

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México  
Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género

**Seminario Vestido, moda y cultura  
Construcción y comunicación de  
identidades sociales diversas: del vestido  
medieval al estilo *dark*.**

**Sesión 3** El Renacimiento: moda en las cortes  
europeas

ASHELFORD, Jane (1996); "Gorgeous Attire. 1500-  
1603", en *The Art of Dress. Clothes and Society  
1500-1914*, Londres: National Trust Enterprises  
Limited, pp. 16-43.

Ashelford, Jane, (1996),  
"Gorgeous Attire. 1500-1603",  
in The Art of Dress. Clothes  
and Society 1500-1914,

London: National Trust  
Enterprises Ltd.,  
pp. 16-43.

## I

The austere and pious man who was crowned Henry, King of England, in 1485 subsequently enjoyed a reputation for being a surly miser who 'seems never to have laid out any money so willingly as on what he could never enjoy, his tomb - on that he was profuse . . .'.<sup>1</sup> This is rather unfair, as Henry VII actively patronised the arts and had a high regard for learning. In personal matters of dress, however, Henry had no interest in finery; portraits of the King show him wearing plain and unflamboyant clothes in the style that had prevailed for over a century, with centre-fastening doublet reaching below the knees, and a fur-lined gown, whose heavy folds swept along the ground. But Henry VII, like his Tudor successors, never begrudged spending money on displays to impress his own people and foreign visitors with the splendour of his court.

Henry VII consolidated victory over Richard III on Bosworth field by marrying the dead king's niece, Elizabeth, thus uniting the warring houses of York and Lancaster and bringing to an end the Wars of the Roses. The subsequent establishment of the Tudor dynasty allowed him to centralise his authority and to create a new nobility directly dependent on his patronage. When his son succeeded to the throne in 1509 as Henry VIII, he inherited not only a united country, but also a full exchequer, which he immediately set about spending. At the age of eighteen, Henry VIII was the paragon of a Renaissance prince, being 'extremely handsome . . . very fair, and his whole frame admirable proportioned'. Well endowed with 'the noble qualities of his royal estate',<sup>2</sup> he was also very athletic, believing that idleness was the 'chief mistress of vices all'. His vanity would have been rewarded by the observation made by the Venetian Ambassador, Giustinian: 'He is extremely fond of tennis, at which game it was the prettiest thing in the world to see him play, his fair skin glowing through a shirt of the finest texture.'<sup>3</sup>

The perfect Renaissance gentleman was expected to place as much emphasis on the mastery of learning and the arts as on the physical virtues of sport, or of military success. Henry was a major patron of the visual arts and of music, where he displayed talent as both a performer and a composer. Literature also benefitted from his interest - again, he was a writer himself. Though intensely chauvinistic, he was not insular, and could converse and write fluently in French, Italian and other languages.

Henry's determination to keep abreast of developments in the arts was fuelled by a desire to create a court as sophisticated and splendid as that of his admired 'brother', François I of France. In France the Renaissance style of architecture and the decorative arts had been established for more than a decade, so Henry, desperate to keep pace in matters of taste, invited Italian, French and Flemish craftsmen to work in England. Competition between the kings reached its climax in the spectacle that took place on the Field of the Cloth of Gold outside Calais in 1520. Ostensibly the reason for this meeting was to cement an alliance, but it became a contest in which each tried to outshine the other by the magnificence of his appearance and that of his followers. Every part of the retinue was affected, from the horse-trappings, one of which was 'a marvellous vesture of a new devised fashion of fine gold . . . pounced and set with antique work of Romaine

10 (previous pages) James V, King of Scots his French wife, Mary of Guise, the paren Mary, Queen of Scots. This double portrait shows Mary wearing a French hood and a bodice of rich brocade with matching sleeves slashed to show puffs of the smock underneath. Massive ermine cuffs are folded back over sleeves. James is depicted in a low-cut doublet over a shirt, and a gown with exaggerated sized fur revers and slashed sleeves. (Unknown artist, 1539, Hardwick Hall)

nas More in a loose black velvet  
in ample collar of sable, whose  
above the elbow in a matching fur  
sclosing the rich red velvet of the  
ve underneath. His white linen shirt  
psed at the neck and wrist. On his  
irs a hat of black blocked felt, its  
laps tucked up onto the crown.  
(Holbein, 1527, Montacute)



figures', to the gilded pennants flying from the army of tents. Henry dazzled spectators with rapid and increasingly elaborate costume changes.

One of the many foreign artists who accepted the King's invitation to England was the German, Hans Holbein the Younger. Although his official title was that of the King's Painter, his work was not limited to portrait painting, but embraced jewellery and metal design, book illustration and decorative schemes. His involvement in these spheres had a profound influence on the course of fine and decorative arts in England.

A vivid impression of the dress of leading members of Henry's court may be obtained by a visit to Montacute House in Somerset, completed in 1600 for Sir Edward Phelips. Its splendid Long Gallery is now filled with a selection of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century portraits on loan from the National Portrait Gallery. One of the earliest is a sixteenth-century copy of Hans Holbein's portrait of Sir Thomas More (11); the original was painted in 1527 when More was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Erasmus, the Dutch humanist, wrote in 1519 that his friend More liked to 'dress simply and does not wear silk or purple or gold chains excepting where it would be decent not to wear them'.<sup>4</sup> This observation is borne out by Holbein's portrait, in which More, as a royal and loyal servant, wears a collar of linked Ss. In the fifteenth century, this collar had signified allegiance to the house of Lancaster. Henry VII restored its use with the addition of Tudor badges like the pair of portcullises for fastening, and a pendant rose.

95



12 This portrait of Henry VIII, a variant to Holbein's original image in the Presence Chamber at Whitehall, shows an increased preoccupation with decorative dress: application of interlaced gold braid, liberal distribution of jewels on the doublet, and slashes through which the shirt underneath are drawn. The wide width across the shoulders is emphasized by broad fur revers of the gown, the upper section of which is also decorated with bands of interlaced gold braid. (After Hans Holbein, 1537, Blickstein Collection)

In contrast, Henry VIII's love of jewels and flamboyant display is immediately apparent in the many depictions of him, but it is Holbein's full-length portrait that presents the most familiar and powerful image. The prototype was a wall-painting in the Presence Chamber at the Palace of Whitehall executed by Holbein in 1537 to celebrate the birth of Henry's son, Prince Edward, and thus the perpetuation of the Tudor dynasty. Behind the King are shown his parents, Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, while Jane Seymour, his third wife and mother of his heir, stands on his right hand. This wall-painting was destroyed by fire in 1698, but there are many copies and variants of the image (12).

In 1537, although Henry was still in early middle age, he was in great pain from a chronic bone infection, thought to be the result of an earlier jousting accident, which



Hall, writing in 1540, described the garment as a 'coate of purple somewhat made lyke a frocke all over with flat gold of damaske with small betwene of the same gold'. It must be the King in the last years of his life, he was increasingly stout and immobile; his portrait shows, used a walking-stick with fur, the sleeves continue as long sleeves, while the doublet sleeves have been cut so that puffs of the shirt with rubies set in gold. Jewelled clasps fastened across the sleeves and front of the gown, and a large collar of pearls is draped across the King's chest. (Artist, c.1542, Montacute)



affected both his legs. The King had been obliged to give up the sports which he had so much enjoyed, but his gargantuan appetite was not diminished, with the result that he became grossly overweight (13). Undisputed evidence for the expansion of his figure comes from his made-to-measure suits of armour, preserved in the Royal Armouries. They reveal that Henry's chest measurement when he was still physically active was 45in, with a waist measurement of 38in, but by 1540 his chest measured 58in, and his waist 54. As his girth increased, he sought to disguise it by adopting the hugely over-padded styles popular in Germany.

A fashion innovation in this early part of the sixteenth century was the division of the hose, which covered a man's body from waist to feet, into two separate garments. The upper stocks, slops, trunk hose or breeches, covered the area between the waist and

tb

mid-thigh. The nether stocks or lower hose consisted of woollen stockings that were attached to the upper hose by means of points (ties with metal tags). The codpiece was a separate item of dress, usually cut from the same material as the trunk hose, and was laced to hose and doublet with points. At Henry's court the codpiece was heavily boned and padded so that it jugged out between the breeches and the skirts of the doublet. This blatant display of masculinity did not survive in the more refined atmosphere of his daughter Elizabeth's court, and after 1580 it was no longer fashionable.

The basic elements of female dress during Henry VIII's reign were the kirtle and the gown. Until about 1545 the word kirtle denoted a garment with a square décolletage which fitted the body closely to mid-thigh and then fell in folds to the ground. After that date, when bodice and skirt were made separately, the term kirtle was applied to the skirt alone, the gown becoming an optional overgarment worn for warmth or on formal occasions. The bodice then was referred to as a 'pair of Bodies' because it was made in two parts – the back and front being joined together at the sides. Sleeves were made separately and attached to the bodice by means of ties. In the 1530s, massive oversleeves with turned-back cuffs were worn over stiff, often quilted, undersleeves. Movement of the arms must have been very restricted, inhibited by the very tight cut of the upper part of the sleeve and by the combined weight and volume of the two sleeves. The rich fabric used to make a bodice was protected from perspiration and dirt by the shift or smock, a fine linen undergarment worn next to the skin. Its trimmed edge appeared above the edge of the bodice and through the slashed decoration on the sleeves.

In the early years of the sixteenth century, ladies of the court wore the distinctive English hood, called a gable or pediment head-dress (14). This was usually made of velvet and was given its gable shape by means of a wired or stiffened framework. Beneath would be worn an undercap, allowing the centre parting of the hair to be displayed – though after about 1525 the undercap hid the hair completely. It was superseded by the French hood, which English court ladies found more flattering (10). This style of head-dress was adopted by Henry VIII's second queen, Anne Boleyn, who had been educated at the courts of Margaret of Savoy, the Regent of The Netherlands, and of François I of France, and thus it became the fashionable style of the 1530s in England. The French hood was small and semi-circular, set on a stiff foundation and worn on the back of the head. It had jewelled upper and lower borders (called upper and nether billiments), the lower edges of which curved forward onto the ears and were trimmed with crimped cypress (a black transparent material like crape).

When Anne Boleyn fell from grace in 1536, the King charged her with adultery and she was executed on 19 May. The next day Henry was betrothed to one of her ladies-in-waiting, Jane Seymour, and they were married on 30 May. Jane was far more conservative in her taste than Anne, preferring to wear the English hood (15). Perhaps it was felt that this traditional head-dress would be more suitable for the restrained atmosphere that the new Queen brought to the court.

An excellent written source for this period of transition can be found in the letters of the Lisle family. About 3,000 of these were written between 1533 and 1540 when Arthur Plantagenet, Lord Lisle (an illegitimate son of Edward IV), was Lord Deputy of Calais, where he and his wife, Honor Greville, lived in great state. Much of the correspondence is with John Hussee, 'my Lord Lisle's man', who spent a good deal of his time in London



14 A portrait of Henry VII's queen, Isabella of York, shows her wearing the distinctive hood. Her hair is framed by a border with rectangular rubies, and two sets one plain, the other decorated with pearls and jewels, that fall in front of the shoulders and the rest of the hood hangs down behind. Queen's costume comprises a bulky gown with a low, square neckline narrowly edged with ermine and decorated with rich band-studded brocade. The fullish sleeves have turned-back cuffs of ermine. Above the bodice is a hefty jewelled collar of interlaced links set with pearls, a pendant design typical of late Gothic taste. (Copy, Anglesey Abbey, of original, now at the National Portrait Gallery)

ymour, Henry VIII's third queen,  
 z final variation of the English hood.  
 r of material is folded into an  
 riangle secured on top of the head;  
 ing half being allowed to fall behind  
 ers. The front edge of the hood, the  
 orated with gems, clamps the hood  
 inst the sides of the face. Both the  
 d the tucked-up lappets are much  
 n those worn by Elizabeth of York  
 ; hair is masked by two bands of  
 retched across the forehead.  
 are neckline of the smock, clearly  
 ve the closely-fitting crimson velvet  
 elicately embroidered with black  
 irt has an inverted V-shaped opening  
 a decorative triangle of gold braid  
 epart. It would have been attached  
 rskirt by ties. As it was a separate  
 it was often made with matching  
 re the back seams of the brocade  
 left undone, but are joined at  
 y jewels so that the smock sleeve can  
 hrough.  
 is Holbein, 1536, Knole)



bb  
 99

copying with the family's legal, financial and personal affairs. He also kept them informed of the latest news from court and his letters contain references to political events and public gossip juxtaposed with domestic details. A letter written to Lord Lisle on 19 May 1536 is typical: 'Anne the late Queen suffered with sword this day, within the Tower, upon a new scaffold; and died boldly. . . . Your hosen shall be sent within this vi days. And touching Mr Page [Sir Richard Page, Comptroller of Customs] and Mr Wyat [Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder, poet and courtier, who was suspected of an improper relationship with the Queen, but was later cleared and released], they remain still in the Tower. What shall become of them, God knoweth best.'

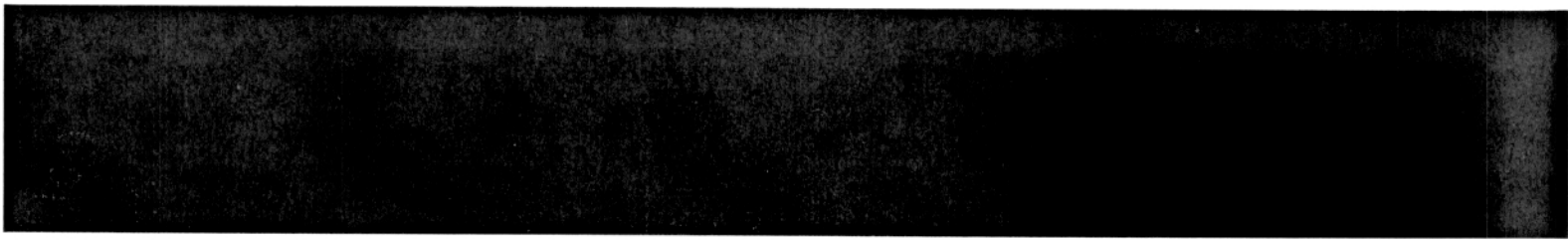
Lady Lisle's daughter by her first marriage, Anne Bassett, had just taken her place as one of Queen Jane's Maids of Honour when Hussee wrote this letter to her mother on 17 September 1537:

My Lady of Sussex [her cousin] hath given Mrs. Anne a kirtle of crimson damask and sleeves to the same . . . the Queen's pleasure [is] that Mrs. Anne shall wear out her French apparel, so that your ladyship shall thereby be no loser. Howbeit, she must needs have a bonnet of velvet and a frontlet of the same. I saw her yesterday in her velvet bonnet that my Lady Sussex had 'tired [dressed] her in, and me thought it became her nothing so well as the French hood; but the Queen's pleasure must needs be fulfilled.'

Hussee's belief that Anne would be able to wear out her French clothes at court was ill-founded, for on 2 October he wrote to say that 'Mrs. Anne shall wear no more her French apparel' and that she must have 'a bonnet or ii, with frontlets and an edge of pearl and a gown of black satin, and another of velvet, and this must be done before the Queen's grace's churching'.<sup>7</sup> Churching was a combination of a service of thanksgiving and of purification for the mother after a successful childbirth. Jane Seymour gave birth to Prince Edward, the longed-for male heir, on 12 October 1537. Lady Lisle delayed in granting permission for the two new gowns for Anne to be made, so Hussee had less than twenty-four hours to complete the commission before the Prince's christening on 16 October. Only by enlisting the help of John Young, another member of the Lisle household, was he able to present Anne with her finished gown in time for her to take her place with the rest of the royal household.

Lady Lisle had obviously economised on the quality of linen used to make her daughter's smocks, for in the same letter (2 October), Hussee explained that he would have to buy new cloth because her existing ones had been deemed to be 'too coarse'. It was essential that the gentlewomen attached to the court were dressed 'according to their degree', that is, commensurate with their status at court. As Anne was a Maid of Honour, a paid position, she wore finer clothes than her sister Katherine, who was a Gentlewoman to one of the Queen's ladies.

Queen Jane's triumph at having produced a prince was short-lived, for she died twelve days later on 24 October, apparently of septicaemia. This meant that the entire court had to exchange their brightly-coloured clothes for black mourning dress. Although Anne had a place in the funeral cortège, the death of the Queen meant that her post at court was at an end. However, her cousin Lady Sussex took her in, enabling her to remain on the edge of court life. On 14 December 1537 Hussee informed Lady Lisle



that Lady Sussex had suggested that she should have a 'gown of lion tawny satin, turned up with velvet of the same colour'<sup>8</sup> made up for Anne. Lady Lisle immediately questioned the idea, believing it unnecessary when the court was still in mourning. However, Hussee assured her on 19 December that it was essential, for Lady Sussex thought 'it was uncertain how long the King's pleasure should be that they should wear black', and one never knew 'what sudden chance so ever might happen'.<sup>9</sup> The King remained a widower until 6 January 1540 when he married the German princess Anne of Cleves. Although the marriage lasted just six months it allowed Anne to resume her post at court, and she retained it throughout the reigns of his last two wives, Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr.

Hussee's letters provide an invaluable source of information about the type of clothes worn at court, for he set about finding the correct material and trimming for a new outfit and instructing the tailor on how to shape it into the latest fashion with great diligence and dedication. Two garments which are frequently mentioned in his letters are nightgowns and waistcoats. These were informal garments, the latter shaped like a jacket, worn by men and women in the privacy of their home, rather like dressing-gowns today. As they were lined with fur they must have been an indispensable garment in cold draughty houses. We learn in one letter dated 6 March 1537 that Hussee had just bought 10½yds of black damask, 3yds of black velvet and just over 2¼yds of white satin to make a nightgown and waistcoat for Lady Lisle. Hussee stood over the tailor when he cut out the material to make sure that there was no wastage: 'There was no piece therof saved worth taking up, for I was at the cutting therof.'<sup>10</sup> On 9 March the garments had been made and he sent them to the skimmers to be lined with fur. On the 18th he sent the finished nightgown, two waistcoats, one furred with ermine, and two ermine bonnets to Calais accompanied by the plaintive assertion: 'By my faith, Madam, I have made hard shift for it!'<sup>11</sup> The whole process had taken twelve days, but when Lady Lisle received them she was not satisfied and must have written to Hussee asking him if he was sure that they were indeed the latest fashion. On 2 April Hussee replied that they were 'the very fashion that the Queen and all the ladies doth wear, and so were the caps'.<sup>12</sup>

Hussee's life became unbearable if Lady Lisle thought he had been cheated by a mercer or a tailor, so he went to great lengths to ensure that this did not happen. On her part, Lady Lisle was extremely slow to pay any bills and relied on Hussee to keep everyone happy by giving them quails especially sent over from a poulterer in Calais. This ploy was usually successful with the royal tailor Skut, but on one occasion the Lisles had run up such huge debts that Hussee dared not call on Skut with 12yds of satin because the accompanying gift of quails had not arrived.

In 1540 the Lord Chancellor, Thomas Cromwell, struggling to retain his own position, accused Lord Lisle of being an enemy of reform. Lisle was sent to the Tower of London and all the family goods (including the correspondence) were confiscated and a careful inventory made. When the auditors opened the locked chests in which the Lisle's jewels and jewelled dress trimmings were stored they must have been amazed by what they found. The quantity of jewels and other ornaments sewn onto separate items like sleeves, head-dress borders and partlets (yokes) was staggering. A pair of crimson satin sleeves was decorated with 800 pearls, and a pair of black velvet sleeves was adorned with 573 pearls and 84 'paired stones' of gold. A long gold girdle made up of 43 pieces of





Howard, Earl of Surrey. His doublet has a slightly swollen waistline, giving a slightly swollen e, and short skirts. The surface is with an intricate pattern of gold braid areas of velvet appliqué. The codpiece is breeches, which are an early form of hose, with the breech, panned, distended in an oval shape from the closed at mid-thigh with bands of material. The fur collar of a sleeved; across his shoulders.  
 William Scrots, c.1550, Knole

gold was found in a black box, and amongst the jewels were a 'hawthorn of gold' set with 20 diamonds and a gold rose set with 3 diamonds and 3 pearls.<sup>13</sup>

While Lord Lisle languished in the Tower Thomas Cromwell lost favour with the King. When Henry married Catherine Howard, the niece of Cromwell's enemy Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of Norfolk, in 1540, his fate was sealed and he was executed for high treason. In March 1542, the King finally ordered Lisle's release, but he was so delighted and relieved by this news that he died the next day in the Tower 'through too much rejoicing'.<sup>14</sup>

One of the last judicial victims of Henry's reign was Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, eldest son of the Duke of Norfolk. This 'foolish proud boy' was famous for his extravagant taste in dress and one of the charges against him at his trial for high treason in 1546 was that he wore a doublet and hose of purple silk and gold tissue, the prerogative of royalty. In a posthumous portrait by William Scrots, c.1550 (16) we see him wearing the latest Italian fashion as he leans languidly against a broken classical pillar. His spectacular Order of the Garter collar was returned to the Crown and was worn by Edward VI when he was crowned.

Henry VIII died in 1547 safe in the knowledge that his son would succeed him as Edward VI. But the delicate child reigned for only seven years, and at his death in 1553 the throne passed first to Mary, Henry's daughter by his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and then to Elizabeth, daughter of Anne Boleyn. Although the Catholic Mary and the Protestant Elizabeth were very different in character and outlook, they shared the Tudor love of dress. Even when Mary was in disfavour with her father, she was entitled to her own clothes allowance as a royal princess, and the Privy Purse expenses for the period 1536 to 1544 show that she had an impressive collection of clothes and jewels.<sup>15</sup> However, her marriage to Philip II of Spain in 1554 had a marked effect on the English court. The vibrant colours worn by Henry VIII and Edward VI were replaced by the more sombre colours favoured by the Spanish. Philip's brief stay in England introduced courtiers to the Spanish cloak, hooded and hip-length, sleeveless panned jerkins, and the superior quality of Spanish leather and gloves. By 1557, when the Duke of Mantua visited, he noted that Englishmen had discarded Italian fashion (see 16) in favour of the Spanish. Here is the paradox: the Englishman was fiercely chauvinistic and disdainful of all foreigners, but he was susceptible to foreign fashions.

By the 1550s women had a choice of two styles of gown to wear over the bodice and skirt. The loose gown (see 18) fitted across the shoulders to fall in set folds spreading outwards to the ground, leaving an inverted V-shaped opening in front from neck to heel. The gown could be closed by means of buttons, bows and aglets (ornamental metal tags used either as fastenings or as decorative trimmings). The closed gown (see 17) fitted to the waist and then extended over the hips to fall in folds to the ground.

The area between the throat and the edge of the bodice could be covered by a decorative yoke, a partlet, made either of embroidered linen or a rich fabric studded with jewels or spangles. It would be attached to the bodice by means of pins. A letter written to Lady Lisle in November 1533 shows that even at this early date the partlet was embroidered. Leonard Smyth (the Lisle's agent before Hussee) explains that he had 'delivered your frontlet to the Queen's broiderer. . . . Also I delivered the measure of your neck for your partlet collar, which you shall have within x days.'<sup>16</sup>



The French hood remained in fashion, particularly for older ladies, until Mary Queen of Scots popularised the heart-shaped hood in the 1560s. In the mid-1550s, hair was parted neatly in the middle to puff out slightly on either side of the head, but during the next five years that puff of hair became much more pronounced.

One of the most talented artists to work in England after the death of Holbein in 1543 was the Fleming Hans Eworth. His known works cover the period 1549 to 1570, but signed and dated works are rare. A full-length portrait by his circle, c.1555, is thought to be of Lady Mary Sidney, sister of Robert Dudley, later Earl of Leicester, and mother of Sir Philip Sidney (17). Lady Mary's costume, despite the luxurious nature of its components, gives an overall impression of elegant severity and sobriety that was very much the style favoured at Queen Mary's court. She is depicted wearing the type of bodice, skirt and closed gown preferred by the Queen – when the Venetian ambassador met her in 1554, the year she married Philip II of Spain, he noted that she favoured the close-bodied style of gown: she wore 'a gown such as men wear, but fitting very close, with an under-petticoat, which has a very long train; this is her ordinary costume, being also that of the gentlewomen of England'.<sup>17</sup> The smooth, bell-shaped lines of skirts like this were dictated by the Spanish underskirt, the farthingale or vertugado, worn underneath. This undergarment is what gave the sixteenth-century female such an inflexible and exaggerated silhouette. First recorded in the royal accounts in 1545, when one was ordered for Mary's half-sister Elizabeth, the farthingale remained in fashion, with a number of variations, for over seventy years.

The loose gown is shown in a portrait of Elizabeth Hardwick, known as 'Bess', later Countess of Shrewsbury (see 18). In 1547 Bess of Hardwick had married the second of her four husbands, Sir William Cavendish. Their union had important dynastic consequences as, through their sons, the couple were the founders of the ducal families of Devonshire, Newcastle and Portland. Cavendish died in 1559, the year that Elizabeth Tudor was crowned, and he left Bess of Hardwick a life interest in Chatsworth in Derbyshire and a substantial proportion of his property. Bess, through her Protestant connexions at court, had been a friend and supporter of Princess Elizabeth, whose position during her Catholic half-sister's reign had always been perilous. When Mary died in 1558, Bess's loyalty was rewarded when she became a lady-in-waiting to the new Queen. The portrait of Bess – now hanging at Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, the house she built in the 1590s – is erroneously inscribed 'Maria Regina' and dates from the time of her appointment to Elizabeth's court.

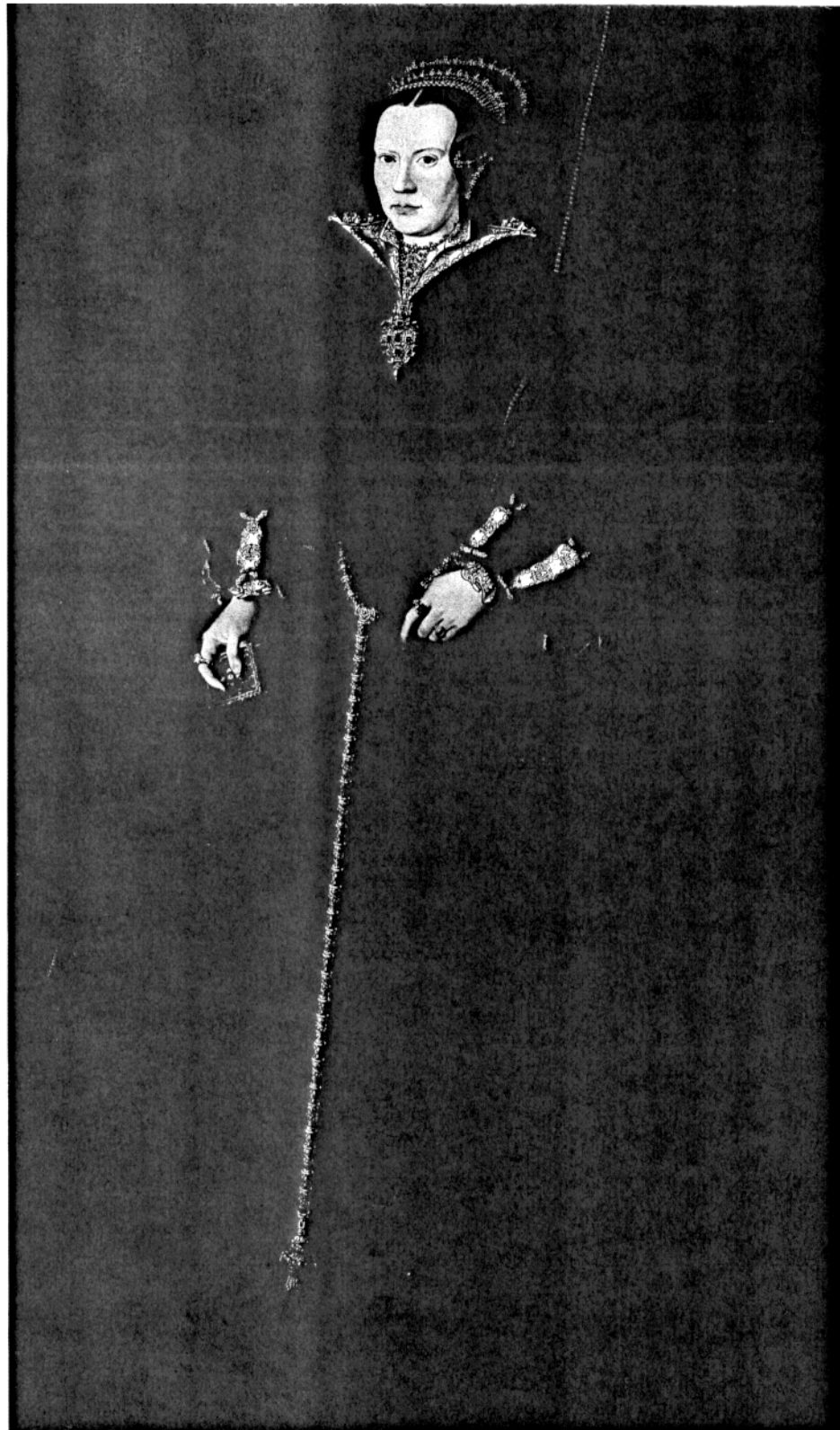
The accession of Elizabeth to the English throne marks an important period in the history of costume. Never has there been an English monarch with such an interest in dress and in the impact that dress can have upon image. At the same time, the prosperity established by Elizabeth's grandfather, Henry VII, was bearing fruit, creating a society with an unprecedented degree of mobility.

The costumes described above have been very much the dress of the most privileged. But the increased expenditure on dress was not confined to courtiers, as fashions spread from the court into London society and out to the rest of the country. This Tudor achievement is alluded to by William Shakespeare in his play, *Henry VIII*. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, predicts at the birth of Elizabeth Tudor in 1533 that when she comes of age:

Mary Sidney's bodice has a high collar, derived from Spanish fashion, which was designed to display the richly-lined lining. This replaced the low neckline that had been popular in the previous thirty years. The shape of the stiffened bodice is defined by the inverted triangle of the skirt, the other triangle is created by the richly-patterned brocade worn under the skirt. The collar of her smock has been done, the area filled with an pendant. Embroidery on the sleeves is visible, as puffs pulled through decorated slashes on the bodice, the collar.

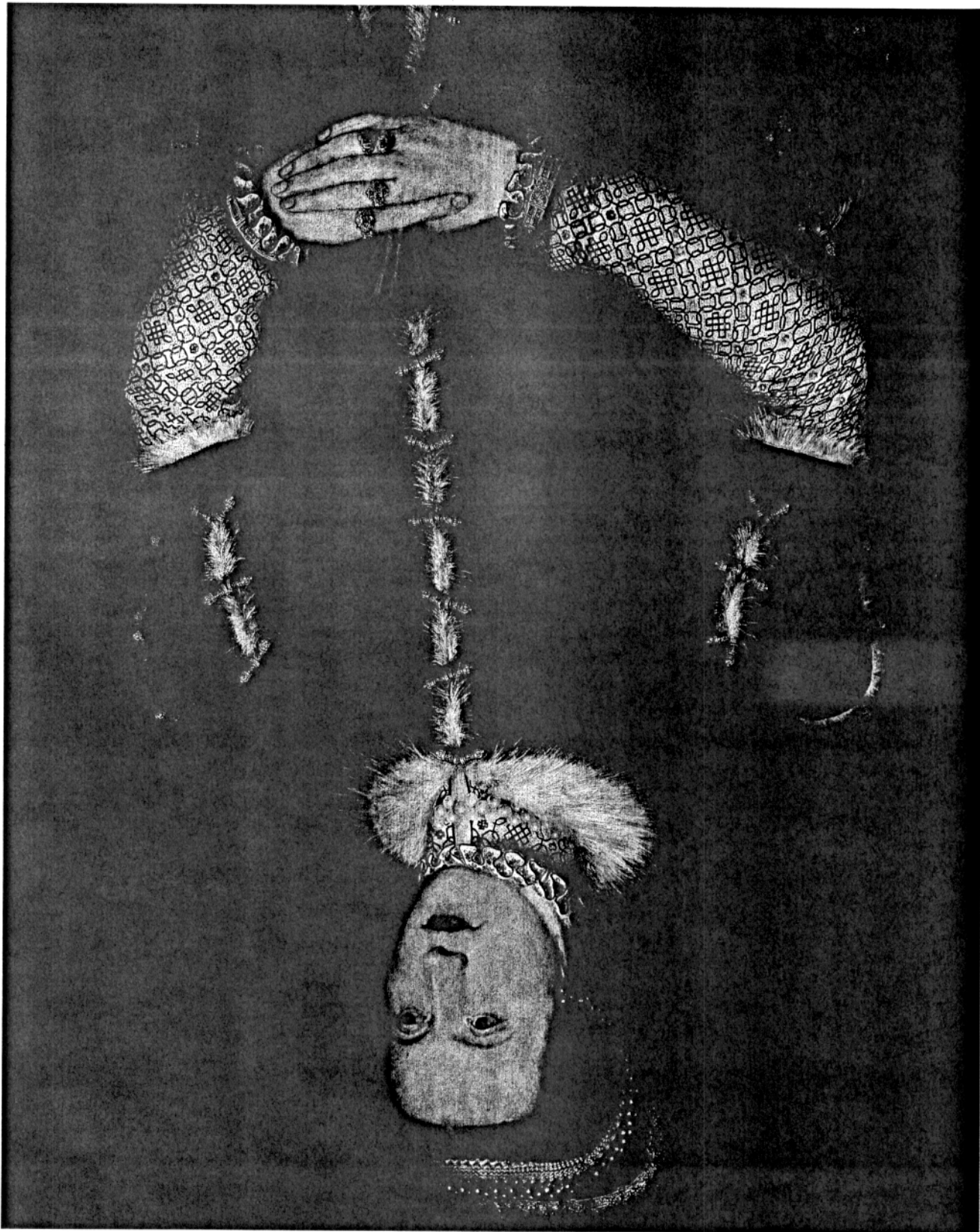
Mary's wealth and status are indicated by the quantity and quality of her jewellery: the jewelled opening of the bodice and jewelled girdle defining the waistline; in an elaborate pomander.

(Hans Eworth, c.1555, Petworth)





104



Hardwick, in a portrait painted  
 r loose gown is lined with soft white  
 tened down the front with aglets.  
 also revealed through aglet-decorated  
 short upper sleeves and sides of the  
 it forms a neat collar. The bodice  
 embroidered in a geometric pattern  
 d circles, and this design too is  
 the standing collar of what is either  
 or partlet. The ruff is still in its  
 te, merely an embroidered frill  
 o the collar. Her French hood has a  
 ment of pearls, set on a border of  
 press, wired so that it curves onto  
 the face, whereas the curve of the  
 i the hood is defined by a billiment  
 d gold set with gems.  
 ays wore a rope of pearls in her  
 n this one they are twisted around  
 s dictated by the fashion of the time.  
 sting accessories are the enamelled  
 ets worn around the wrist. Bracelets  
 : often appear in Elizabethan  
 nd a number of examples survive.  
 of Hans Eworth, c.1560,  
 Hall)

. . . every man shall eat in safety  
 Under his own vine what he plants; and sing  
 The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours.<sup>18</sup>

Inevitably, increasing social mobility brought with it words of warning from conservative observers. William Harrison, in his *Description of England*, 1577, looked back wistfully to a time when:

an Englishman was known abroad by his own cloth and contented himself at home with his fine kersey [rough woollen cloth] hosen and a mean slop [wide breeches], his coat, gown and cloak of brown-blue or puke [blue-black], with some pretty furniture of velvet or fur, and a doublet of sad tawny [dark orange-brown] or black velvet or other comely silk, without such cuts and garish colours as are worn in these days and never brought in but by the consent of the French, who think themselves the gayest men when they have most diversities of jags and change of colours about them.<sup>19</sup>

There was also concern that dress should reflect the wearer's class, rank and profession, as it had done in earlier centuries. A series of ten proclamations, sumptuary legislation, was issued by Elizabeth I between 1559 and 1597. (See also p.289.) These divided society into nine groups, with Dukes and Earls at the top, and servingmen at the bottom, the levels in between being determined by annual income and the value of property owned. This legislation sought to define exactly what fur, fabric and trimming could be worn by each rank, but it is doubtful whether such stipulations could be enforced. Sir John Harington, the Queen's godson, wrote an epigram about the ineffectiveness of the law:

. . . Apparells great excess;  
 For though the laws against yt are express,  
 Each Lady like a Queen herself doth dress,  
 A merchaunts wife like to be a barroness.<sup>20</sup>

That the English loved a show is apparent in many contemporary descriptions. The equation of ostentatious display with strength and power gave rise to ceremonial occasions at which the hierarchical system was clearly shown by the style of dress worn by the participants. A person of importance proclaimed his status by his choice of dress and jewels and by the number of liveried servants who accompanied him in public – the assumption being that the greater the number of retainers, the more important the man. The most common livery was broadcloth trunk hose and coat with the badge or 'cognizance' of the household embroidered on the left sleeve. When the noblemen and their retainers were all gathered together in their brilliantly-coloured liveries it made 'a goodlie sight . . . which doth yeeld the contemplation of a noble varietie unto the beholder, much like to the shew of the peacockes taile in the full beautie, or some meadow garnished with infinite kinds and diversitie of pleasant floures'.<sup>21</sup>

In 1595 Breuning von Buchenbach visited the English court at the head of an embassy from Duke Frederick of Würtemberg. He noted the many 'earls, lords, and knights. They all wore gold and silver dress and their raiment embroidered with precious stones and pearls. At no other court have I ever seen so much splendour and such fine

105



clothes.<sup>22</sup> (See also 257.) This blatant and indiscriminate display of jewels and shimmering luxury fabrics not only had the desired effect of confirming the strength and wealth of the country, but it also meant that a visit to court was expensive. Many changes of wardrobe were required, and any reduction in the quality of the outfits or any repetition of them would soon be noticed and commented on.

The court was a compact society comprising all the officials of the Royal Household. Technically, any gentleman could be admitted to the court, but to be noticed, and thus in a position to gain preferment, it was essential to be introduced by a father or uncle already present at court, or to be a member of a family with an established tradition of service to the crown. Any man who was not fortunate enough to have such family ties would have to find a patron, for being at court without a friend was like being 'a hop without a pole'. The wives of some of the great men held posts as Ladies of the Bedchamber or Privy Chamber and they would endeavour to find positions for their daughters and nieces as Maids of Honour to the Queen.

Many writers deplored the fact that men would squander the revenues of their estates in order to buy new clothes. Ben Jonson in his play *Every Man out of his Humour* (1590) writes: 'twere good you turned four or five hundred acres of your best land into two or three trunks of apparel'.<sup>23</sup> When Arthur, son of Sir Nicholas Throckmorton of Coughton Court, Warwickshire, went to court in 1583, he recorded in his diary that he financed his new clothes by selling part of his land and by borrowing his brother's legacy, on which he had to pay interest for many years.

During the first two decades of Queen Elizabeth's reign, fashion for men and women moved at a much faster pace, replacing the dignified sobriety of the 1550s with a softer, less rigid style in the 1560s. This favoured much brighter colours (see p.31) and an enlivening of plain surfaces again, with applied decoration like embroidery, pearls, gems and braid. Surfaces could be 'pinked' – that is they were cut in small holes or slits arranged to form a pattern; 'paned' – when a vertical slash exposed material of a contrasting colour underneath; and 'puffed' – a decorative effect produced when material was drawn through slashes and panes in 'puffs' (19, 20 and 21).

A comparison between a portrait of Sir Nicholas Throckmorton painted early in 1562 (20) with one of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, painted c.1575–80 (21) shows the later proliferation of decorative detailing and the change in the male silhouette after padding was used to create the swollen appearance of the doublet and hose. Throckmorton was Elizabeth's ambassador to France when his portrait was painted. Leicester was the Queen's supreme favourite for more than twenty years, until his death in 1588. His intense love of finery earned him a respected position as an arbiter of taste amongst the fashionable men at Elizabeth's court, but he ran up enormous debts with mercers, tailors and other suppliers in the process.

During the second two decades all the garments in these portraits were to become the subject of exaggeration, but in the portrait of Leicester they are in a state of perfect balance, with their volume equally distributed between the doublet and the hose. After this date each garment developed independently and the balance broke down: the doublet belly swelled out and under, into the curious peascod shape; and the hose shrank to a mere pad around the hips. The ruff, previously so carefully contained above the collar, was destined to extend far beyond it so that the head effectively became

19 (right) Pinking and paning have been employed on the doublet worn by The Radcliffe, 3rd Earl of Sussex, in this portrait of the early 1560s. Gems have been scattered on the cloak and also form a hatband on the net. As a Knight of the Garter, the Earl displays the Lesser George around his neck. (Follower of Antonio Mor, 1560s, Angewandte Kunst, Bonn)

20 (far right) Sir Nicholas Throckmorton wears a suit – a matching set of garments consisting of a doublet, trunk hose and a cloak. His doublet has a small standing collar, and is fastened at the centre with little gold buttons. A roll of fabric, called a wing or epaulette, is hidden between the sleeve and the armholes of the doublet, and the sleeves and the doublet are both decorated with alternate pink and white material producing a striped effect. The ruff, edged with bobbin lace, matches the ruff at the wrists. A handkerchief, a fashionable accessory, is prominently displayed in the pocket, and a sword echoes its finely worked gold hilt. (Unknown, probably French artist, 1560s)

disconnected from the body. The ruff was pinned to a wire frame called an under-propper or supportasse, which held it at the required angle. Decoration, whether pinking, slashing, braid, lace or embroidery, became more prolific as the garments filled out and increased in volume.

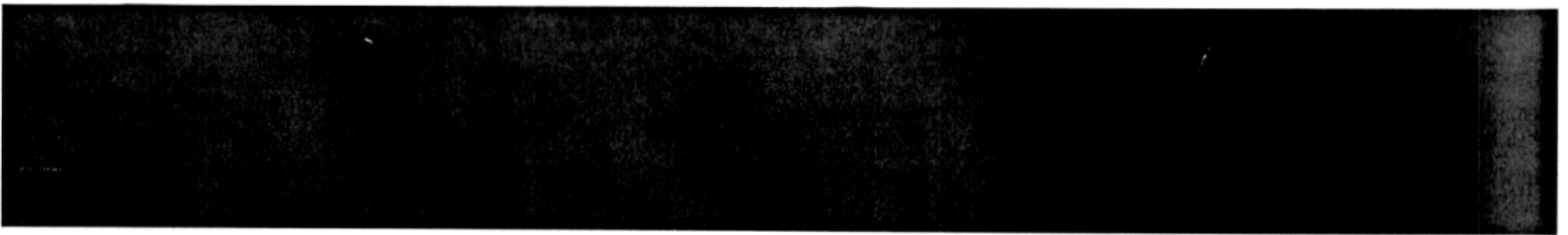
Decoration also took on an important role in women's fashions. A portrait of Katherine Vaux (22), Sir Nicholas Throckmorton's mother, dated 1576, shows a wonderfully complex and exuberant costume, an example of the experimentation with surface decoration that took an almost *trompe-l'oeil* form in the 1570s.

In contrast was the smock, worn under these highly-decorated garments. It was usually made and embroidered by the lady of the house herself. It consisted of two pieces of lawn or linen joined at the sides and could have a square neckline or small collar. Sleeves were always long and the area nearest the hand, 'the sleeve hand', was usually embroidered, as were the collar, hem and neckline.

Men's shirts were cut in a very similar way to women's smocks and were also decorated with embroidery. In John Eliot's *The Parlement of Prattlers*, 1593, a book



107







21 The cream satin doublet worn by Dudley, Earl of Leicester, shares the waistline as Throckmorton's but has higher standing collar and is decorated with narrow bands of gold braid alternating with bands of pinking. His trunk hose has the shape typical of the 1570s, cut into panels that disclose the gold satin lining. The lining is of black, white and gold – a dramatic background for the Earl's square-cut Garter collar with its enamelled Great Gem and elegant square-cut black gems set in a central seam down the sleeves of his fur-lined black cloak (it could also be lined with red) and round the brim of his bonnet. (Unknown artist, c.1575–80, Montagu Collection)



o garment in this portrait of Vaux is a gown, the high collar of been turned back to create revers. displayed as revers, the sleeves and are all made from a semi-transparent, erial embroidered with a delightful roses and strawberry plants. Above line of the bodice, underneath the a be seen the embroidered edge of the pendant attached to a ribbon is worn ionable way – off centre – and a pearl s under the collar of the partlet. Aglets ed all over the gown.  
 artist, 1576, Coughton Court)

intended to help children learn how to converse in French, there is a dialogue between John and his servant in which the boy brings John a smock by mistake:

*Boy:* Pardon me sir, if it please you, I am deceived it is my mistresse smock.

*John:* Wretchlesse boy thou wilt make me smell of the smocke all today and tomorrowe.<sup>24</sup>

John was annoyed because his wife's smock, unlike *his* shirt, would have been perfumed.

Embroidered shirts could be very expensive if bought ready-made from a seamstress. The Puritan pamphleteer Philip Stubbes complained in 1583 that you could buy shirts covered in 'needleworke of silk, and curioslie stitched with open seame, and many other knackes besydes . . . some ten shillings, some twentie, some fortie, some five pound, . . . some ten pounds a peece.'<sup>25</sup>

In the Elizabethan period elevation in status was often celebrated by commissioning a portrait, for which the acquisition of new clothes was essential. When the astrologer Simon Forman married in 1599 he spent £50 on a new gown, breeches, cloak and cap for himself and new clothes for his wife and then they both sat for their portraits.<sup>26</sup> If the sitter held a distinguished office the artist would give the symbols of that position a prominent place in the portrait: an officer of the Royal Household would carry his white wand; if the sitter was a military commander he would be shown holding his baton; and a Knight of the Garter would invariably wear the Lesser or Great George, jewelled pendant badges of the order (see 19 and 21).

An artist commissioned to paint a portrait knew that it was intended to be a record of wealth and status and that he would be expected to portray the sitter's clothes and jewellery in as precise and detailed a way as possible. Painters adapted their style of painting in order to satisfy the demands of their patrons. It was a trend strengthened by the Queen's preferred manner of portraiture, and her choice of the miniaturist Nicholas Hilliard, a brilliant colourist, endorsed a style that lasted for nearly forty years. Her first sitting for Hilliard in 1572 took place in 'the open alley of a goodly garden where no tree was near, nor any shadow at all'.<sup>27</sup> The two-dimensional impression that resulted from this sitting reduced the face to an impassive mask, but it gave the artist the freedom to concentrate on the intricacy and complexity of decorative detail that was such a characteristic of this flamboyant period in costume history. An example of this style can be found in George Gower's 1577 portrait of Elizabeth Knollys, whose mask-like face is but one part of an interlocking pattern of lace, embroidery and jewels (23).

It is difficult now to understand the importance of colour for the Elizabethans, for the brilliant colours that we see in embroidery are not only indicative of an intense love of the natural world but they also speak a language of their own, as each colour had a particular meaning. Richard Robinson's translation of an Italian treatise on the symbolism of colours was published in 1583, and explains, for example, Queen Elizabeth's insistence that her six Maids of Honour should wear a white and silver costume when at court: 'white indicated faith, humility, and chastity: silver, purity'.<sup>28</sup>

Colours with negative values were black, which signified grief and constancy; grey for despair and ash for trouble and sadness. Yellow was a positive colour as it represented hope, joy and magnanimity, whereas yellow-red was deception. Russet,

109



23 Elizabeth Knollys, Lady Layton, Queen's Maids of Honour, showing clothing for a wealthy lady. Her gown is decorated with aglet-trimmed tasselled bands of braid. The liberal jewels, commensurate with her position in society, consists of a rope of pearls draped across the chest, and a pendant and a snake – emblems of mildness and prudence – attached to a loop of twine. Her high-crowned hat has a magnificent jewelled hatband, ostrich feather and coral in the form of a starfish and coral. (After George Gower, 1577, Montagu House, London)

with its association with country values, was prudence. Green was the colour of love and joy, but turquoise (from the French  *Pierre turquoise* , Turkish stone) was jealousy. As red was associated with courage it was not surprising that both Mary, Queen of Scots and Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, chose a colour scheme of red and black with which to meet their end on the executioner's block.

To extend the range of colours available new dyes had to be found – a matter of some



importance for those in the textile trade. Sources in other countries were eagerly sought out and experimented with. In 1579 a dyer, Morgan Hubblethorne, was sent to Persia to learn of 'great colouring of silks'. He was told to 'have great care to have knowledge of the materials of all the countreys that you shall passe thorow, that may be used in dying, be they hearbs, weeds, bark, gummes, earths or what els soever'.<sup>29</sup>

Materials were available in a wide range of colours, for the primary colours were divided into a number of subtly different tones, each of which had a particular name. The most vivid tone of red, for example, was *lustie gallant* and the palest was *maiden's blush*. Between these two extremes there was a choice of *Catherine pear*, *carnation*, *incarnate*, *sangwyn*, *stammel*, *flame*, *gingerline*, *murrey* and *peach*. The new colours that proliferated during Elizabeth's reign were assigned picturesque and 'fantastical' names that are, nevertheless, self-explanatory, like 'gooseturd green, pease-porridge tawny, popinjay blue'.<sup>30</sup> A refined sense of colour led to an appreciation of the different effects of light and shade on fabrics when varying textures like satin, velvet, taffeta and fur were combined in a single outfit. Further displays of great beauty and richness were created when the pile of velvet, woven on a ground of a contrasting colour, was cut away to create a pattern of opulent richness. A surface could be further embellished by embroidery with coloured silks, gold or silver thread and the application of seed pearls, spangles and oes (small rings or eyelets).

One of the more obvious problems in studying dress of this period is the scarcity of extant garments, those that have survived being mostly embroidered jackets, gloves, coifs, partlets and forehead cloths. These tend to represent a selection of the labours of the domestic embroiderer, who was creating garments to be worn at home and whose work does not necessarily illustrate contemporary high fashion. Of the magnificent clothes worn at the court of Elizabeth absolutely nothing remains, and we can only imagine their appearance by looking at portraits (24, 31 and 257).

The eighteenth-century chronicler and historian, Horace Walpole, dismissed late Elizabethan dress as a 'vast ruff, a vaster farthingale and a bushel of pearls',<sup>31</sup> but to its contemporaries exaggeration was an end in itself, and creating a style that to our eyes might be excessive would have elicited admiration and respect from their peers. The process of starching and then arranging the 'vast ruff' was perhaps the most time-consuming activity, and one that men and women alike had to undertake.

Starch was introduced into England in 1564 by a Dutch lady, Dinghen van den Plasse. It was usually made out of wheat and had to be boiled before use. This was a tricky process and the starch often burned or thickened too quickly. (A soluble starch, made from rice, was not developed until the 1840s, when the potato famine in Ireland forced up grain prices and starch manufacturers had to find a cheaper source.)

Securing the immense circle of starched material and then tilting it at the appropriate angle resulted in the 'burning out many pounds of Candle',<sup>32</sup> and the end result would be completely ruined if one was caught in a shower, when it would 'goe flip flap in the winde, like rags flying abroad, and lye upon their shoulders like the dishcloute of a slut'.<sup>33</sup> The extent of the circular ruff worn in the 1580s can be seen in a version of the famous 'Armada' portrait of Queen Elizabeth – painted to commemorate the defeat of the Spanish in 1588 (24). The Queen's ruff, made of cutwork, has been arranged over an underpropper so that it is tilted at an acute angle.



24 In this version of the 'Armada' the original of which is at Woburn, Elizabeth's bodice is front-fastening, an extended point. The wings, which join the bodice, are decorated with pearls and gem-studded bows, and satin sleeves and matching petticoat embroidered with golden stars and (By or after George Gower, c.1588,

As every part of female dress was stiffened at this time, an extremely unnatural shape was created, but it presented endless opportunities for embellishment and decoration. The bodice could either be front-fastening and end in an extended point, or it could have a V-shaped opening in front filled with a stomacher. This was an inverted triangle of material, lined with pasteboard or canvas and stiffened with whalebone busks (strips of wood, whalebone or metal inserted into the casing), that bypassed the waist and extended right down the skirt. The greatest wish of one fourteen-year-old girl in 1597, the daughter of a gentleman from Lancashire called Starkie, was to have a bodice 'not of



Wick Hall has a very rich collection of embroidery, including a cushion depicting the Judgement of Solomon, recorded in an inventory as being in one of the rooms of the Long Gallery. This detail shows the elaborate styles worn in the 1580s at the court of Henri III of France, many features of which were incorporated into English court fashion. The man on the right wears a cartwheel neckline, a heavily padded doublet, a laced French cloak, minimal trunk breeches, fitting canions and, on his feet, antofles or overshoes. His companion wears a full breeches closed at the bottom to match his doublet, a rope of pearls and a gant lace falling band.

wnaiedone for that is not stiff enough but of norne, for that will hold it out . . . to keep in my belly'. Sleeves were also distended, with wire and whalebone, and padded so that they reached an enormous width. The same girl wanted 'sleeves set out with wires for stickes wil break, and are not stiffe enough'.<sup>34</sup>

The French farthingale that appeared in 1580 gave the skirt a tub-shaped hang and this in turn was replaced at the end of the decade by the even more extreme shape of the wheel farthingale (see 30). This structure carried the skirt out at right angles from the waist to a width varying from 8 to 48in before falling vertically to the ground. To avoid the hard line made by the rim of the wheel farthingale the skirt was given a circular frill or flounce, the pleats of which radiated out from the centre to the edge of the rim. The whole skirt was then tilted at the waist so that the hem was raised at the back and lowered in the front. Wearing the farthingale at this angle enabled the wearer to rest her hands on the ledge-like surface of the flounce, a stance that the same fourteen-year-old wanted to adopt, as she requested a 'French farthingale laid low before and high behind and broad on either side so that I may laye mine arms on it'.<sup>35</sup>

Hair has now 'curled, frised and crisped, laid out (A world to see!) on wreathes and borders from one eare to another . . . underpropped with forks, wyers and I can not tel what'.<sup>36</sup> No longer neatly parted in the middle, hair was raised over a wired support which gave it a dip in the centre with a widening at the temples. After about 1590 it was brushed up from the forehead into a bouffant style, still supported but without the dip. The Queen popularised the wearing of false hair when she lost her own after catching smallpox in 1562 and had to resort to an auburn-coloured wig.

An insistence on wearing fashions that were 'farre-fetched and deare bought'<sup>37</sup> led the upper-class Elizabethans to flit excitedly and indiscriminately from one exaggerated foreign style to another, adding to them a love of glittering surface decoration. The end result, according to the satirist Thomas Nashe, writing in 1593, was a disastrous one that left England as 'the Players stage of gorgeous attyre, the Ape of all Nations superfluities, the continual Masquer in outlandish habilements'.<sup>38</sup> His use of the word 'masque' in connection with contemporary fashion is illuminating, suggesting that fashionable dress resembled the exotic costumes that would be worn in a theatrical masque and, as such, were quite unsuitable for normal everyday life. This element of fantasy is characteristic not only of dress but of architecture, painting, sculpture and the decorative arts, endowing them with the unselfconscious exuberance and vitality that are their outstanding qualities.

In his play *Midas*, first performed in 1590 and published in 1592, John Lyly wrote: 'Traffic and travel hath woven the nature of all nations into ours, and made this land like arras, full of device, which was broadcloth, full of workmanship.'<sup>39</sup> It is an interesting simile that suggests that increased trade with other countries, and travel abroad, had enriched rather than diminished England. Philip Stubbes wrote more censoriously in 1583: 'But now there is such a confuse mingle mangle of apparell in Ailgna [England] . . . that it is verie hard to know who is noble, who is worshipfull, who is a gentleman and who is not.'<sup>40</sup>

The Tudors perceived that visitors equated lavish display at court with national strength and power. For many it was more important to have seen Queen Elizabeth than to have seen England, an attitude which underlines the success of the Tudor propaganda

machine. One such was Baron Zdenek Waldstein of Moravia, who visited England in the summer of 1600 and was granted an audience with the Queen at Greenwich Palace. In his speech he explained he 'had hoped and prayed for nothing so much' than that he should 'one day set foot in this glorious Kingdom of England, and that at the same time I might come face to face into the presence of your Majesty' thus achieving 'the greatest object of my journey'.<sup>41</sup> The figure of the Queen 'glittering with the glory of majesty and adorned with jewellery and precious gems', and those of her equally resplendent courtiers had become a symbol of England's national unity and international success.

However, we know that Queen Elizabeth also enjoyed wearing the dress of other countries. In 1577, Dr Thomas Wilson, ambassador for England in Flanders, told Don John of Austria that Elizabeth wore 'diverse attires, Italian, Spanish and French, as occasion served'<sup>42</sup> and that he would be sent a portrait of the Queen wearing Spanish dress. Even the subsequent war against Spain did not cause Elizabeth to throw out the Spanish gowns in her wardrobe, and many are recorded in the 1599 inventory (see below).<sup>43</sup> Nor was there any interruption to the importation of Spanish leather from Cordoba during the hostilities. It was the finest quality leather in Europe and continued to be used to make the most expensive gloves, boots and jerkins.

Queen Elizabeth also used dress to make political points and on one occasion she attempted, in a very clandestine way, to obtain the services of a tailor who worked for the French Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici. So William Cecil, Lord Burghley,



26 An extremely rare example of a 16th-century garment, dating from between 1600 and 1610. Made of rich mulberry-coloured satin and lined with silk throughout, it is thought from its style to have been worn by a man, though it links it with Bess of Hardwick, who wore it at Hardwick Hall in 1608 at the grandest. This detail, the top of the sleeve and wing, shows that the wing was composed of several tabs, each edged with a strip of satin.



tions: 'The Queen would fain have a tailor that has skill to make her apparel both after the French and Italian manner and thinketh you might use some one as suiteth the Queen [Catherine de Medici] without mentioning any manner of request in the Queen Majesty's name . . . as she does not want to be beholden to her.'<sup>44</sup> Her ploy must have succeeded for in 1582, when her marriage negotiations with Catherine's son, the Duc d'Alençon, were at their height, a full-length portrait of Queen Elizabeth was painted for Catherine and displayed at the Valois court. 'The ladies marvelled at the size of the pearls on her dress and noted with satisfaction that she was attired all over *à la Française*.'<sup>45</sup>

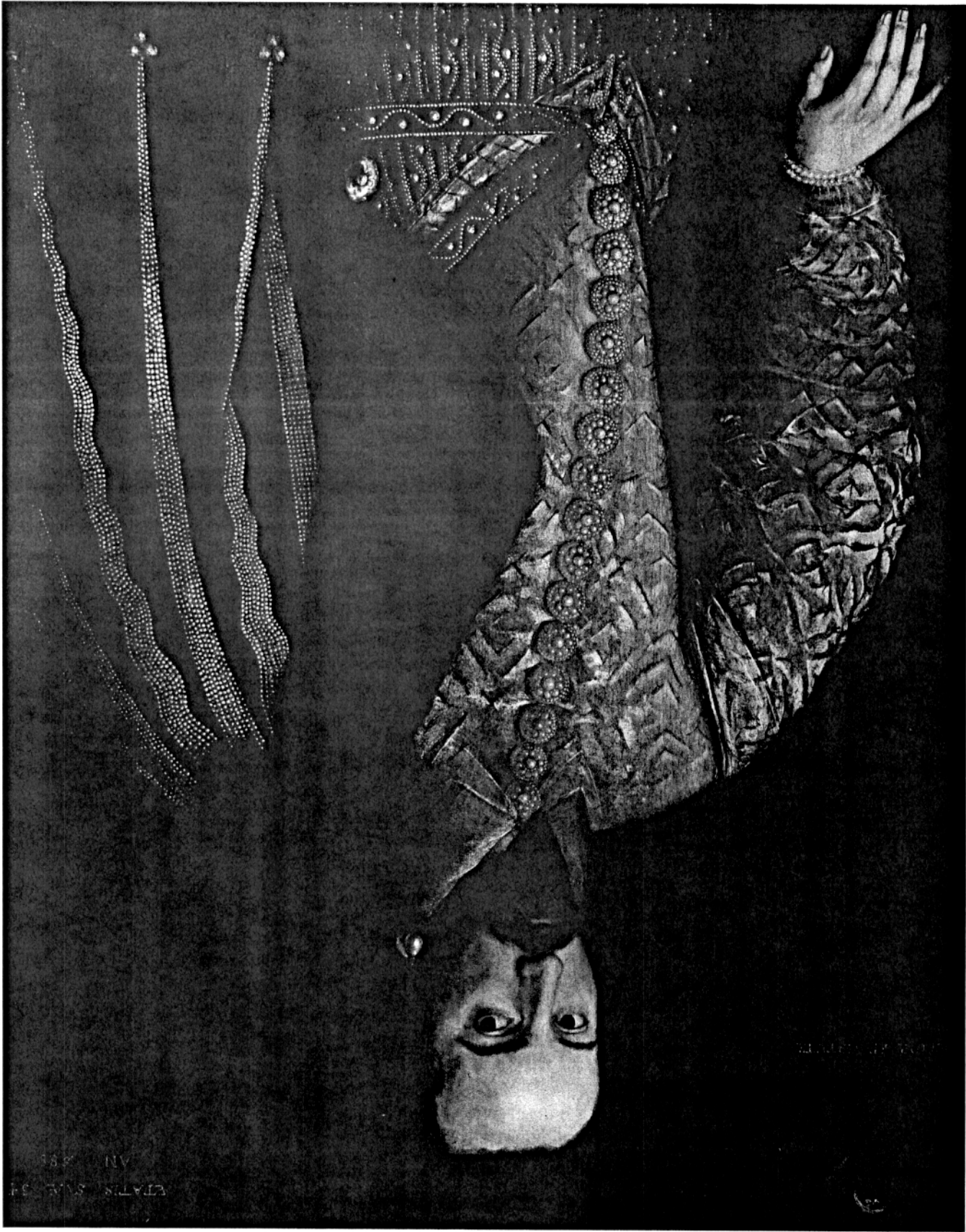
These royal clothes were ordered from the Great Wardrobe, a separate government department. It maintained and stored the huge stock of costumes accumulated by the crown and purchased and made up new outfits for the monarch and officers of the court when ordered to do so. It had a separate budget and every year the accounts were presented to the Exchequer and the Treasury by the Master of the Wardrobe. In 1599 an inventory was made of the Great Wardrobe, showing that the Queen owned some 1,326 items, including robes that had belonged to her predecessors, Edward VI and Mary. The staff of the Great Wardrobe included seamstresses, tailors and embroiderers working full-time remaking and mending existing garments and keeping the stock clean and aired. It took one man a whole day just to beat and air the Queen's muffs, for example.

To be noticed at Elizabeth's court it was certainly essential to be dressed in the height of fashion – whether this meant being the 'ape of fashion' was irrelevant. Every aspiring courtier knew that the Queen expected him to look immaculate and fashionable at all times, so that if he was to make an impact much effort, imagination and money would have to be spent on his appearance. Even if one had to 'lie ten nights awake, carving the fashion of a new doublet', then so be it.<sup>46</sup>

When Arthur Throckmorton went to court in 1583 a note at the end of his diary for that year states that cloth of tinsel (an extremely expensive material of silk or wool interwoven with gold or silver thread) was purchased for a cypress silk suit, with silk ribbon for a matching cloak, and a payment of £6 1s was made for eighteen gold buttons to decorate it. This was in addition to a new suit of tawny velvet decorated with tawny satin and taffeta, matching silk stockings, a beaver hat, two dozen points, ruffs and bands and the silvering of his rapier. He also bought liveries of purple cloth with crimson and yellow velvet guards for his band of retainers and spent the considerable sum of £12 on a jewel to present to the Queen.<sup>47</sup>

On 8 November 1584 Arthur recorded that he 'came and dined at Hampton Court. My sister was sworn of the Privy Chamber.' This was an event of great importance for the family as his sister Elizabeth had been made a Maid of Honour and so was admitted to the Queen's inner circle. Unfortunately, by 1591 Elizabeth Throckmorton had fallen in love with one of Queen Elizabeth's favourite courtiers, Sir Walter Raleigh. She became pregnant and on 19 November they were secretly married. On 29 March 1592 Arthur wrote that 'my sister was delivered of a boy between 2 and 3 in the afternoon' and that on 27 April she returned to Court as if nothing had happened,<sup>48</sup> the baby having been dispatched to relatives in Enfield in Middlesex. Failing to inform the Queen of these events was tantamount to treason, as those holding office at court had to seek her

115



ETATS UNIS DE  
AN 1552

1552

After Raleigh's choice of black and  
rally embellished with pearls, for his  
deliberate, as they were the colours  
en. Another possible allusion to the  
to be seen in the top left corner of  
it, where a damaged Latin motto  
'by love and virtue' is accompanied  
:nt moon, a reference to Elizabeth  
, goddess of the moon. Slung non-  
ver Raleigh's shoulder is a beautiful  
et cloak lined with sable fur, its  
broidered with sun rays worked in  
ending in a pearl trefoil. He has  
wear the alternative, and simpler,  
ckwear to the ruff – a triple-layered  
id of plain lawn.  
mmist H, 1588, Montacute)

permission before they could even contemplate marriage. Needless to say she soon discovered the couple's guilty secret. Raleigh was sent to the Tower of London for five weeks and was only released so that he could command a fleet sailing to the West Indies. Elizabeth remained in the Tower until the end of the year.

Raleigh was a very good-looking man who loved fine clothes and his dramatic taste in dress can be gauged from a 1588 portrait (27). When this portrait was painted the doublet had acquired its characteristic peascod shape, achieved by stiffening it with pasteboard or whalebone busks, and was so heavily padded at the extended point of the waist that it almost curled back on itself. Writing about these 'monstrous' garments Stubbes observed that the padding is so dense that the wearers 'hardly eyther stoupe downe, or decline themselues to the grounde, soe styffe and sturdy they stand about them'.<sup>49</sup> Sleeves are similarly padded, but, the swollen trunk hose worn by Leicester (see 21) in the previous decade has shrunk in shape and is cut into pearl-decorated panes.

A comparison of the portrait of Sir Robert Carey, 1st Earl of Monmouth, painted c.1591 (28), with that of Sir William Herbert (created Lord Powis in 1629), painted in 1595 (29) reveals a gradual deflation in the male silhouette as the taut, tense line of padded doublet and minimal trunk hose gave way to a more relaxed and romantic style. Thomas Middleton wrote in the preface to his play *The Roaring Girl*, 1611, written with T. Dekker, that 'The fashion of play-making I can properly compare to nothing so naturally, as the alteration in apparell: for in the time of the great-crop-doublet, your huge bombasted plays, quilted with mighty wordes to lean purpose was only then in fashion.'<sup>50</sup> The dramatic equivalent of the padded doublet was the verbose and long-winded play of the period.

The companion portrait of Sir William's wife, Lady Eleanor Percy, daughter of the 8th Earl of Northumberland, also painted in 1595 (30), shows the development of female fashion, and in particular of the farthingale. In Peter Erondell's French/English phrase book *The French Garden*, 1605, there is an exchange between Lady Ri-Mellaine and her maid while she is being dressed in the morning which gives an idea of the amount of time involved in placing so many garments on the body, the intricate task of pinning and tying them together, the arrangement of the lady's hair and accessories and the application of cosmetics.

Her maid's first task was to warm her smock. When she had put it on it was covered by the whalebone-stiffened bodice of her petticoat, which was tightly laced in position, to be followed by a petticoat skirt of 'wroughte [embroidered] Crimson velvet with silver fringe'. Her stockings were secured by garters and the maid then tied her Spanish leather shoes – chosen because the lady wanted to go out for a walk. The next task was to arrange the lady's hair, so a cloth was placed over her shoulders while the hair was combed thoroughly. The maid was told to bring some jewels to decorate her hair and some laces to bind it, and to sort out the head-dress – a French hood with a border of rubies. She then used a piece of scarlet cloth to 'scour' her face with paste of almond and dried it with a napkin. Once a carcenet (a heavy necklace resembling a collar) had been arranged round her throat, and agate bracelets round her wrists, the tailor was ordered to bring an 'open gowne of white Sattin layed on with buttons of Pearle'.

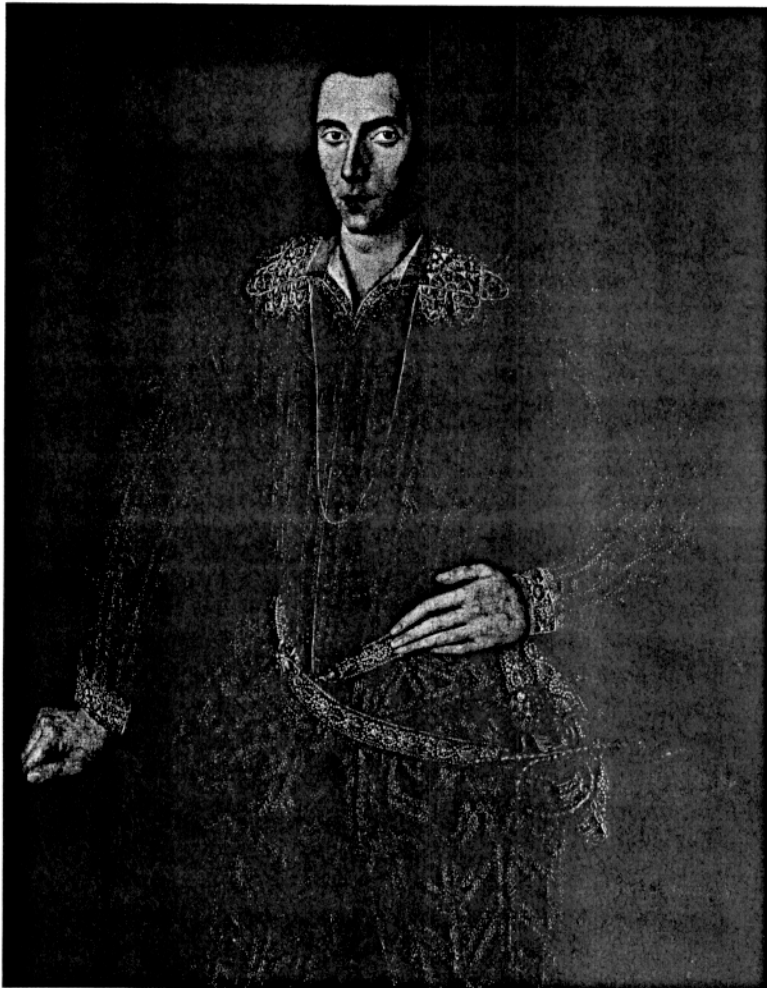
The next stage of dressing was the most tricky – the selection and fixing of neckwear. After some deliberation Lady Ri-Mellaine chose a cutwork rebato (a shaped collar



*The Art of Dress*

wired to stand up around the back of the head) which was carefully pinned to the bodice at the appropriate angle. Her cuffs were secured with 'small pinnes' from the pincushion – without which the process of dressing would have been impossible. After the farthingale and gown had been put into position a girdle was placed around her waist and a variety of useful items were attached to it. These included scissors, pincers, a knife to open letters, a penknife, a bodkin, an earpicker and a seal. Other accessories brought to her were a comfit-box, a mask, a fan, a handkerchief, gloves and a rope of pearls. On the completion of her dressing the maid was bidden to pick up her discarded night clothes and 'put them in the cushen cloth'.<sup>51</sup>

This daily ritual was even more elaborate when applied to the Queen as each of her ladies-in-waiting had a specific task allotted to her. One of them, a Gentlewoman of the Privy Chamber, had the responsibility of keeping a Day Book in which she recorded all items leaving the Wardrobe and listed any jewels worn by the Queen or sewn onto her costumes that had been mislaid at the end of the day. Hence an entry for 1578 which reads: 'Item loste from her Majesties backe the xxxith of Marche at Grenewich from a



Robert Carey, later 1st Earl of Devon, in an outfit that is a striking example of the last stage of the peascod-doublet, now so exaggerated that it turns into a trunk hose, while the trunk hose has been replaced by a pearl-studded roll. Like Raleigh, Carey obviously loved pearls and has chosen to wear ropes of them across his chest like a sash, and there is beautiful pearl embroidery on his cloak.  
 School, c.1591, Montacute)

(far left) Sir William Herbert in a doublet and hose decorated in an altern of braid. In keeping with the comfortable style, he wears his shirt with its lace-trimmed collar lying on his shoulders.  
 English artist, 1595, Powis Castle)

(left) Lady Eleanor Herbert is depicted in a farthingale under a red velvet kirt. Her stomacher and matching sleeves have been embroidered in a pattern of flowers, with the surface given extra texture by a covering of ruffled gauze. This transparent material is framed by heavy embroidered hanging sleeves that match the elaborate ruff. Her elaborate ruff is composed of deep folds of sheer lawn edged with gossamer and hanging spangles that lie on top of each other in magnificent profusion. Eleanor indicates her allegiance to the Queen by wearing a jewelled cross. Other ornaments include three elaborate pendants: one on her bodice, another fixed to a sleeve, and a third worn in the hair. A long jewelled chain is attached to either side of the bodice, and a pearl-studded band encircles her waist. She holds the latest accessory – a fan.  
 English artist, 1595, Powis Castle)

Gowne of clothe of golde with roses and honysuckles one dyamounde oute of a Claspe of golde.<sup>52</sup>

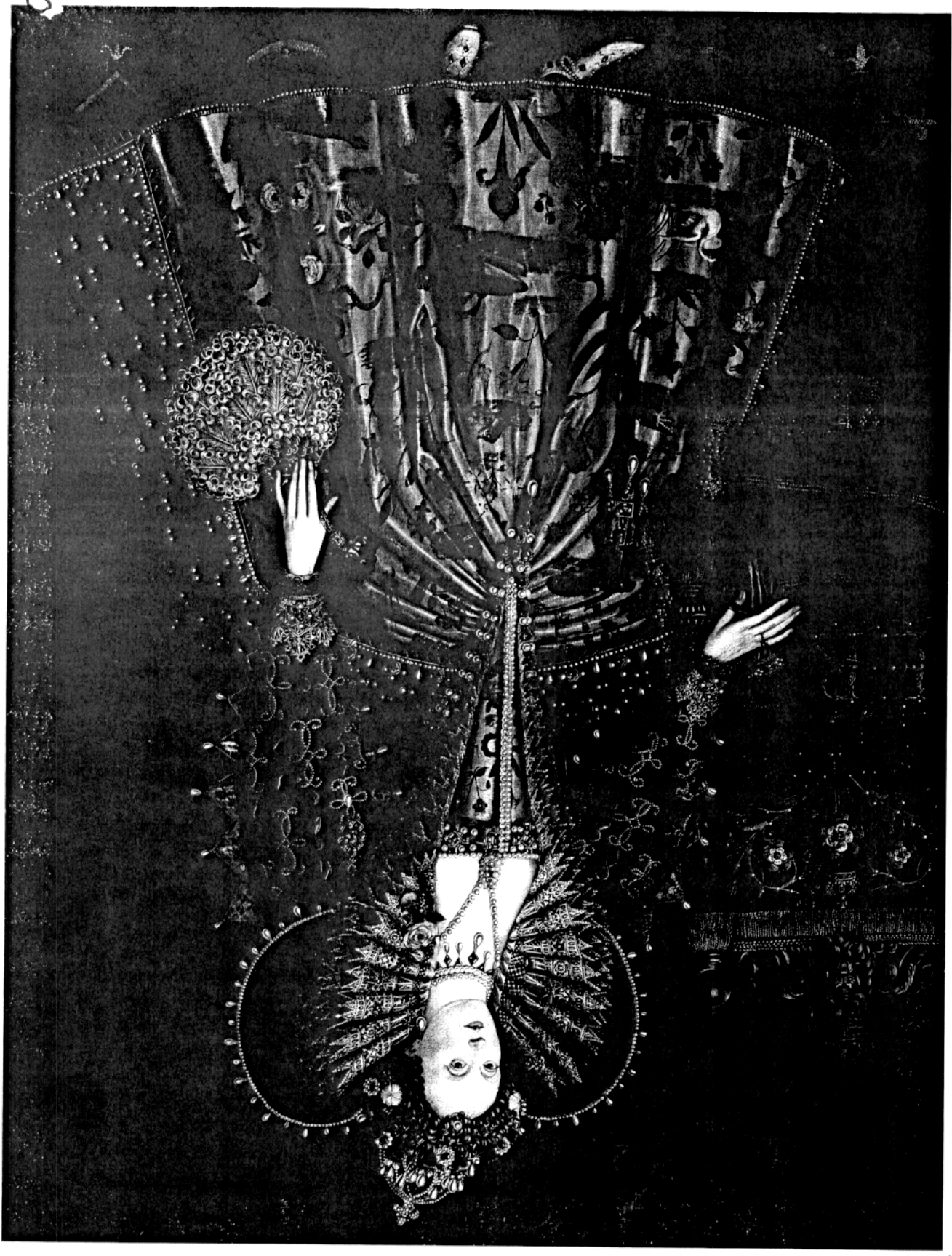
When Thomas Platter saw Elizabeth I in 1599 he found she was ‘most lavishly attired in a gown of pure white satin, gold-embroidered . . . in short she was most gorgeously apparelled’.<sup>53</sup> As we have seen, nothing has survived of her ‘inestimable wardrobe’, but a portrait of the Queen at Hardwick Hall gives some idea of her appearance (31).

Opinion has always been divided as to whether her flamboyantly-patterned white satin forepart and stomacher, with their extraordinary diversity of life-like motifs, were actually embroidered or stained (ie painted), but it is now thought that the skirt was embroidered and that it was Bess of Hardwick (by then Countess of Shrewsbury), who masterminded the design, and possibly worked on it herself, intending it to be a spectacular New Year’s Day gift to the Queen.<sup>54</sup> It is typical of the extravagant and sometimes bizarre late-Elizabethan style of embroidery which mixed together all manner of motifs taken from the natural world, whatever the discrepancies in scale. A variety of flowers, including roses, irises and pansies, are interspersed with a lively depiction of insects, animals and fish, amongst which are fearsome sea-monsters, a crab and a whale spouting water (32). Sources for these motifs could be found in illustrations in natural history books, emblem books and herbals, the most famous of which was John Gerard’s *Herbal or General History of Plants* published in 1597. Flowers and embroidery were apparently linked together in the Elizabethan mind, as suggested by a passage in Gerard’s dedication to Lord Burghley: ‘For if delight may provoke men’s labour, what grater delight is there than to behold the earth apparelled with plants, as with a robe of imbrodered works, set with orient pearles and garnished with great diversitie of rare and costly jewels.’<sup>55</sup>

On New Year’s Day everyone in the Queen’s household, from the noblest to the most humble, was expected to give her a gift, in return for which they would receive money, or its equivalent in plate. Jewellery was a popular choice of gift and in 1584 they ranged from Sir Christopher Hatton’s spectacular ‘Attyre for the head containing vii peeces of golde, iii of them being Crownes of golde emperyal garnished with smale dyamonds, Rubyes, Perles and opalls on the one side and the other being Victoryes [allegorical figures holding an olive branch, probably made from enamelled gold and depicting Victory] garnished with diamonds Rubyes perles and opalls’, to Mr Newall’s gift of a tiny gold spade, set with mother of pearl and diamonds, that could be pinned onto a ruff.<sup>56</sup> Embroidered sweetbags, filled with sweetmeats or money, were another popular and less expensive choice, and when embroidered with gold and silver thread, pearls and spangles made extremely attractive accessories (see 37).

In *The Parlement of Prattlers*, 1593, there is a dialogue set in a goldsmith’s shop between the proprietor, Smith, and Jane, a customer. Jane asks Smith if he has either a pendant made of jet ‘after the manner of France’ or a topaz set in gold. Smith replies that he has neither, but he can show her a ‘verie faire Turquois’. After expressing her approval of the stone Jane wants to know where it came from and is surprised to learn that it originated in far-off ‘Quinzay [Cathay] the imperiall State among the Chinos’. She then asks the goldsmith if he could create a ring similar to those sold in Venice, with a ‘faire christall’ under which is set a ‘little Scorpio of iron wagging his tail very artificially’. Smith replies, ‘I have been in Italy and have seene many of the same making’,

119



portrait of Queen Elizabeth even her gloves are encrusted with pearls – virginity – and gold jewels. Pearls of various sizes, arranged in different patterns, are the decoration. A massive jewel, set on a red ribbon, has been pinned to the top of the gown. It comprises a spire or obelisk of six tiers, with a base of a large square and three square diamonds, each with a pearl. There is also a female figure on either side of the spire. Elizabeth was very proud of her long elegant fingers and she draws attention to them by positioning her right hand on a pair of gem-encrusted ruffled gloves, whilst the other holds a white feather fan set in a sumptuous gown encrusted with rubies. Gloves, often made of velvet, were an essential article of finery and a mark of rank for men and women. (Hilliard and Rowland Lockety, c.1599, Hall)

...il from the Queen's portrait (31) ... pansy from the hem of her skirt. ... ven as love-in-idleness, heartsease and ... ver, the pansy (much smaller and less ... n today's version), with its elegant ... de it a popular motif with the ... century embroiderer. It was one of ... s favourite flowers, frequently ... on her clothes, together with the ... rose representing the honour of virgins.



121

and he offers to fashion one for ten crowns.<sup>57</sup> This brief interchange is interesting as it not only reveals how merchants would trade with the most distant areas of the known world to procure luxury goods, but also underlines the ease with which ideas could be transferred from one country to another.

Throughout the sixteenth century the craft of the goldsmith was one of the most international. Their close involvement with the financial affairs of their clients (see p.48), the assurance of princely patronage and the circulation of published designs meant that their work was never confined within the borders of a single country. They also had access to extraordinary sources of raw materials. The gold and silver bullion that flooded into the Hapsburg Empire from the Americas via Spain and Portugal was then fashioned by craftsmen in its Central European territories in Nuremberg, Munich, Frankfurt, Vienna and Antwerp into glittering jewels, studded with diamonds from India, rubies from Burma, sapphires from Ceylon and emeralds from Colombia. Pearls, those quintessential Elizabethan jewels, were grown in oyster fisheries on the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Manaar, off the north-east coast of Ceylon, to reach Europe via the trading cities of Alexandria in Egypt and Madras in India.<sup>58</sup>

Increased demand for goods that were 'farre fetched and deare bought' meant that merchants must be men of great resilience and determination, risking their money to gamble on the safe arrival of goods over difficult land and sea routes. Whether they used the sea passage to India round the Cape of Good Hope (discovered by Vasco da Gama in 1498) or the overland route to the Far East through the Eastern Mediterranean and Asia, the duration of such journeys and their inherent dangers meant that a high profit had to be guaranteed when the goods finally reached their destination. From the twelfth century raw silk and woven silk fabrics had been one of the most valuable imports from China, but by the sixteenth century these were supplemented by silks, brocades and damasks from the Middle and Near East. Italy was famous for its wide range of silks, designed and woven in centres like Florence and Genoa, and these were exported throughout Europe via the marketing cities of Venice, Leghorn and Genoa. London mercers such as Sir Baptist Hicks (see p.82), whose shop at the sign of the White Bear, Cheapside, was frequented by all the luminaries of Elizabethan London society, made his fortune by employing representatives in Italy. Negotiating directly with the suppliers meant that Hicks was guaranteed a regular and secure supply of the very finest silks.

In 1606 Thomas Dekker the playwright, who was noted for his portrayal of daily life, wrote that the clothes of a fashionable Englishman are '[like] a traitors bodie that hath beene hanged, drawne, and quartered, and is set up in seuerall places: his Codpiece is in *Denmarke*, the collar of his Dublet, and the belly in *France*: the wing and narrow sleeue in *Italy*: the short waste hangs ouer a *Dutch* Botchers stall in *Utrich*: his huge sloppes speakes *Spanish*; *Polonia* gives him the Bootes'.<sup>59</sup> This description, though somewhat exaggerated, reflects the eclectic style of Elizabethan dress, which borrowed fashions from many countries. The fact that the English were famous, or rather notorious, for their constant and restless desire for new fashions and their apparent inability to create their own national style was a source of annoyance to some observers. But it also ensured the continuing success and expansion of the London fashion trade, enabling the customer to find an impressive display of materials and accessories that were 'farre fetched and deare bought'.



Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México  
Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género

Seminario **Vestido, moda y cultura**  
**Construcción y comunicación de**  
**identidades sociales diversas: del vestido**  
**medieval al estilo *dark*.**

**Sesión 3** El Renacimiento: moda en las cortes  
europeas

DAVIS, Fred (1992), *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, Chicago y Londres: University of Chicago Press, pp. 31-54.

# 3

## Ambivalences of Gender: Boys will be Boys, Girls will be Boys

**A girl should be a tomboy during the tomboy age,  
and the more of a tomboy she is the better.**

Joseph Lee, turn-of-the-century founder of the Playground  
Association of America

## THE ASYMMETRY OF CROSS-GENDER CLAIMS

The history of Western fashion is marked by a profound symbolic tension arising from the desire, sometimes overt though more often repressed, of one sex to emulate the clothing and associated gender paraphernalia of the other.<sup>1</sup> Until well into the eighteenth century the habit of cross-gender emulation in dress was, if anything, somewhat more pronounced on the male side in the privileged classes than on the female (Brenninkmeyer 1963). (The common people were for the most part excluded from fashion's orbit until the nineteenth century.) In general, however, fashionable dress for both sexes shared, as a perusal of books on costume history makes plain, a great deal more than would be true later.

Since the industrial revolution, at which point males came increasingly to fall under the visual constraints of a somber work ethic, the tendency, of course, has been for masculine versus feminine ambivalence in clothing to reveal itself almost exclusively on the female side as women have opted periodically—and during certain periods with great fervor—to incorporate into their personas insignia of male status and masculinity. The catalogue of devices by which this has been accomplished is almost without end; by way of example, I offer only a casual listing here: top hats, bowler

1. The epigraph is from Paoletti and Kregloh (1989, 39). Echoing a principal theme of this chapter, the authors at once add, "Cross dressing or equivalent gender-bending behavior among young males won no similar endorsements."

hats, fedoras, sailor hats, Basque berets, ordinary men's shirts, button-down oxford shirts, T-shirts, neckties, bow ties, ascots, crew sweaters, black leather motorcyclist jackets (sometimes studded), waistcoats, plus fours, heavy rough tweeds, severe tailoring, padded and exaggerated shoulders, military jackets and insignia, boys' haircuts (including short, bobbed, and unruly hair), bald scalp, no makeup, tattooing, underemphasized breasts, jodhpurs, bermuda shorts, riding crops, men's walking sticks, tightly rolled men's black umbrellas, jumpsuits, men's footwear (including basketball shoes, wing-tips, and opera pumps), suspenders, and, finally, the quintessential male garment, trousers—be they slacks, jeans, or part of a three-piece suit.<sup>2</sup>

Since the early nineteenth century, men for their part have flirted only sporadically, and then rather timorously, with the possibility of adopting clothing or other gender-specific items in any way suggestive of femininity. The so-called peacock revolution of the early 1970s, which for a short time paralleled, though on a much smaller scale, the truly radical alterations in women's dress (e.g., pants, braless blouse wear, short hair, jeans) amounted to little more than a turning to brighter colors, a receptiveness to patterned apparel and softer fabrics worn more loosely on the body and, generally, a slightly greater informality in business and after-hours dress. Within a decade, however, even these modest departures from conventional attire were largely abandoned by middle- and upper-class men as the dark-hued three-piece business suit again asserted its symbolic dominance in the male's wardrobe. An attempt by a reputed *enfant terrible* of French couture, Jean-Paul Gaultier, to introduce sarongs and pants-skirts (open-legged trousers with a skirt panel in front) in his fall 1984 men's collection was greeted with reactions ranging from indifference, at best, to

2. It is revealing that whereas most items of male attire adopted by women have been viewed with indulgence or amusement after their initial shock value has worn off, the same cannot be said of trousers. George Sand was ostracized for wearing them in mid-nineteenth century Paris, as was Marlene Dietrich in "polite circles" almost a century later. Even more telling, perhaps, is that following their mass adoption by women in the wake of the women's movement of the late 1960s numerous fashionable hotels, restaurants, and other public accommodations barred entrance to women wearing them.

outright ridicule (Duka 1984). Interestingly, even as he introduced them, Gaultier, by way of assuring interested buyers (of whom apparently there were none) he was not out to feminize men, is quoted as stating, "I'm not saying men and women should look alike. It won't be like the Sixties, where they had the same haircut and everything. They'll share the same wardrobe, but they'll wear it differently. Men will stay masculine and women feminine" (Brantley 1984b).<sup>3</sup>

That the very idea of men's "fashions" smacks of insinuations of femininity and/or homosexuality is attested to by the skittish reception accorded the first men's boutiques—they were so named—opened in Paris by Pierre Cardin in the late 1950s. According to a prominent American designer I interviewed, it was facetiously remarked at the time that the men's clothes sold there "looked like the sort Marlene Dietrich would wear. His boutiques turned out to be a lot more popular with chic women than with men."

#### A NOTE ON ANDROGYNOUS DRESS

An intriguing refinement of fashion's historic propensity to exploit the masculine versus feminine instability in gender identity is the periodic resort to androgyny as a way of addressing the problem. Over the past century and a half, though more overtly in the period since the First World War, androgynously toned fashions have from time to time held sway, having reached their zenith in the unisex stylings popular from the late 1960s to mid-1970s (Gottdiener 1977). (Some unisex shops absolutely refused to make any gender distinction in the clothes hanging from their racks.) A similar flurry, this time actually spoken of in the fashion

3. This is but one of a vast class of such statements I elsewhere term "fashion's rhetorical consolations," i.e., statements, usually from designers and the fashion press, that deny or minimize the identity threat posed by a new fashion. Their aim, of course, is to reassure potential buyers that their most preferred images of self will in no significant way be compromised by wearing the new fashion. Thus the world of fashion at one and the same time celebrates and trivializes the acts to which it owes its very existence.



press as *androgynous*, occurred in the early to mid-1980s, mostly, however, by way of “punk” influences from the streets rather than from explicitly ideological gender concerns as such.

Strictly speaking, true androgyny would involve a melding or muting of gender-specific items of apparel and appearance so thorough as to obliterate anything beyond a biological “reading” of a person’s sex (e.g., presence or absence of facial hair, a bosom, a narrowed waist in relation to hip size). In other words, apart from such visible biological characteristics, the clothing and other costuming borne by the person would have “nothing to say” on the matter of gender or sexual role. Clearly, so-called androgynous fashions in the West have never, as Paoletti and Kidwell (1989, 160) emphasize, attained so radical a condition; nor can we assume it was ever the intent of their creators for them to do so. The symbolic aim of these fashions is to dramatize cross-gender tensions, not resolve them.

Despite the by no means trivial significance of androgynous symbols for how men and women will respond to each other, two features in particular belie the authenticity of any full-blown declaration of androgyny.<sup>4</sup> First, as with the masculine versus feminine identity tension generally, the items meant to represent androgyny are, in terms of their gender-associated origins and allusions, located much more often on the male side of the gender division than on the female. Short hair, toned-down makeup, trousers, men’s suit and shirt stylings, ties, and suspenders are the devices designers have classically resorted to when wishing to register androgynous as opposed to gender-specific meanings for women. By contrast, the only putatively androgynous insignia in recent times that have to any significant extent been adopted by men were the longer hair stylings, hand purses, and beaded ethnic necklaces and bracelets of the now largely abandoned hippie-inspired unisex stylings of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The recent vogue for earring wear among teenage boys and some young adult males may, perhaps, point symbolically to some future blurring of gender lines. As of this writing, however, the style is still very far from being incorporated into the sartorial mainstream. Its

4. Steele (1985), for example, maintains that androgynous touches have traditionally been employed in fashion to heighten, not to desexualize, the erotic allure of women’s clothing.

confinement within the teenage subculture and certain “fringe” groups, most notably gays and rock musicians, while not without cultural significance, attests to the continuing strong male gender barrier toward all paraphernalia evocative of femininity.

The essentially asymmetrical weighting of androgynous fashion claims is further apparent when on closer inspection it is recognized that such claims almost always honor pre- and early adolescent boyishness rather than anything approximating a truly asexual or hermaphroditic state.<sup>5</sup> Again one sees typically the same array of masculine items, although this time favoring the symbolically preadult age grades: the slightly tousled boyish haircuts, snap brim caps, Eton jackets, button-down shirts, loose-fitting wool slacks, striped school ties, wide suspenders, etc. Small wonder then that feminists, rather than viewing current androgynous styles as symbols of sexual equality, regard them suspiciously as but another subtle sexist device for muting the egalitarian demands emanating from the women’s movement. Under the symbolic pretense of deemphasizing gender distinctions, the boyish androgynous look, it is alleged, serves at one and the same time to appeal to latent homoerotic impulses in men and to assuage fears over a loss of power to women. It is as if the androgynous look whispered: “These women dressed like men are really not that at all. They’re more like immature boys.”<sup>6</sup>

### DRESS, GENDER, AND MODERN HISTORY

Why the cross-sex traffic in the opposite sex’s insignia has been so decidedly one-sided since the early nineteenth century, and why prior to that it was more nearly equal, have proved intriguing questions for costume historians, feminist scholars, and fashion

5. Similar points are made by Hollander (1985) although, rather than on gender issues, she places greater emphasis on the prepubescent, more purely erotic incitements believed by some analysts to adhere to androgyny. She also claims there has over the past few decades been, especially in the public media world of entertainment celebrities, a good deal more—moreover, culturally significant—borrowing of female dress and adornment symbols by males than I have allowed for here.

6. The same point is made by Bordo (1990). See her insightful essay for an extended discussion of the role of the “lean and slender” androgynous look in contemporary gender politics.

theorists. Indeed, costume historians (Laver 1937) have argued that in fashionable circles prior to the nineteenth century gender distinctions in dress were not nearly as strongly marked as they have become since. In the eighteenth century, both men and women of the aristocracy, and of the upper Bourgeoisie who emulated it, were equally partial to ample displays of lace, rich velvets, fine silks, and embroideries, to highly ornamented footwear, to coiffures, wigs, and hats of rococo embellishment, and to lavish use of scented powders, rouges, and other cosmetics (Los Angeles County Museum of Art 1983). In short, the male was as colorfully plumed as the female and, as in the avian kingdom, often more so.

Scholars (Bell 1947; Brenninkmeyer 1963; Konig 1973) differ somewhat in their analyses of what it was that brought about so sharp a divergence in the ways men and women dressed after the eighteenth century. But all concur that it was tied in some fundamental way to the decline of European aristocracy and the corresponding ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, a movement that, though much accelerated by the French Revolution, was well underway before 1789. Protestant-oriented values of hard work, sobriety, frugality, and personal economic advancement figured prominently, of course, in the structural transformation of European society (Weber 1947). Perhaps it was essentially the desire of the bourgeoisie to reflect these moral attitudes in what they wore that accounted for men and women coming to dress so distinctively. For then, as even now to a lesser extent, the sexes did not have equal access to workbench, marketplace, and office. If nothing else, pregnancy, child rearing, and an unending round of household chores saw to that. And with such parallel developments as the industrial revolution and a more democratic polity, both of which served to highlight the Protestant work ethic, it fell to the adult middle-class male to serve as the visible embodiment of the ethos animating the great social transformation then taking place. Accordingly, men's dress became the primary visual medium for intoning the rejection of "corrupt" aristocratic claims to elegance, opulence, leisure, and amatory adventure that had been so elaborately encoded into pre-nineteenth century dress.<sup>7</sup> Through fashion, means were found to

7. The elegant corruptions signaled by pre-nineteenth century aristocratic dress are portrayed with great visual flair and verisimilitude in two films from the

signal man's symbolic adherence to the austere values of the new age. Men's dress became more simple, coarse, unchangeable, and somber, sartorial tendencies that in many respects survive to the present. Not that women's dress remained unaffected by these structural changes in European society—e.g., gowns and other outer apparel became more modest and less opulent, coiffures less edificelike, the use of cosmetics less blatant—but the alterations were not nearly so radical, probably because woman's social role had not changed to the same extent as had man's. Bell (1947, 92–93) summarizes these developments thus:

The differentiation between the dress of men and that of women which begins through a variation in development throughout the eighteenth century and culminates in the schism of the nineteenth century arises from the fact that the exhibition of wealth in men no longer depended upon a demonstration of futility; this change was made possible by the emergence of a wealthy manufacturing class. On the other hand, the women of this class, having no employment and being entrusted with the business of vicarious consumption, continued to follow the sartorial laws already in existence.

By the time of Victoria's ascension in 1837, clear and well-bounded gender distinctions had been established for men's and women's dress. Analogous in certain respects to the dichotomy Bernstein (1964) posits for working- and middle-class language use in contemporary Britain, it was as if men had come to be consigned a highly *restricted* dress code, whereas women were permitted to retain much of the *elaborated* code that had evolved for them over prior centuries. The restricted character of men's dress code derived principally, as I have noted, from the overweening centrality accorded work, career, and occupational success for male identity; so much so that for many decades to come, especially in the middle classes, clothing was almost unavailable as a visual means for men to express other sides of their personalities.

As is often the case when some few ends are pursued single-mindedly to the near exclusion of all else, the code's symbolic integrity (with its unrelieved emphasis on matters of work and liveli-

late 1980s, *Dangerous Liaisons* and *Valmont*, both based on an eighteenth-century novel by Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

hood) was easily threatened by anything other than the most incidental allusion to nonvocational facets of self. Hence, men became sensitive and squeamish over incorporating into their wardrobes any item of clothing remotely suggestive of femininity, passivity, or indolence. This same single-mindedness probably also accounts for the glaring absence since the nineteenth century of humor in adult male dress, a quality women's dress managed to retain and on occasion to cultivate anew.<sup>8</sup> Witness in this connection the now-famous witty asides of Chanel (cheap costume jewelry with severely tailored suits) and Schiaparelli (hats shaped like shoes) from their couture of the 1920s and 1930s. More recently, obvious parody and playfulness are to be found in the women's clothing of, among others, such designers as Jean-Paul Gaultier, Franco Moschino, the late Perry Ellis, and the firm of Esprit.

The differential evolution of male and female dress in the modern era is not, as many think, the result of historical accident with each dress form going its own way, as it were, once its basic pattern is set down. On the contrary, the restricted code of post-eighteenth century men's dress and the elaborated code of women's are of a piece; together they comprise a coherent sign system, which seeks to ratify and legitimate at the deepest, most taken-for-granted levels of everyday life the culturally endorsed gender division of labor in society. Thus, in so steadfastly narrowing its symbolic allegiance to values of work and career, conventional middle-class male dress signals its privileged access to the source of economic and political power in industrial and postindustrial society, namely, occupational success and the income and prestige deriving therefrom. That much more than "mere appearances" are involved in clothing's gender signalings is a point nicely made in an amusing incident cited by the Langs (1961, 473, quoting Young 1937, 187):

8. Exception must be made for the ritualized and special ceremonial occasions on which men are permitted to do "funny things" with their appearance and clothing: Halloween, fraternity rushings and hazings, ballpark displays of team loyalty, holiday parades, etc. But these are symbolically well segregated from the serious, work-oriented activity of everyday life in which business suits and other "no-nonsense" clothes are expected to prevail.

An officer of the Federal Reserve Bank, asked what was adequate compensation for wearing his wife's hat to the office some morning, first answered, "Fifty thousand dollars." Then, after thinking it over for a moment, he said, "it would have to be as much as he could expect to earn the rest of his life, since afterward he could never expect to hold a position of financial responsibility again; and in the end he concluded that no price would be enough for the loss of prestige entailed."

But dress encodings (via sight, smell, and touch) are, we know, more subtle than to remain fixed on some crude, unrelieved declaration of male gender dominance, leaving matters at that. A concomitant systemic feature of the interplay of men's restricted dress code and women's elaborated code in the modern era is that while the expressive range of the former is greatly circumscribed, that of the latter sustains and, through fashion, builds upon a rich symbolic repertoire. As Bell (1947) and others before him (Simmel 1904; Veblen 1899) observed, with the rise of the urban bourgeois family a man's wife and daughters, themselves usually lacking title and other primary bases for high social status—they did not hold "important positions" in the world, they were discouraged from participating in politics and government—came through their clothing, interior decorating, and other consumer activities to serve as the expressive vehicle for announcing the status claims of the family and of its male breadwinner in particular.

The expressive constriction encoded on the male side, therefore, was well compensated for by the license granted women to decorously and artfully proclaim some credible status rank for the family. Women could then permit their dress considerably more symbolic scope and play, which the novelties and ambiguities of fashion were always near at hand to cater to. At the same time, women, having to manipulate a more complex code, could more easily (through mismatches, exaggerations, neglect or obsessive preoccupation with detail, etc.) "make mistakes" and be thought gauche, fussy, dowdy, vulgar, or whatever, as the reigning canons of taste at the time may have ruled. (There was, and remains, a good deal less opportunity for men to "make mistakes" in dress.) But paradoxically, a woman's mistakes in dress could be socially set aside more easily, just as, on the other side of the coin, her sar-

torial virtuosity could more quickly be discounted. For in the end, all knew that her wardrobe, however well or poorly it succeeded in impressing others, was but an indirect reflection of status, not the primary claim to it, which in the middle-class scheme of things resided finally in the man's occupational status and, in that connection usually, the wealth possessed by the family.

Greater expressive scope, more freedom to improvise, and, ironically, a corresponding widening of the social margin for performance error have, then, framed woman's dress code much more than they have man's. That is why the wife of the federal bank officer quoted above could probably much more easily wear his hat in public than he could hers. It is probably also why since the eighteenth century the cross-gender traffic in clothing has been so heavily one-sided, from men to women rather than the reverse. A plaything for the one could prove symbolic suicide for the other.

#### LIMITS OF CROSS GENDER CLOTHING CLAIMS AND DECEPTIONS

Notwithstanding fashion's frequent encouragement to women to borrow items and modes of men's dress, the norms of Western society demand that gender identity be grounded finally in some irreducible claim that is clearly either male or female, not both or some indeterminate middling state. To forestall discrediting insinuations of "butch lesbianism" or "gay transvestism," Western dress codes operate to blunt any too blatant appropriation of the opposite gender's identity.<sup>9</sup> It is characteristic, therefore, for cross-gender clothing signals, even the more common and variegated women's borrowings from men, to be accompanied by some symbolic qualification, contradiction, jibe, irony, exaggeration, etc., that in effect advises the viewer not to take the cross-gender representation at face value. A striking case in point is the 1970s "Annie Hall look" with its comic undercutting of claims to masculinity

9. Exhibitionistically festive cross-dressing, popular in some clandestine circles, breaches this divide, of course (see Pomerantz 1991). The public disposition to view the practice as deviant or perverse, however, attests to the continuing normative force for sustaining some irreducible gender-distinguishing representations in dress.



A scarf headband sustains gender identity. © Doug Menez/Reportage. Courtesy of Smith & Hawken





A 1991 version of the 1970s Annie Hall look. *Courtesy of Tweeds, Inc.*

through a gross oversizing of the men's clothes worn by the female. There is also the boyish accenting of the androgynous look, noted above, meant to mitigate for women a too radical departure from accepted gender identifications. Innumerable other examples, both visual and testimonial, from the most subtle to the most blatant, can be cited.<sup>10</sup> Those that follow are chosen at random and follow no particular logic:

10. Today's women's fashions are littered with this sort of gender ambiguity and ambivalence. The profusion of such signs speaks simultaneously, I would sug-

- Included in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1983 exhibition honoring the work of Yves St. Laurent are mannequins wearing men's formal, black-tie evening wear. One mannequin wears a frilly lace blouse beneath her tuxedo jacket; another displays a scandalous transparent chiffon blouse. (Dionne 1983)
- "The basic sources of inspiration for [the designer] Ungaro are military uniforms and the elaborate garb of the 18th century dandy. But these styles are so transmuted by ruffles and combinations of luxurious fabrics that they become the epitome of ultrafeminine dress. Ruffles decorate the shoulders, hips and, especially, the hemline, where they audaciously frame the legs." (Morris 1987b)
- "Even when she is still a bit hard-edged, as at Thierry Mugler and Claude Montana (the only two designers who have shown so far who still stress strong shoulders in otherwise excellent collections), the New Girl is soft, too. At Mugler, she even wears floral chiffon blouses and dramatic body-baring pastel nightgowns criss-crossed with straps to accentuate the body." (Gross 1986b)
- In a similar vein, an established Los Angeles designer I interviewed spoke of her growing distaste for the "frilly, feminine things for which I'm known" and of her desire to be "more realistic and minimalist in the clothes I design. . . . I get a little nauseous with all these visions of women in wilting lace things." But later in the interview, reflecting on what she had said earlier, she remarked laughingly, "I'm sure there's still a little frou-frou left in me. I mean, how can you resist a ruffle once in a while?"
- The renowned Italian designer Giorgio Armani is known to be particularly partial to slanting his women's fashions toward masculinity. Referring to his Milan showing of fall 1984, a reporter writes, "This racy collection is tempered by a snappy sense of paradox. As Armani says, 'I don't like unqualified femininity, there needs to be something to balance it.' In that spirit, he throws a man-style navy blazer over silk shorts, pairs a cropped midriff-flashing blouson pullover with pinstriped flannel slacks, cuts jackets that are straight in front with womanly curves in back." (*W* magazine 1984)

gest, to a certain collective contrition felt by many men over the historic assignment of women to subordinate social roles and, at another level, men's fear that gender roles may be altered too drastically, too soon.

- A fashion trademark of the American designer Ralph Lauren is the feminizing of the men's tweed hacking jackets he designs for women by showing them worn over ruffle-collared or lace embroidered blouses.

It is worth noting in this connection that through a structured parallelism of spatial and semantic metaphors the oppositions of over-under, inner-outer, and top-bottom often come to serve as formats for encoding the identity ambivalences, contradictions, and ambiguities one wishes to convey concerning one's gender (or, for that matter, one's age, social status, or sexuality as well) (Hollander 1980). In addition to several such examples given above, there is the fetching if overemphatic one offered by Lurie (1981, 245) in her discussion of the topic:

The woman in the sensible gray wool suit and the frilly pink blouse is a serious hard-working mouse with a frivolous and feminine soul. If, on the other hand, she wears a curvy pink silk dressmaker suit over a plain mouse-gray sweater, we suspect her of being privately preoccupied or depressed no matter how charming and social her manner.

#### “DRESS FOR SUCCESS” OR “DRESS FOR SEX”

As suggested earlier, the area of social life that has in recent years been extraordinarily productive of gender ambivalences in dress is that of women entering the labor force, particularly as it pertains to women pursuing careers in business and the professions. The identity dialectic that is triggered here and animates the ambivalence derives ultimately, of course, from the historic division of sexual roles in the culture of the West. Without belaboring the point, this, as any child soon comes to know, essentially equates maleness with occupation, breadwinning, authority, and the exercise of instrumental capacities, and femaleness with sexual allure, domesticity, child rearing, subordinate status, and expressive display. And it is because these heavily gender-driven attributes are so effectively, though subtly, inscribed in the vestmental codes of the West that special problems are posed, equally for the social order as for women who seek acceptance, equality, and authority in formerly all-male or nearly all-male preserves.



The polarities of over/under, loose/tight as metaphors for identity ambivalence.  
*Courtesy of Tweeds, Inc.*



*"You're home now, Adele. Why don't you take off your shoulders?"*

*Drawing by M. Stevens; © 1990 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.*

In practical terms the identity issue such women must negotiate—it is one all women, and men, will have to negotiate if gender roles are ultimately to be redefined—is that of deemphasizing the more purely feminine, eroticized, and domesticated, components of their dress without at the same time inviting the social losses likely to result from a too thorough divestment of feminized attire (e.g., wearing pants in lieu of a skirt or dress; abandoning makeup, earrings, bracelets, etc.; allowing visible facial, underarm, or leg hair).

Theoretically there is no need for women in business and the professions to opt for masculine dress insignnia. They could conceivably move in a unisex direction that is avowedly neither masculine nor feminine (consider surgical gowns). However, the cultural linkage of "male = work, career, skill mastery, authority" is so formidable, it is not at all surprising that this is the symbolic trajectory the identity negotiation assumes. This, of course, is what underlies the women's "dress for success" outfit of the 1970s advocated by John Molloy (1977) and innumerable other sartorial consultants: dark-hued, comparatively severe, man-styled jacket and straight, lowered-hemline skirt accompanied by attaché case;



A typical "Dress for Success" ensemble, ca. 1990. *Courtesy of Talbots*

in all, a figure suggesting masculinity but leavened by such feminine touches as silk blouses, soft bow ties, earrings, clutch handbags, manicured nails, and Chanel-style link necklaces and belts. As Kennedy Fraser (1981, 228) was to describe the gender ambivalence underlying the woman's dress-for-success scheme:

If one had to sum up the current vision of executive womanhood—it is a simplification, because designers have widely differing interpretations of the theme—one would have to begin with a fairly strictly tailored suit. This prototypical tailored suit has a straightish skirt, with a hemline ending around the knees. The jacket has shoulders that are often padded or otherwise enlarged. But, as if pulling back from any austerity or masculinity inherent in this silhouette, designers add to it exaggeratedly feminine accessories: frivolous and impractical hats; shoes with recklessly high, thin heels; and unusual gloves.

Clearly, the professional woman's sartorial compromise, if it can be spoken of as such, is one that, because of the sharply dichotomous gender typing, not only retains numerous identity instabilities but also gives rise to new ones. On the one hand, the fear of negating femininity is so pronounced that vestmental means, both subtle and blatant, are constantly being sought to reassure career women and their alters that no *serious* gender defection has occurred. A fashion note in a metropolitan daily gives voice to a typical sentiment:

For Lore Caulfield [a Los Angeles designer of lingerie] there's no contradiction in making lingerie and being a feminist. . . . Many women—especially those who must *dress for success*—wear sexy underwear as an antidote to their career clothes, she says. "This is additional proof that women are really developing themselves and expressing their own sexuality," she explains. (Abrams 1983)

Along the same lines, a Los Angeles designer I interviewed spoke of how admiring the "lady judges" and women executives who bought his expensive two-piece dress suits were of the "feminine touches" he managed to work into his designs. He attributed this to their wish to soften the austere presence associated with their work roles.

On the other hand, further complications and ambiguities are introduced should career women move too far—what is "too far"

is likely to vary with the occupation and its work site—toward "softening" (i.e., feminizing) conventionally accepted dress-for-success presentations.<sup>11</sup> The maddeningly contradictory consequences that can ensue from a reversion to femininity in the workplace are nicely touched on in this excerpt from a *New York Times* life-style column on women's hair length:

Psychologists say that in the work place, longer hair sends a message to management.

"Longer hair," Professor Waters said, "can signal the men to not be nervous boys, we're not after your jobs, even though the women may indeed be after their jobs. It's a message of femininity and softness—not weakness, mind you. It's a way of pacifying the enemy."

But Professor Jackson noted a possible double bind. "A woman who is less of a threat may be perceived as less of a competitor, which could hinder her ascent up the corporate ladder," she explained. "Yet, if she is seen as less of a threat, men may be inclined *not* to hinder her ascent." (Slade 1987)

Issues of "professionally correct" hair length aside, many career women themselves, most especially, perhaps, feminists, come in time to flail at a dress style that reduces individuality to a stereotypic formula. Of course, mounting a revolt because of this is made easier once the person feels secure enough in her profession, as was the case with the ex-stockbroker author of the following extract:

Later I got a job trading currency options. It was an important position. I started playing around with large sums of money. Suddenly I realized something about those [boardroom-style] suits. I hated them, I still do.

They are uncomfortable. They are ugly. The bow ties make you

11. In general, professions with a strong tradition of decorum whose practitioners are subject to high public exposure (e.g., law, banking, and finance) are likely to be less tolerant of deviations, feminized or otherwise, from accepted gender compromises in dress than are professions less bound, either through circumstance or tradition, by these expectations (e.g., the arts and academia). Women in medicine and certain of the engineering professions constitute an interesting intermediate case. Work-site uniforms like lab coats, smocks, and surgical gowns seem to encourage a degree of liberality in the choice of whatever other clothes are worn to work.



look gift-wrapped. They are designed to hide your figure, as though your figure has anything to do with your brains, competence or productivity.

So when I got to be a trader I rebelled. If I was capable of managing millions of dollars, I reasoned, I was capable of doing it in whatever clothes I felt most comfortable in. (Goldstone 1987)

It is, of course, exactly the suppressed feelings of dress discomfort and distaste such as Goldstone harbored to which fashion designers seek to appeal and give symbolic expression in their designs. But doing so activates yet another source of identity instability for women seeking via dress to effect gender redefinitions for themselves in the workplace. For, as I have pointed out, clothing fashions in the modern world have been preponderantly *women's* fashions. To the extent that modern woman's gender socialization has made her highly receptive to the manipulations of self-image fostered by fashion, she can in like measure be only weakly attached to the stereotypic gender qualifications and cross-sex symmetries struck by dress-for-success and like assemblages. Even as they mute with fingernail polish and silk bow ties what a good many men still view as strident symbolic claims to an equal place in the vocational sun, such ensembles gravitate toward a stasis of gender representation at variance with the very impulse of fashion. For it is of the essence of fashion to rankle at the fixed and settled, no matter how worthy the symbolic purposes served by the dress of the day. Brubach (1990b) gives vent to the disenchantment awaiting those too long wedded to the tried and true in dress:

And for the rest of us the fashion-free world that seemed so promising fifteen years ago is getting to be a little monotonous, with the people who outfit themselves in "classic" clothes—the modernist uniform, which, having never been in fashion, will never be out of it—beginning to look like wallflowers and spoilsports, standing aloof from the times, refusing to participate.

The dilemma, therefore, is that to subject the dress-for-success posture (whatever version of it is favored!) to the play of fashion is to tamper with, and perhaps seriously compromise, the symbolic purpose at its core. This is to convey the impression that, because they now dress more like their male counterparts, women are in fact men's equal when it comes to such valued on-the-job at-

tributes as ambition, determination, skill mastery, levelheadedness, etc. (recall Goldstone's quoted comments). A salient part of this message is the tacit disavowal of the fickleness and capriciousness often associated with fashion, which, in turn, is seen as falling so exclusively to women.

The other horn of the dress-for-success dilemma constrains women to switch to Western man's restricted dress code as they abandon in large part their elaborated dress code, which they have lived with for centuries and many, including prominent feminists (see Wilson 1985), claim to enjoy. This entails sacrificing the many possibilities for symbolic elaboration, innovation, and improvisation that women's dress repertoire presently includes and men's does not. On purely aesthetic grounds, then, there is considerable resistance to doing so. Women's reluctance in this connection probably also accounts for what many of them regard as the ludicrous prescriptiveness of the dress-for-success ensemble (Lurie 1981, 26), i.e., the many "musts," "shoulds," and "nevers" that punctuate the advice of Molloy (1977) and other career dress advisors.

Contributing further to the latent instability of the dress-for-success gender compromise is that ideologically, too, many women—as is typical of members of all political minorities once their "consciousness is raised"—take umbrage that their ticket of admittance and token of acceptance into the business and professional worlds enjoins them to bedeck themselves with the symbolic wares of those worlds, especially if, as in this case, such wares were once the exclusive insignia of those who have dominated them. "Why should we have to recast our image into that of men's in order to secure those job rights that are naturally ours?" they ask.

In imagination it is possible to conceive of "wearer-friendly," unisex-leaning apparel that, without embracing the gender markings of masculinity, eliminates the nuances of frivolity, incapacity, seduction, and domesticity that have traditionally adhered to women's dress. Indeed, as I discuss in chapter 8, some dress reformers, most notably Amelia Bloomer in the mid-nineteenth century and certain Russian constructivists in the 1920s, tried their hand at exactly this. The conspicuous lack of success their efforts met with—in the market, if not necessarily in terms of design—is

testimony to the cultural depth of the quotidian discourse that still (and probably for some time to come) infuses the world of work with the gender signs of masculinity and other, mostly lesser, worlds with those of femininity.

#### CONCLUSION

Ambivalent orientations toward gender identification even now, as they have in the past, play a profound role in Western dress and in the symbolic buffeting to which fashion forever subjects it. I would repeat that whatever other forces may be said to move fashion—economics, sex, boredom, invidious class distinctions—it draws much of its perduring inspiration from the identity dialectics generated in states of ambivalence, that of gender being but one among several that have figured prominently in Western cultural history since the late medieval period. Quite obviously ambivalences of social class, sexuality, age grade, and much else about which men and women are of more than one mind have also etched their way into Western codes of dress and the alterations effected in them through fashion. Moreover, because these ambivalences spring from the cross-flows and clashes of the basic cultural categories that structure our lives, they are deeply moral and, most certainly, collective in character. As such, they form the existential canvas upon which fashion designers (and other artists, too, of course) seek to impress their interpretations and new encodings. As I will sketch out at length in chapters 6 and 7, when successful these in turn lead to a progressive collective transformation in mass taste and habit (Blumer 1969a), which then lays the basis for what is termed the “fashion cycle.”

## 4 Ambivalences of Status: Flaunts and Feints

**Beware of all enterprises that require new  
clothes.**

Henry David Thoreau

## The semiotics of masculinity in Renaissance England

DAVID KUCHTA



Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México  
Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género

Seminario **Vestido, moda y cultura**  
**Construcción y comunicación de**  
**identidades sociales diversas: del vestido**  
**medieval al estilo *dark*.**

**Sesión 3** El Renacimiento: moda en las cortes  
europeas

KUCHTA, David (1993), "The semiotics of masculinity in  
Renaissance England", en James Grantham Turner (ed.),  
*Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe.*  
*Institutions, texts, images*, Cambridge, Nueva York y  
Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, págs. 233-246.

In her classic article "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Joan Kelly speculates on the dynamics of gender relations in Renaissance court life, arguing that the male courtier began to "adopt 'woman's ways' in his relations to the prince."<sup>1</sup> In Kelly's reading of Castiglione, the Renaissance courtier's dependence on the prince was signified by the "accommodation of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century courtier to the ways and dress of women" (p. 44). Femininity was identified with the manipulation of appearances, as noblewomen lost all forms of power other than charm. The courtier was thus feminized when he used courtly display to attract the favor of the prince. "To be attractive, accomplished, and seem not to care; to charm and do so coolly – how concerned with impression, how masked the true self. And how manipulative . . . In short, how like a woman – or a dependent, for that is the root of the simile" (p. 45).

Kelly's analysis raises important questions about the relationships between gender and power – gender as a form of power, to be sure, but also the similarity, the "simile," between political and gender ideologies. This essay will take up Kelly's analysis by considering the semiotics of masculinity in the English Renaissance court. It will analyze the relationship between political ideals of masculinity, and attitudes to display and attraction. How was masculinity represented, and what was the connection between the phenomenon of courtly display and the political construction of masculinity? Was there a "simile" between political dependence and gender dependence? Was the courtier feminized?<sup>2</sup> This chapter will argue that, although Kelly was correct in linking the phenomena of attraction, charm, and display to political dependence, political dependence and display themselves were not inherently gendered. As will become clear, men's use of sartorial splendor was seen as compatible with dependence on the crown. More importantly, elite

masculinity was defined in part as properly sumptuous display, as living up to the sartorial expectations of the crown. What this chapter will analyze, then, is the semiotic regime which defended sumptuous masculine attire in the Renaissance court.

Noble privileges of sumptuous male display did not go unchallenged during the Renaissance. Elizabethan and Jacobean England was sufficiently fluid in its social structure to challenge any aristocratic monopoly on conspicuous consumption.<sup>3</sup> Elite prerogatives to sumptuousness were undercut by new wealth, destabilizing a seemingly natural association between the display of wealth and claims to elite status. This challenge from below may have encouraged traditional elite groups to solidify their claims to sartorial splendor. Yet sumptuous male display was not without its critics either. Puritans, mercantilists, and country gentlemen opposed the import of Italian ideals of courtesy and the Italian (and later French) fashions which accompanied them. Critics helped shape an image of the court as the locus of vice, luxury, tyranny, and effeminacy – an image which would be an important element in the outbreak of the Civil War. In country ideology, following fashion was a sign of effeminacy and servitude, while the freeborn gentleman's virtue was signified by "simplicity and wholesome pleasures based on religion and respect for tradition," as Perez Zagorin has written.<sup>4</sup> Country gentlemen linked effeminacy with sumptuous display and political dependence: manly simplicity signified political autonomy; restraint symbolized freedom. In this politicized vision of masculinity, fashion was merely an external imposition by tyrannical and arbitrary custom.

Courtiers and gentlemen thus stood uneasily between challenge and criticism. The desire for a visible social order did not mesh easily with claims to a visible moral order. Faced with this ambivalence, defenders of the crown and court constructed a definition of masculinity which argued for the morality of male display, yet made it theoretically inaccessible to all but the nobility. In assertive language meant to gloss over fluid boundaries, they defined high expenditure as the exclusive prerogative of the nobility, yet justified it as liberality not prodigality, as magnificence not extravagance, and as manliness not effeminacy. What critics saw as debilitating softness, defenders saw as honorable bravery. Two public definitions of masculinity competed with each other in Renaissance England, and we can trace this competition in courtesy manuals, sermons, and literary sources. Of course it would be difficult to claim that either definition captured the reality of sartorial practices in Renaissance England – rather, they provide insight into the ways in which high ideals of masculinity were constructed and contested by religious,

political, and cultural factors (to name but a few), and warn us against ahistorical speculation about the true nature of masculinity in Renaissance England. This chapter will analyze the way in which a semiotics of masculinity was constructed to justify elite male display during the English Renaissance.

### Beauty adorns virtue

As is well known, Castiglione and other Italian courtesy writers had an immense impact on English courtesy theory. English writers influenced by Italian courtesy rhetoric include Henry Peacham, Thomas Elyot, Francis Bacon, Francis Osborne, William Higford, and the author of *The English Courtier*.<sup>5</sup> In this discursive tradition, dress and manners were not mere externals: they were manifestations of internal worth, graceful supplements to nobility. Thomas Adams wrote: "Oh how comely are good cloathes to a good soule, when the grace within, shall beautifie the attire without."<sup>6</sup> Adams echoed Castiglione's formula: "therefore is the outward beauty a true sign of the inward goodness, and in bodies this comeliness is imprinted, as it were, for a mark of the soul."<sup>7</sup>

In this semiotics of masculinity, the hypothetical "true sign" consisted of an identity between outward beauty and inward goodness, between material signifier and social signified, between appearance and status. Noble dress and noble status were meant to resemble one another. In effect, this clothing regime worked by a hierarchy of analogies, by the resemblance between social standing and clothing expenses. Silk and satin were noble, flannel and fustian were humble. This accords with Michel Foucault's characterization of Renaissance semiotics: "it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them."<sup>8</sup> (Foucault later refers to this episteme as a "hierarchy of analogies" [p. 55].) Dress was meant to make status visible by the one-to-one correspondence between social level and level of expenditure. The poet Barnabe Barnes opined that "all garments should be . . . in worth and fashion correspondent to the state, substance, age, place, time, birth, and honest custome of those persons which use them."<sup>9</sup> The higher the status, the richer the fabric; wealth should correspond to worth. "The use of soft cloathing" and fine fabrics, as the archbishop of York, John Williams, argued, is confined "to those due circumstances to which they are designed. They are not for every sole



id private man, to gather about him a gaping multitude, but for magistrates and other remarkable persons, employed in governing states, and serving of Kings."<sup>10</sup> Material fabric and social fabric seemed one another; beauty adorned virtue: riches well bestowed were "a great ornament, and setting forth to a gentleman;"<sup>11</sup> in rich apparel and ornaments "the beames of magnificence shine, which is embraced amongst the principallest vertues heroicall."<sup>12</sup>

The hierarchical resemblance between clothing and status, like the social order itself, was considered to be natural, though (and this will be a key point in this semiotics) the clothes themselves were not seen as inherently endowed with status. In the abstract, it was considered natural for noble men to wear noble clothes, and in this sense the hierarchy too was deemed natural. The resemblances, however, were not. There was much more ambivalence in determining which men, and what clothes, were themselves noble. In this discourse, it was the state's role, not nature's role, to determine nobility by legal means. The crown could legitimate claims to nobility, in men as well as in clothes, and thus help naturalize the relationship between clothing and status. The natural icon, then, was socially naturalized, arbitrarily motivated. It is this oxymoron which defined the semiotics of elite masculinity in the Renaissance court.

Since costly apparel naturally graced the courtier, he had to fashion an affected attitude towards it. He needed to feel at home in the sumptuous trappings of his station, a naturalness and nonchalance which Castiglione called *sprezzatura*. *Sprezzatura* meant displaying ease, whereas affectation meant a mismatch between appearance and social status in a hierarchy which itself was considered natural. "Men's behavior should be like their apparel," Francis Bacon advised, "not too trait or point device [precise], but free for exercise or motion." Likewise, Bacon argued that "if he labor too much to express [good forms], he shall lose their grace, which is to be natural and unaffected."<sup>13</sup> To the modern reader, this created appearance of nonchalance seems like deceit, manipulation, and effeminacy: "how masked the true self . . . how like a woman," as Joan Kelly quipped. It was, however, precisely the opposite. To be sure, nonchalance was self-consciously created, but it was a created naturalness – with all the instability and ambivalence that it implies. It meant cultivating a political image which accorded with the natural order, acting and dressing according to one's sexual and social station. It meant being truthful in one's appearances, neither feigning a false modesty nor affecting an unearned extravagance. Affectation and impersonation were condemned because they drew attention to the

theatricality, the self-fashioning, the created image – not because the image was false, but because the immediacy of signification, the affiliation between appearance and reality, the correspondence between signifier and signified, was lost. In this semiotics, affectation was the misuse of signs, the loss of transparency, the loss of their proper, noble significance. It is in ceremonies and appearances, Stefano Guazzo wrote, "that the inward love may be knowne, as well as the outward honour is seene, other wise ceremonies are lothsome unto us, and shew that the hearte is faigned" (p. 166). When outward honor manifested and resembled inward love, display was a true sign. Otherwise, when outward honor was merely purchased by upstarts, the signifier lost its graceful relationship to what it signified. It was worshipped for itself rather than for its referentiality. As a legal status (rather than an economic class) nobility could not be purchased or affected, but it nonetheless had to be displayed and proclaimed.

### Apparel proclaims the man

*Sprezzatura*, "the master trope of the courtier,"<sup>14</sup> was thus also the master trope of this semiotics of masculinity: the display of a one-to-one correspondence between appearance and social position, the image of a due proportion between fabric and rank. No statement better captures this semiotics than Polonius' advice to his son Laertes:

Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy,  
For the apparel oft proclaims the man.<sup>15</sup>

Laertes' dress should be as costly as his purse could buy, and thus correspond to his status. He should express this status through richness not gaudiness, though Polonius does not tell us how to distinguish between the two. The difference was determined more by attitude than actual garment. The difference was not how much money one invested in clothes, but how much symbolic value. The difference, then, was one which relied on the semiotic status of the garment. Apparel, as Shakespeare neatly summarized, "proclaims" the man (not "makes" him, as is often incorrectly quoted). Rich clothing proclaimed gentility, represented it, and made it conspicuous. Proclaiming is an act of attribution, ascription, while making is an act of creation, production. In this semiotics, sumptuous dress did not make or create gentility, as upstarts desired. If defenders of this semiotic regime argued that the higher the

atus, the finer the fabric, they accused upstarts of believing that the  
ner the fabric, the higher the status. This double standard meant that  
ie correspondence between material fabric and social fabric was not  
onic, but arbitrary.

In this discourse, then, there was nothing inherent in clothes them-  
selves which gave them nobility or masculinity. Henry Peacham quoted  
lutarch: "gold and silver, worn by martial men, addeth . . . courage and  
pirit unto them; but in others effeminacy, or a kind of womanish  
anity."<sup>16</sup> The relation between signifier and signified was arbitrary,  
ependent upon the context, and upon the wearer. Clothes were  
onsidered to be arbitrary not in the sense of being random, but in the  
ense of being conventional, historically determined, rather than ahisto-  
cally and naturally fixed in their meaning. The signifier only secured its  
roper meaning when it corresponded to a preexisting social station.  
old added courage only to "martial men" – that is, men of the  
ristocracy. "Womanish vanity" was this loss of correspondence, the  
misappropriation of signs by those who did not merit their noble  
gnificance. In themselves, clothes were innocent, arbitrary, conven-  
onal: it was their connection with nobility which made them noble.  
Only within their hierarchical correspondence did they become natura-  
zed. Count Annibale Romei praised "costly garments, pretious jewels,  
umptuous pallaces, magnificent furniture," yet warned that "neither  
iches, nor sumptuous vestimentes make a man noble" (pp. 246, 187).  
he clothes did not make the man.

To assume otherwise was effeminacy. For Renaissance courtesy  
riters, gender and semiotics were linked. Effeminacy was found in the  
ffected misuse of signs by vain upstarts. Effeminacy meant dressing out  
f place, thus calling attention to one's dress in a kind of "womanish  
anity." Effeminacy was idolatry: treating arbitrary signifiers like idols  
ndowed with inherent meaning, mistaking signifier for signified.  
William Rankins condemned those "self-soothing sots" who

have no firmer vertue than a name:  
But who so thinks the signe the substance is,  
Erres, and his wit doth wander much amisse.<sup>17</sup>

Effeminacy meant semiotic instability, as signs lost their grace, the  
atural affiliation between clothing and status:

Grace is nothing else but something akin to a light which shines from the  
appropriateness of things that are suitably ordered and arranged one with the  
other, and in relation to the whole . . . Thus, a man must not embellish himself  
like a woman, for his adornments will then contradict his person, as I see some

men do, who put curls in their hair and beards with a curling iron, and who  
apply so much make-up to their faces, necks, and hands that it would be  
unsuitable for any young wench, even for a harlot who is more anxious to  
hawk her wares and sell them for a price.<sup>18</sup>

Overdressing was a form of semiotic prostitution, an impure traffic  
between signifier and signified, an exchange muddled by an immoderate  
attention to materiality. Elsewhere, della Casa linked immoderate dress  
with homosexuality: "Your garments should not be extremely fancy or  
extremely ornate, so that no one can say that you are wearing  
Ganymede's hose."<sup>19</sup> Courtly masculinity was defined in opposition to  
a series of "wanton and sensual imperfections,"<sup>20</sup> which were them-  
selves linked with materiality: prostitution, homosexuality, and effemi-  
nacy. Effeminacy was a loss of moderation, "an effeminate spruceness,  
as much as a fantastic disorder," as the royalist and Anglican Owen  
Felltham wrote.<sup>21</sup>

Clothing, then, was a dangerous supplement to masculinity. Masculi-  
nity sat ambivalently between the extremes of homosexuality and  
prostitution, differentiated from them only by its moderate attitude to  
materiality, by its nonchalance toward the signifier. To presume that  
material signifiers made the man was to destroy the hierarchy of  
analogies so central to Renaissance masculinity. Effeminacy involved  
misappropriating the symbols of the warrior class. Aristocratic masculi-  
nity rested on "bravery" both in battle and in dress. Adornments should  
moderately embellish a nobleman, but not to the extent that they  
"contradict his person," as della Casa wrote. Moderation, of course, was  
a relative term, one which stood precariously between modesty and  
prodigality, simplicity and extravagance. Men should apply makeup,  
but not "so much make-up." Effeminacy was found not in display and  
adornment, but in excess. Properly used, the material sign should bring  
grace and shine; improperly used, materiality might lead to debauchery  
and sensuality. There was thus a fine and invisible line – called  
moderation – between the proper and improper use of signs. The  
difference between virtuous magnificence and vicious prodigality  
existed not in the garment itself, nor in the eye of the beholder, but in the  
station and attitude of the wearer. James I advised his son to be  
"moderate in your raiment; neither over superfluous, like a deboshed  
waister; not yet over base, like a miserable wretch; not artificiallie  
trimmed and decked, like a Courtizane; nor yet over-sluggishly clothed,  
like a country-clowne; not over lightly, like a Candie-souldier, or a vain  
young Courtier; nor yet over gravelie, like a Minister."<sup>22</sup> Moderation  
was not artificial vanity, but it was not precise modesty or gravity either.

ach were the sins of debauchees, courtesans, country gentlemen, pstarts, and puritans. James I repeated the major formulae of courtesy twice on dress when he counselled:

In your cloathes keepe a proportion, as well with the seasons of the yeare as of your age: in the fashions of them being carelesse, using them according to the common form of the time, some-time richelier, some-times meanlier clothed as occasion serveth, without keeping any precise rule therein. For if your minde be founde occupied upon them, it will be thought idle otherwaies . . . But speciallie eschewe to be effeminate in your cloathes, in perfuiming, preening, or such like: and faile never in time of warres to be galliardest and bravest, both in cloathes and countenance. (p. 151)

Distinguishing between bravery and artificiality was a difficult task, specially since courtesy literature argued that there were no “precise rules” for dress other than conformity to custom. One form of consumption signified bravery, the other clownishness. One led to a proper display of aristocratic masculinity, the other led to debilitating effeminacy. The difference between the two was precisely one of attitude, of displaying a certain carelessness, of not being “found occupied upon” fashions. The internal sensibility of moderation – a emotic sensibility – was compatible with the external display of being galliardest and bravest.

That James I rejected effeminacy but advocated bravery in dress should lead us to question the long-standing association between homosexuality, effeminacy, and male display in Jacobean England. Diana de Marly has flatly asserted that “King James I of England and VI of Scotland was a homosexual and this changed the character of the court considerably,” leading England into an “effeminate and wanton age.”<sup>23</sup> The historical association between homosexuality and effeminacy is best known in Lawrence Stone’s account of the crisis of the English aristocracy in the century prior to the Civil War. Stone has speculated: “It was the Court that led the fashion, and a philandering queen followed by a homosexual king no doubt gave an added incentive to the movement: both Elizabeth and James had an eye for the well-dressed young man.”<sup>24</sup> Stone’s musings are not mere errant remarks in his classic work: for Stone, the aristocracy’s abnormal adoption of conspicuous consumption was “led by the monarch themselves [*sic*]” (p. 562), contributed to “the general downward trend of aristocratic fortunes” (p. 197), and exacerbated the crisis of confidence in aristocratic society which culminated in the Civil War. The corrupting influence of homosexuality thus seems to play an important role in Stone’s account of the crisis of the aristocracy. Yet as we have seen, conspicuous male display

was compatible with aristocratic masculinity, and Stone provides no evidence to suggest that James I encouraged men to dress beyond their means. Certainly James adopted standard courtesy tropes to defend the elaborate dress of his noble courtiers – but this defense was not specifically linked with sexual preferences, except in the homophobic minds of his critics.

It should be clear from this evidence that much courtesy literature written and read in Renaissance England rejected considering male display in itself as effeminate, even when it was meant to attract the attention of the prince. Defenders of the courtier saw conspicuous male display not as a lesser form, but as a different definition of masculinity. In much courtesy literature, the courtier was not feminized when he used display, contrary to Kelly’s claim. The ethics of attraction and the aesthetics of display were not inherently gendered. Gender was certainly displayed – “all garments should be neat, fit for the body, and agreeable to the sex which should wear them,” as Barnabe Barnes argued (p. 15) – but the phenomenon of display itself was not gendered. The manipulation of appearances was not “woman’s ways,” nor, for that matter, was it specifically “man’s ways,” as similar strictures and prerogatives applied to court ways, a subject beyond the scope of this chapter. For the English courtier, then, bravery in dress was justified by bravery in battle. Conspicuous consumption was considered a rightful and manly honor bestowed upon him by his noble status and position at court. Rich clothes proclaimed high status. Conspicuous consumption made the social order conspicuous. Effeminacy, on the other hand, was the misuse of these arbitrary status symbols, and thus a threat to the social order by the base materiality of the nouveau riche.

### The crown proclaims the clothes

How, then, was effeminacy to be prevented in an age which saw a growing number of nouveaux riches, an increase in social mobility, and the relative decline of aristocratic fortunes? Who was to arbitrate between the proper and improper use of arbitrary signs? Who regulated the correspondence between signifier and signified? Courtesy writers here called upon the crown. If clothes were arbitrary signifiers, and their meaning determined by social custom, then it should be the prerogative of the crown to control such custom. Since there was nothing inherent in clothes, nothing natural which gave them nobility, it was only the constant reinforcement of the hierarchy of analogies which might

guarantee their proper signification. Only an explicit and frequent repetition of their intended meanings could assure that fine fabrics remained the signs of nobility. If silk was noble, it was only because royal proclamation made it so. Signifiers took on social meaning because of state policy, not natural affiliation. To be sure, fine fabrics had intrinsic material qualities – softness, rarity, craftsmanship, shine – but it was considered that these properties only took on sexual and social meaning through social convention. Richness in fabric corresponded to high social status only because the crown limited the purchases of the titled wealthy. An economic order defined by wealth corresponded to a legal order defined by worth only through royal proclamation. In this hierarchical order, the crown distributed clothes to each according to their social “needs.”

Improperly distributed, arbitrary signifiers might be misused arbitrarily: their excessive dissemination could lead to riot and disorder. In this semiotic regime, nothing was greater feared than polysemy. It was thus the crown’s role to guarantee the hierarchy of analogies, to regulate the proper correspondence between fabric and rank. It did this by sumptuary law, which reached its zenith under Elizabeth.<sup>25</sup> Sumptuary proclamations were often issued, though rarely enforced. Since the frequency of their issue, and the lack of cases prosecuting infringements, suggests that sumptuary laws were futile, they are testimony more to a social thought about dress than to any actual practice.

Through the declarative power of sumptuary law, the crown attempted (apparently unsuccessfully) to legislate the nation’s habits of consumption and thereby regulate the general economy of signs. In this great hierarchy of analogies, no one under the degree of earl, for example, was permitted to wear cloth of gold, silver, or tinsel satin. No one under the degree of husbandman was allowed to wear hose made of cloth costing more than 2s. per yard.<sup>26</sup> Attempting to assure a direct traffic between signifier and signified, the crown tried to guarantee that the misuse of signs would not dilute their noble value: a sort of Gresham’s law of semiotics. The increased frequency of royal proclamations against excessive dress under Elizabeth may testify to the increase of new wealth during her reign, as is often argued, but it also suggests that Elizabeth, more than her predecessors, saw the monarchy as the guardian of semiotic stability. It was considered a royal prerogative to ensure conformity of fashion. The political regulation of the display of social distinctions, then, was primary in Elizabethan sumptuary policy. Sumptuary proclamations, in theory if not in practice, were the legal guarantee of the hierarchy of analogies, the arbiters of the economy of signs.

If clothes proclaimed the man, then it was the crown which proclaimed the clothes. Royal proclamation made sumptuous court dress merely a uniform to be donned without affectation, one which should gracefully correspond to station, one for which there was no precise rule other than court custom itself. Castiglione offered no exact rules for fashion, “but that a man should frame himself to the custom of the most” (p. 126). Clothes should not make an impression on a man’s heart, for that was affectation and effeminacy: rather, they should be worn in due obedience to the crown. Archbishop Williams considered that princes “express their magnificence . . . in their outward garment, whether it were gown, cloak, or mantle of estate, which they might be said to bear only” (p. 26). Conformity to fashion signified nothing more than a man’s position at court and his fidelity to the crown. The entire hierarchy of analogies which guaranteed the courtier’s claims to sumptuous apparel depended upon the support of the monarchy. Thus the protean courtier should be able to adapt himself to current court fashions. “For clothes,” wrote the MP Sir William Cornwallis, “he that shunnes singularity (for from singularity comes eyther disdaine, or envy) let his attire be conformable to custome, and change with company . . . In many things (as in this) custome is a thing indifferent, and things indifferent receyving their life from light grounds; every countrey hath some peculiar to it selfe by which when we are there, we ought to be ruled.”<sup>27</sup>

For the courtier, conspicuous consumption was the rightful honor bestowed upon him by his position at court, by the good will of his monarch. Fine dress was a “thing indifferent,” an arbitrary court convention to which noblemen should conform with nonchalance. In themselves, costly garments were innocent, gender neutral. Properly used, they were noble; improperly used, they were affected, vain, and effeminate. Though richly apparelled, the nobleman ultimately should treat clothing as a thing indifferent. For the courtier, donning sumptuous dress was, in theory at least, merely an act of uniformity.

As is by now clear, the resemblance between material fabric and social fabric was arbitrary, not motivated by any natural properties of the signifier-fabric. In themselves, clothes had no intrinsic social or religious worth, only one which derived from their position within a social hierarchy. On this point, my analysis differs from Michel Foucault’s account of Renaissance theories of the sign. For Foucault, Renaissance knowledge considered signs as natural icons whose signifying power “resides in both the mark and the content in identical fashion” (p. 30). This is the basis of the resemblance between signifier and signified, a



resemblance which, in Foucault's account of Renaissance thought, was referent in the sign, whether that sign was a natural object or a linguistic form: "In its raw, historical sixteenth-century being, language is not an arbitrary system" (p. 35). From the evidence presented here, however, we can argue that although signs were considered to be based upon resemblance, that resemblance was established by convention: though based on physical resemblance, the icon was seen to be dependent upon convention. The arbitrary icon, a notion alien to traditional semiotics, had natural properties intrinsic to it, but the relation of those properties to their referent was established by custom.<sup>28</sup>

Thus we have seen a social doctrine of conspicuous consumption, a political doctrine of crown prerogative, and a semiotic doctrine of the arbitrary icon merge into an episteme of masculinity. The Renaissance semiotics of masculinity was based on a hierarchy of analogies, a system of resemblances between clothing and social position. Material fabric corresponded to social fabric. Rare and gentle fabrics signified gentility, while cheap and coarse cloth denoted commonness. This hierarchy was terminated and guaranteed by royal proclamation, which commanded conformity in such "things indifferent" as court dress. The courtier was expected to cultivate an indifference to his clothes, as they were merely a re-instituted uniform. Any attitude to clothing other than indifference was affectation, pride, vanity, or effeminacy. Noble liberality merged with nonchalance. In this semiotic regime, then, conspicuous consumption among the nobility was socially necessary, politically commanded, and semiotically arbitrary. It is this notion of the arbitrary in which justified sumptuary inequalities, and which allowed conspicuous consumers not only to ward off accusations of effeminacy and immorality in dress, but to accuse upstarts of precisely the same thing. A social order was – at least in their own eyes – discursively compatible with a moral order. Upper-class masculinity was compatible with honorability. Thus although display at court was "an art of conduct ordered to the social and political exigencies of Renaissance despotism," Daniel Javitch has argued,<sup>29</sup> there was no "simile" between political dependency and gender dependency. In this semiotic regime, display itself was not gendered, while masculinity, not effeminacy, was defined by conformity to court custom.

Of course, this Renaissance semiotics of masculinity would not last. It lapsed in the general political, economic, and religious crisis of the seventeenth century. Court critics would criticize the idea of the arbitrary signifier in the same language that they criticized arbitrary display. Inspired by puritanism and country ideology, a new, iconoclastic

discourse considered courtly signs not as arbitrary signifiers, but as evil icons with inherent sinfulness and intrinsic effeminacy. Court-sponsored dress was "politud openly with popishe supersticion and idolatry," as the puritan Anthony Gilby wrote.<sup>30</sup> Court dress was semiotically over-determined, and in itself caused corruption and effeminacy. "Soft cloathes introduce soft mindes. Delicacy in the habit, begets an effeminacy in the heart," warned Richard Brathwait.<sup>31</sup> In this iconoclastic discourse, vanity and effeminacy originated in the clothes, not in the heart. Outward beauty was no longer a true sign of inward goodness, but led to moral corruption. Delicacy begat effeminacy. The clothes made the man: such was the danger inherent in court dress. The freeborn Englishman, however, was autonomous and self-sufficient, and did not need the dangerous supplement of display. True masculinity would be displayed by a condemnation of the signifier, a fashion which disdained fashion – with all the instability that this implied.

It was this iconoclastic discourse, this anti-fashion, which ended the Renaissance episteme and gave birth to a new, "classic" regime (in Foucault's terms) in the second half of the seventeenth century. It was this discourse which gave us as well a new masculine appearance: the relatively modest three-piece suit, introduced in the late seventeenth century. Historical analysis of Renaissance courtesy and Renaissance masculinity has long borrowed much from the metaphysics of Renaissance court critics, a gendered metaphysics with its own historically produced privileging of the signified over the signifier. For it is this discourse, finally, which looks at the display, ornamentation, and manipulation of appearance by the Renaissance courtier and exclaims, "how like a woman."

#### Notes

- 1 (1977), repr. in *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, 1984), p. 44.
- 2 I would like to thank Randolph Starn for originally posing this question to me.
- 3 Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1965), p. 123.
- 4 *The Court and The Country* (New York, 1971), p. 34.
- 5 For further data, see Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 199 n. 99, and the essays by Quilligan and Schoenfeldt in this volume.
- 6 *The Gallants Burden* (London, 1614), p. 54.
- 7 *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Thomas Hoby (1561; repr. New York, 1907), p. 347.

- 8 *The Order of Things* (New York, 1973), p. 17.
- 9 *Four Bookes of Offices: Enabling Privat Persons for the Special Service of all Good Princes and Policies* (London, 1606), p. 15.
- 10 *A Sermon of Apparel, Preached before the Kings Majestie and the Prince his Highnesse at Theobalds, the 22. of February, 1619* (London, 1620), pp. 24–5.
- 11 Stefano Guazzo, *Civile Conversation*, trans. George Pettie and Bartholomew Young (1581; repr. New York, 1967), p. 188.
- 12 Count Annibale Romei, *The Courtiers Academie* (1598; New York, 1969), p. 253.
- 13 Gordon Sherman Haight, ed., *Essays and New Atlantis* (1597; New York, 1942), pp. 215, 213.
- 14 Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege*, p. 93.
- 15 William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark* (1600–1), ed. Edward Hubler (New York, 1963), p. 51.
- 16 *The Worth of a Penny* (1647) (London, 1669), p. 28.
- 17 *Seven Satires* (1598), ed. A. Davenport (London, 1948), p. 5.
- 18 Giovanni della Casa, *Galateo* (1558), trans. Konrad Eisenbichler and Kenneth R. Bartlett (Toronto, 1986), pp. 53–4.
- 19 *Galateo*, p. 54.
- 20 Robert Greene, “A Quip for an Upstart Courtier” (1592), in *Harleian Miscellany*, vol. v (London, 1745), p. 372.
- 21 *Resolves Divine Moral and Political* (1620) (London, 1840), p. 275.
- 22 “Basilikon Doron. Or, His Majesties instructions to his Dearest Sonne, Henry the Prince” (1606), in Henry Morley, ed., *A Miscellany* (London, 1888), p. 150.
- 23 *Fashion for Men: An Illustrated History* (London, 1985), p. 45.
- 24 *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* p. 564.
- 25 Reed Benhamou, “The Restraint of Excessive Apparel: England 1337–1604,” *Dress* 15 (1989), 27–37.
- 26 Act of 24 Henry VIII, cap. 13 (1532), in *A Collection in English, of the Statutes nowe in force, continued from the beginning of Magna Charta, made in the 9. yeere of the reigne of King H.3 untill the ende of the Session of Parliament holden in the 23. yeere of the Reigne of our grations Queene Elizabeth* (London, 1583), pp. 13–16. This Act was frequently renewed under Elizabeth.
- 27 *Essayes* ([London,] 1600), essay 24, fo. Va54.
- 28 For a review of recent literature on “iconicity” which shares this notion of the arbitrary icon, see Paul Bouissac, “Iconicity and Pertinence,” in Bouissac, Michael Herzfeld, and Roland Posners, eds., *Iconicity: Essays on the Nature of Culture* (Tübingen, 1986), pp. 193–213.
- 29 “*Il Cortegiano* and the Constraints of Despotism,” in Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand, eds., *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture* (New Haven, 1983), p. 17.
- 30 *To My Lovynge Brethren That is Troublyd About the Popishe Aparrell, Two Short and Comfortable Epistels* (n.p., 1566), p. 451.
- 31 *The English Gentleman and Gentlewoman* (London, 1641), p. 278.

## Recuperating women and the man behind the screen<sup>1</sup>

DOMNA C. STANTON



In *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin cites *Le Caquet de l'accouchée* (*The Cackle of the Confined Woman*), a set of short, anonymous texts published sequentially in 1622, to illustrate the “degeneracy” of grotesque realism.<sup>2</sup> Though he concedes that “a tiny spark of the carnival flame is still alive” in these “fashionable” writings (pp. 105–6) – eight of which were collected in the *Recueil général des caquets de l'accouchée* (1623) and reprinted seven times before 1650 – he highlights their differences from the “very old” tradition of “female gathering[s] at the bedside of a woman recovering from childbirth . . . They were marked by abundant food and frank conversation, at which social conventions were dropped,” Bakhtin continues: “The acts of procreation and eating predetermined the role of the material bodily lower stratum” (p. 105). By contrast, in the post-Rabelaisian *Caquets de l'accouchée*

the author eavesdrops on the women’s chatter while hiding behind a curtain. However in the conversation that follows, the theme of the bodily lower stratum . . . is transferred to private manners. This female cackle is nothing but gossip and tittle-tattle. The popular frankness of the marketplace with its grotesque ambivalent lower stratum is replaced by chamber intimacies of private life, heard from behind a curtain. (p. 105)

Bakhtin perceives the importance of the eavesdropper, but the binary oppositions that structure his comparative discussion of the “traditional” female gathering and the *caquets* reveal the ideological agenda and the gender blindspots of his study. His paean to the ambivalent grotesque realism of the carnival, which subverts dominant beliefs and affirms the devalued or denied, finds its crowning expression in Rabelais, but is then, according to his Marxist scheme, recuperated by the serious, official culture of the absolutist state and reduced to a low literary genre with monologic meaning. In the process, marketplace frankness about the “lower bodily” organs of ingestion, excretion, and