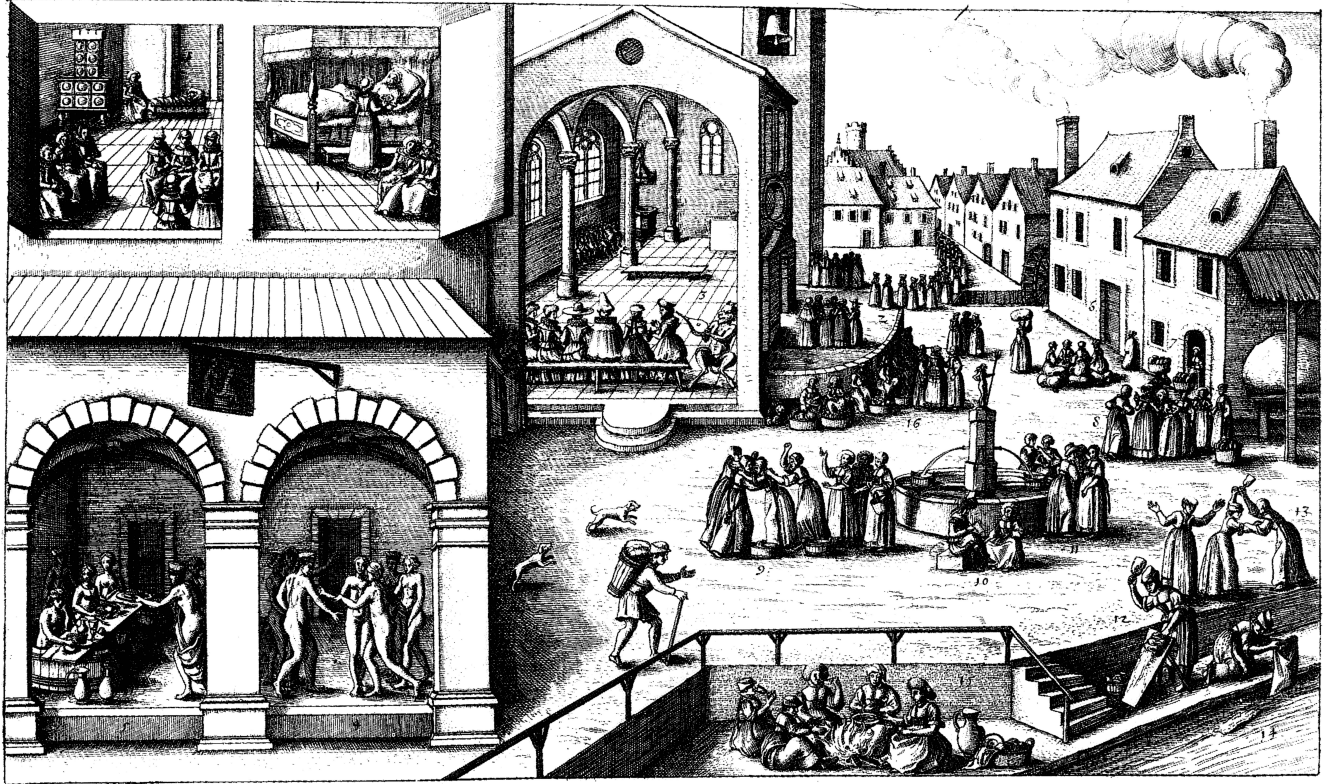


Figure 16.3 *The Market Place*, c. 1603. (By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum).



formed a mode of mockery and attack in customs of shaming which sought to eliminate these polluting influences. But the marking out of 'others', to represent the antithesis of respectability, was often reserved for certain women who were made to carry marks, or to appear as animals and monsters on a sliding scale which could only end with the Devil or perversely with God. With reference to conduct books, Stallybrass has argued that woman's body was constructed as 'naturally "grotesque"', always potentially transgressive and thus in need of 'constant surveillance'.<sup>29</sup> If, 'within the discursive practices of the ruling elite', woman's bodily ideal was that of the classical with 'the enclosed body and the closed mouth',<sup>30</sup> it was in popular discourse that images of the female grotesque body were elaborated as exercises in both play and power.

### Making Visible

The process of making visible with the use of words could begin with the face. Women suspected of adultery were accused of whoredom and this was registered on the face where women were given the whore's mark. In 1606 one Sara Bridge had declared in 'hott and collicker speeches' to another that 'Thou art an whor and art marked for a queane'.<sup>31</sup> This mark was physically inflicted in another instance by Mildred Clark when, in the street and using a pair of tongs, she 'wounded' Alice Wreight and 'slit her nose' for having laid with a 'knave'.<sup>32</sup> Rendering the sins of the lower body visible on the face was an act of ritualised violence which defiled the flesh and damaged reputations. It was recognised from sermons that 'an honest woman dwelleth at the signe of an honest face, which is like the gate of the Temple that was called Beautiful: shewing, that if the entry be so beautiful, within is great beauty'.<sup>33</sup> To make the face appear ugly was to expose inner ugliness or sin. This sign of sin was also an inversion of Christ's sacred marks that one man invoked repeatedly and 'with great violence' when he 'swore God wounds that she [Elizabeth Flatman] was a base queen'.<sup>34</sup>

If the whore's mark could allude to the mark of the Beast, women were also transformed through popular discourse into animals: 'durtie arst sowe', 'dogfaced

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<sup>29</sup> P. Stallybrass (1996), p. 126.

<sup>30</sup> P. Stallybrass (1996), p. 127.

<sup>31</sup> *Cole v Bridge* (1606) CCA: PRC 39/28, f. 195.

<sup>32</sup> *Wreight v Clark* (1604) CCA: X.11.8, fols. 187–188, 198.

<sup>33</sup> H. Smith, (1612): *Six Sermons Preached by Maister Henry Smith*, London: T. Dawson, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> *Flatman v Stephens* (1635)

whore', 'toad faced queane' were common terms of abuse levelled at women to disclose their 'filthy' habits.<sup>35</sup> Not only was this usage of animal imagery an attempt to link women's conduct to the inhuman, 'dirty' impulses of beasts, it amounted to a potent slur upon their sexual reputations, as Edward Skynner stated in 1623 that 'a Boare is a beast because he hides not nor cannot hid his privities ... then by god quoth Skynner she [referring to one Goodwife Collard] is a beast'.<sup>36</sup> The link between women's unseemly public nakedness and their dirty animality was visualised in a street scene that localised bodily disorders at the alehouse outside of which a woman bears her lower body and a Boare eats her dirt (Fig. 16.4). Nakedness without shame was associated with animality and thus the nakedness of women could expose their bestial nature.

If women, through the use of such words were marked in the face and stripped of their modesty and clothing, they were also visualised in the shape of animals. When, in 1640, a woman was verbally accused of being a 'bacon faced bitch' this vocabulary drew upon visual resources readily available in printed ballads and pamphlets.<sup>37</sup> A pig-faced woman was shown in an illustrated ballad entitled *A Monstrous Shape or a Shapelesse Monster* (Fig. 16.5). According to the ballad she was born in Holland with 'a dainty white swines face./ Which shews that she came of a race/ that loved fat porke and bacon'.<sup>38</sup> This example of a monstrous birth was cited as a wonder that was exhibited in London in 1640. Certain female figures were thus not only like animals, they were physically part animal, forming monstrous hybrids located on the boundary between social inclusion and rejection.<sup>39</sup>

## Dynamics of Speech and Image

Characteristic of the early modern popular discourse of morality was the use of dramatic inversions or world-turned-upside-down motifs that tended to cluster

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<sup>35</sup> Tireman v Fells (1614) CCA: PRC 39/32, fols. 152, 157; Chilton v Collard (1606) CCA: X.11.9, fols. 202–203; Smith v Kennistone (1628) CCA: PRC 39/39, fols. 58–59.

<sup>36</sup> Collard v Skynner (1623) CCA: X.11.19, fols. 149, 154.

<sup>37</sup> Tailor v Kennistone (1640) CCA: PRC 39/52, f. 184.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in D. Wilson (1993), *Signs and Portents. Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment*, London: Routledge, p. 90.

<sup>39</sup> There are also further visual resonances here with printed images of hybrid part animal/part human creatures, coded as evil and grotesque and depicted in anti-Catholic propaganda, that were circulated in Germany. Versions of these were printed in England from 1579, see T. Watt (1994), p. 154.



**Figure 16.4** Alehouse in front of which a woman is shown with a naked backside and a boar eats her dirt, seventeenth century. (By permission of the *British Library*).



**Figure 16.5** Detail from *A Monstrous Shape or a Shapelesse Monster*, 1640. (By permission of the *Bodleian Library*; Wood. 401 (135)).

around female figures. Women suspected of wearing false and merely skin-deep masks of respectability were exposed as immoral when clothing was removed to reveal nakedness, beauty was transformed into ugliness, human form was replaced by animal, cleanliness was sullied with dirt, the Godly were linked with the Devil. Popular verbal compositions often contained the possibilities of multiple interrelated inversions and can be seen to condense and encode a range of popular printed visual equivalents. One densely packed verbal rhyme uttered by Dorothy Stretcher in 1615 illustrates the ways in which the spoken word configured sets of complex connected inversions to comment upon the morality of others. Stretcher's rhyme is characteristic of popular discursive practice in its fusion of verbal and visual codes, the emphasis on elements of the grotesque body and its focus on the female form as a site of transgression and revelation. Aiming to attack the reputations of her women neighbours, Dorothy Stretcher had declared that 'the skinne of their husbands arses must be flawn to make their wives looking glasses'.<sup>40</sup>

At its most basic level this speech launched an insulting comment upon what Stretcher saw as her ugly neighbours: if their husbands' arses were used as a mirror they would more accurately reflect their dirty faces. The rhyme conjures images of flayed skin, male nakedness, female violence and vanity. Interpreted in the wider context of popular discursive conventions there are a further nine levels of possible signification operating in this rhyme, all of which resonate with the widely disseminated visual images in cheap print.<sup>41</sup>

1. Stretcher's speech conjured a powerful image of men suffering indecent exposure and physical violence for their wives' gain. The image of women flaying their husbands' backsides plays into the notion of 'woman on top' exerting command over and inflicting violence upon men. Images of the dominant woman inverted the ideal of the orderly household where men were expected to hold authority (Fig. 16.6).<sup>42</sup> To flay in this rhyme was to invoke a 'grotesque image of the dissected body'<sup>43</sup> and, as Sawday argues, the image of

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<sup>40</sup> (1615) CCA: X.5.2, fols. 254–255.

<sup>41</sup> European popular printed images in wide circulation during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are explored in D. Kunzle (1978), 'World Upside Down: The Iconography of a European Broadsheet Type' in B.A. Babcock ed., *The Reversible World. Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

<sup>42</sup> See N. Z. Davis (1987), *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Oxford: Polity Press, Ch. 5.

<sup>43</sup> M. Bakhtin (1968), p. 194.



Figure 16.6 Woman dominates man and man becomes animal. Frontispiece from Anon. *The Deceyte of Women*, 1561 (By permission of the *British Library*).

the male flayed body could stand as a ‘reversal of a familiar Renaissance poetic trope - the ‘blazoning’ of the female body’.<sup>44</sup>

2. Once subordinated to the wife the husband is no longer a man in that he becomes animal and wears the horse’s bridle. The transformation of man into beast is further reinforced when his lower body is exposed.<sup>45</sup>
3. In the position of dominance woman takes the social position of man.
4. Attempts by women to assume the authority of men were represented in popular print as a struggle for the lower garments, the trousers, or the recognisable garb of masculinity.<sup>46</sup> In Dorothy Stretcher’s rhyme it is the skin of men’s lower bodies that women were to take - reversing the order of modesty by bringing concealed parts of the body into view.
5. Through the act of flaying, man is further coded as animal or as a commodity to be consumed and used (Fig. 16.7).
6. Visual images often inverted the human and animal kingdom so that, in this instance (Fig. 16.7), the ox flays the man. If this is mapped onto Dorothy Stretcher’s rhyme, woman becomes animal in the violent act of flaying.
7. To position the arse of a man as the face of a woman not only concocts a monstrous male/female bodily hybrid, it inverts the human physiological order by replacing the upper body with the lower. The movement of the lower body, the buttocks, to the upper regions was also a feature of grotesque imagery.

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<sup>44</sup> J. Sawday (1995), *The Body Emblazoned. Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, London: Routledge, p. 191. Sawday discusses the ‘culture of dissection’ and the new forms of knowledge that this generated within early modern social relations, practices, rituals and literary production. On seventeenth-century printed images exploring the stripping of women’s skin see D. Kunzle (1973), *The Early Comic Strip. Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet from c.1450 to 1825*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>45</sup> The circulation of a common stock of European popular images (c. 1520–1650) depicting women beating their husbands’ naked backsides is shown in Davis (1987), Ch. 5 and in Kunzle (1973).

<sup>46</sup> For example, see L. Gowing (1996), p. 83.

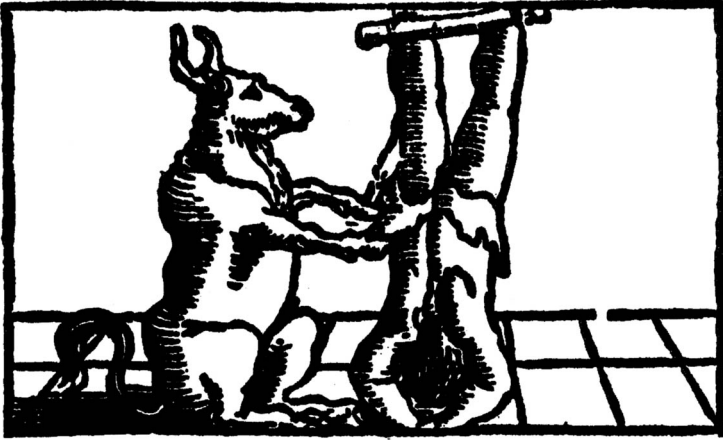


Figure 16.7 Detail from a series of visual inversions showing an animal flaying a human figure, late sixteenth century.



Figure 16.8 *Description of Pride*, 1569. Note the human skull at the woman's foot. (By permission of the British Library).

8. Converting the lower body of a man into a looking-glass for women's pleasure highlights the vanity of women and links the lust of the eye to the lusts of the flesh. Women were often represented as corrupted by an excessive preoccupation with surface appearances which distracted attention away from the spiritual interior. Swetnam's pamphlet, again, alludes to the time wasted by women in 'painting themselves, and frizzling their hairs, and prying in their glass like Apes to prank up themselves in their gaudies: like Puppets'.<sup>47</sup> Printed, visual renderings of pride, for example the *Description of Pride* (1569), provided moral commentary against women's vanity (Fig. 16.8). In this version a woman gazes into a glass only to find a demon at her back, positioned as both a warning and a threat.

The punishment for women's excessive vanity and pride could be visualised as physical disorder. Visual images of monsters produced by women who had transgressed were circulated in cheap print from the mid-sixteenth century, and such monsters provided warnings against excessive indulgence in costume and cosmetics.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the result of a woman's vanity could be to give birth to a monster (see Fig. 16.9). In this version the double-headed female form, where the upper body has also moved down to the lower, is naked in its beastliness and holds a mirror - the sign of its own inheritance of suffering and the seed of its further transgression. The image is suggestive of the endless vanity of women and their endless reflections in monsters to which they will give birth. Furthermore, monstrous births operated as signs of God's wrath, and impending disaster or death as punishment for earthly sin.<sup>49</sup>

9. This brings us to the looking-glass as a reference to mortality. While the mirror in Dorothy Stretcher's rhyme was made of the most profane flesh, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literal and metaphorical references to mirrors were expected to provide exemplary models of good life. Looking-glasses, represented in the form of visual images or printed texts, therefore provided models for spiritual and moral reform.<sup>50</sup> However, the elevating functions of the mirror were clearly

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<sup>47</sup> Swetnam (1985), p. 205.

<sup>48</sup> An illustrated ballad printed in London (1566) advised womankind against pride and depicted a monstrous child with a warning: 'Our filthy lives in Piggess are shewed;/ Our Pride this Childe dooth bere;/ Our ragges and Ruffes, that are so lewed,/ Behold her fleshe and here ...', Wilson (1993), pp. 47–9.

<sup>49</sup> T. Watt (1994), p. 165.

<sup>50</sup> See D. Shuger (1999), 'The 'I' of the Beholder. Renaissance Mirrors and the Reflexive Mind', in P. Fumerton and S. Hunt eds, *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.





**Figure 16.9** *Prides fall Or a warning for all English Women. By the Example of a strange monster born of late in Germany by a Merchants proud wife in Geneva. (By permission of the British Library).*

debased in Stretcher's version of the corrupted reflection. But the ultimate knowledge of the self was to be gained from Mirrors of Mortality that often circulated during the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century as images of the Dance of Death or as images of mirrors in which the human skull was reflected.<sup>51</sup> Viewers were invited to look upon the image of the decayed body as evidence of the transience of material life - as the skull in the mirror instructs 'Approach and see what you are, what you will be and what you have been'<sup>52</sup> (see Fig. 16.10). Dorothy Stretcher's verbal image of the flayed, dead skin as mirror had parallels with moralising printed forms which sought to channel attention from the base and ultimately transient physical body towards the inner spirituality. Stretcher's rhyme provided a powerful *memento mori* in the verbal image of the flayed husbands' bodies which her vain women neighbours were instructed to contemplate - to see their own deaths reflected in that of others.

Aimed as it was at the exposure of her women neighbours' bodily lusts and vanities, Stretcher's speech moved from popular transgressive images of 'woman on top' through to moralising images used in commentaries on the sins and fate of the flesh. For this and further 'prattling' she was commonly reported as a 'filthy beastly speaker and quarreller fighter and scolder' and eventually brought to court to face punishment. In court she was declared by witnesses to be constantly 'rejoycenge in filthe words and talke unfit to be spoken of the most filthiest ribald man that liveth upon the earth much more unfitting for a woman but noe woman in behaviour saving in forme and shape'.<sup>53</sup> Using such dirty talk, Stretcher was seen, in the eyes of the respectable community, to be worse than a filthy man and only a woman at the level of exterior form. If her words could reflect her inner condition as neither man nor woman, what else could she have become but a shapeless monster?

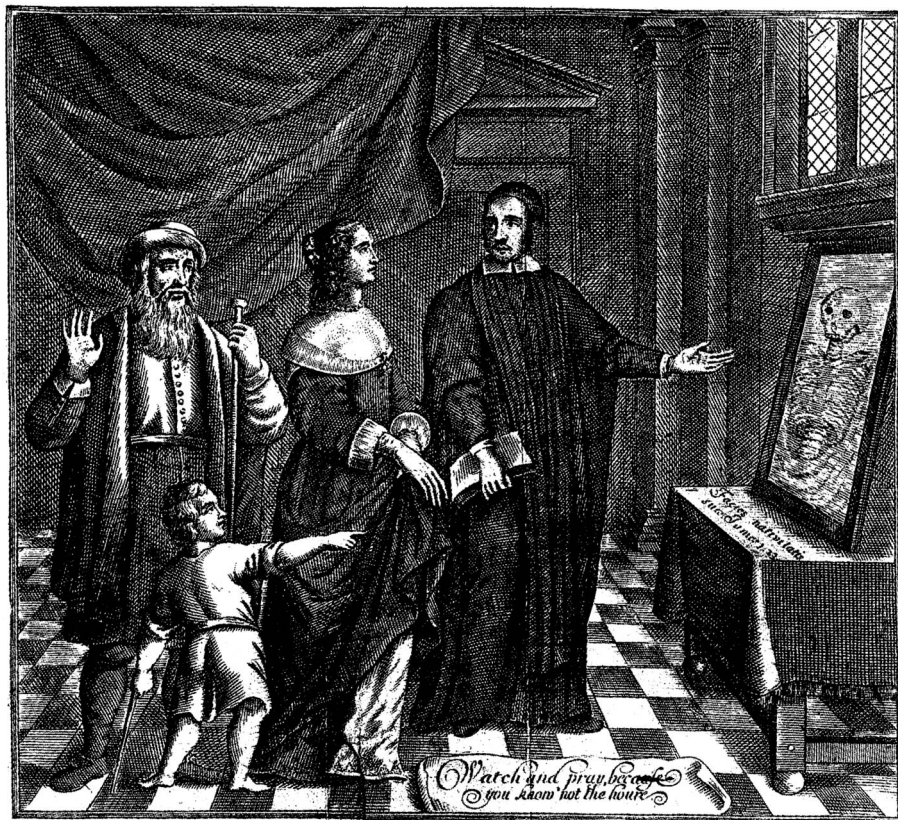
But this is not the end of the story: Stretcher's speech, like countless others in popular discourse, articulated a tension between law and transgression, containing within it not just 'filthy' material but the aspiration toward purity and moral reform. Between mockery and moralising advice, Stretcher's speech alluded to the fleshy sins of women and in doing so it mobilised and translated the imagery legitimated by the voice of authority. In sermons bodily corruption, which rendered the human form prone to sin, was represented as 'a body altogether ugly, and monstrous, the parts whereof are wholly inverted, or rather perverted ... and all

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<sup>51</sup> Popular printed images of death during this period are discussed in T. Watt (1994).

<sup>52</sup> D. Shuger (1999), p. 27.

<sup>53</sup> (1615) CCA: X.5.2, fols. 254–255.



**Figure 16.10** The image instructs: 'Watch and pray, because you know not the hour.' (By permission of the Wellcome Library, London).

the rest of the members were most deformedly mis-placed'.<sup>54</sup> This inner body had to be seen, for if 'worldly', 'carnall men' remained blind to it, believing themselves to be leading an 'outward civill life among their neighbours' it would kill their souls, destroy their flesh and lead to eternal death. The only solution here was to 'watch and pray' - to observe the visible signs of inner corruption and to 'marke Gods word'.<sup>55</sup> Thus when Dorothy Stretcher's rhyme mimicked the word of the law, to mark her neighbours as corrupt 'others' she did so in a language which fused the sacred with the deeply profane and thereby initiated her own downfall.

## Conclusion

The reforming processes of the church and the respectable spiritual community alongside it required speech to make visible or bring the innermost impulses of the body to the surface. The visibility of grotesque polluting bodies provided distinctive 'others' against which the respectable middling ranks of communities could define themselves, by contrast, as orderly and civilised. Acts of exposure were pivotal in discourses claiming the central ground of social authority *and* in popular discourse which both mimicked and mocked the language of morality. Exposing the body's lusts, temptations and weaknesses was conducted through verbal marking, stripping, inversion and transformation. These forms of verbal fashioning were most visible at the site of the female body, the inner corruption of which was manifested as animality or monstrosity. Here the verbal became visual and printed images were made verbal in processes of cultural appropriation and dissemination. These processes enacted not just a gender struggle, but a complex and violent cultural conflict over the significance of words, images and their relation to the body social and the body spiritual.

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<sup>54</sup> Teblinck (1621), p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Teblinck (1621), pp. 25–7.

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# *Clothing Culture, 1350–1650*

Catherine Richardson

Addressing the subject of clothing in relation to such fundamental issues as national identity, social distinction, gender, the body, religion and politics, *Clothing Culture, 1350–1650* provides a springboard into one of the most fascinating yet least understood aspects of social and cultural history.

Nowhere in medieval and early modern European society were its hierarchical and social divisions more obviously reflected than in the sphere of clothing. Indeed, one of the few constant themes of writers, chroniclers, diarists and commentators from Chaucer to Pepys was the subject of fashion and clothes. Whether it was lauding the magnificence of court, warning against the vanity of fashion, describing the latest modes, or decrying the habit of the lower orders to ape the dress of their social superiors, people throughout history have been fascinated by the symbolism, power and messages that clothes can project.

Yet despite this contemporary interest, clothing as a subject of historical enquiry has been a largely neglected field of academic study. Whilst it has been discussed in relation to various disciplines, it has not in many cases found a place as a central topic of analysis in its own right. The essays presented in this volume form part of a growing recent trend to put fashion and clothing back into the centre ground of historical research.

From Russia to Rome, Ireland to France, this volume contains a wealth of examples of the numerous ways clothing was shaped by, and helped to shape, medieval and early modern European society. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the study of clothing can illuminate other facets of life and why it deserves to be treated as a central, rather than peripheral, facet of European history.

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