Refashioning Allegorical Imagery: From Langland to Spenser

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

      Scholars often frame allegory as if it were tied to stable signifiers (i.e. white as purity) and therefore insulated from material concerns. I argue, however, that allegorical clothing is always-already material. That is, it is necessarily tied to material concerns either with respect to fashion or status, and therefore all allegorical costume should be seen as a comment on contemporary material culture. In order to make this argument, this dissertation tracks allegorical costume in English poetry from Langland to Spenser. Starting in the 14th century, there was a rapid expansion of access to and variety in fashion, and there was an increased awareness that identity could be donned and therefore bought and sold. This troubled contemporary moralists, who struggled to define how clothing worked in the public sphere, and it troubled allegorical poets, who struggled to apply stable literary markers in a shifting discursive field. Because allegory is only able to signify through a shared contemporary discourse, I thus argue that fashion both disrupted the discursive field around dress and destabilized allegorical imagery.

      Chapter 1 examines William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and *The Book of Margery Kempe* to see how allegorical conventions conflict with the way characters read each other's clothing, and how the access to power and institutional backing allows certain characters to define how their clothing is read. Chapter 2 explores the rise of the morality play by perusing *The Castle of Perseverance, Mankind, and Hyckescorner.*

While, morality plays are often assumed to be heavy handed lectures that impose categorical imperatives on their audience members, this chapter shows that English morality plays are inescapably material. Even though their structure remains consistent, their descriptions and staging of righteousness shifts along with East Anglian politics. Chapter 3 compares Skelton's *Bowge of Court* to his one surviving morality play, *Magnyfycence*. While both are courtly, dramatic allegories, they establish different rules under which clothing can signify and include different individuals into those systems. Chapter 4 analyzes Britomart in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in order to show how the transformative potential of Britomart's armor shifts with Spenser's waning enthusiasm for Elizabeth I. This dissertation contends that material valences of allegorical imagery contend with and sometimes overwhelm classical models or literary convention, and that struggle within the mode demonstrates profound continuity between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

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Introduction: Allegory and the "Birth" of Fashion

In Passus XIII of *Piers Plowman,* we meet Hawkin the Active Man, whose coat is "moled" in "many sondri plottes," signifying both his sins and distance from salvation. While critical reception has varied widely on the meaning of this episode, it is clear that the fate of Hawkin's coat will be the fate of his soul: for better or worse his identity is conflated with his dress. In another allegory written over 200 years later, Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, Britomart's armor in Book III reflects her changing identity within the narrative. As a young, unarmed girl she is "froward" and cautious, but once she dons just a few straps and a bit of plate, Britomart transforms herself into a confident and powerful character, emasculating her male rivals with every joust. From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, we can find dozens of similar examples where characters' identities are wrapped up in their costume. But in the same period, authors make fundamentally different assumptions about the elasticity of performed identity. In the above pair of examples, Langland's clothing ties Hawkin down and limits the waferer's ability to change his identity. Spenser, by contrast, gives us a protagonist who can transcend gender through dress at will: so long as she is wearing mail, she can be male.

The Middle Ages introduced fashion to Western Europe, and that in turn spurred radical disagreement as to the transformative potential of clothing. This dissertation will examine several conflicting examples like the ones above. The goal is to answer how

shifts in the discourse surrounding clothing along with the material conditions of costume production were reflected in allegory. Doing so illuminates medieval and Early Modern understandings of the embodied self, and how literature both reflected and helped produce the cultural norms of appearance.

1. The Regulation of Identity

The story of fashion is a story about defining difference. In the middle of the 14th century, one of clothing's primary functions in Western Europe was to distinguish between estates and occupations within those estates. Perhaps a definitive example of this function is described by Stella Mary Newton in *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince* when she examines the Royal Wardrobe for the 1360 Christmas celebration.[1] The records provide a nearly exhaustive picture of the clothing afforded to everyone in the court from the king to the minstrels. Edward III's outfit is laid out in exact detail, from the tightness of the fit (in accordance with the new fashion) to the gold ribbon trimming that differentiated his outfit from the rest of the attendees'. We learn that Queen Philippa's outfit was nearly identical to that of Edward's sister, Joan, except for the extra and expensive ermine that Phillippa's tailor had to work with. We also learn that

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[1] Stella Mary Newton, *Fashion in the age of the black prince: a study of the years, 1340-1365* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 1999). Besides the incredible detail that Newton offers, I focus on Edward III for a couple of reasons: 1) we have more detailed records of his Wardrobe than we do of Richard II's. In fact, details about Richard's wardrobe exist (see W. Paley Baildon, "XXII.—A Wardrobe Account of 16–17 Richard II, 1393–4",.*Archaeologia* 62 (1911): 497-514.), but they are hard to find and less detailed, and Edward's are better preserved. Staniland's fantastic summary of 14th century Wardrobes makes little mention of Richard as well (Kay Staniland, "The Great Wardrobe Accounts as a Source for Historians of Fourteenth-Century Clothing and Textiles," *Textile History* 20 (1989): 275-281). 2) As I discuss below, Edward's court de facto introduces sumptuary laws to England, and the king himself shows special interest in their dissemination. 3) Also Edward III reigns until 1377, at which point the A-text of *Piers Plowman* is generally considered to have been completed with the B-text additions soon to follow. If Langland is meditating on official roles of clothing during that time, he's thinking of Edwardian reforms.

attending students from King's College wore tan-colored shortcloth with popellus[2] and

miniver, that the indoor servants wore shortcloth mi-parti, and that the stone masons were

given budge. From these exhaustive details, it is clear that the Westminster Hall

procession would have given a visitor a heraldric vision:

> The somber effect of the clothing of the royal family…would be gradually
>
> lightened as the eye passed across the border-line of knights and clergy
>
> before reaching the great band of motley, an agitated broken pattern
>
> combining only a very few colors.[3]

As Newton herself notes, everyone in the procession had a clear role exquisitely defined

by the cloth provided them by the royal court. There was no ambiguity, and even a

passing observer would have been able to distinguish the powerful from the powerless.

From this we can gather two broad ideas: 1) Edward III believed in and used the power of

clothing to prop up his authority as king, and 2) Clothing here expressed one's role in a

sharply defined, hierarchical manner. Indeed, Edward was willing to spend a *lot* of

money in order to reinforce that link between clothing and status. What's more, the

fabrics and accessories provided by the Royal Wardrobe suggest that this procession was

less about individuals than systems; that clothing was not an expression of the self but an

expression of one's status. Everyone's clothes, from the Prince of Wales' down to the

stonemason's were coordinated to convey the impression that each person had a role in

the administration, and that their clothing reflected their designated roles. In other words,

while clothing has many uses (discretion, protection from elements, etc.), this clothing in

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[2] Squirrel fur.
[3] Newton, *Fashion*, 65-7.

this moment functioned primarily as a uniform for the owner—removing individuality by placing the wearer on a continuum.

While this Christmas wardrobe is especially detailed, it is not the only extant record of a Royal Procession that delineates by role. Indeed, half of Newton's book is dedicated to such examples. In a society under sumptuary laws, it should not be surprising that the king would reinforce legal codes on holiday celebrations. Still, royal feasts are not the only metric for determining the role of clothing in late medieval England: how did costume work outside the purview of the royal court?

Ideally, citizens were to don their respective uniforms not just on Christmas, but in daily life, and sumptuary laws became increasingly prohibitive as fashion took root. England did not begin regulating consumption until 1316;[4] even then, that law was directed not towards clothing but towards food. By that time, Italy's earliest surviving[5] clothing specific sumptuary law (in Bologna) was over 70 years old.[6] Spain, under King James I, passed its first such law in 1234, and France's first undisputed[7] sumptuary law was passed in 1279. England, however, did not begin to regulate attire until 1322,[8] but

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[4] Contrary to popular belief, sumptuary laws are laws regulating all commerce and consumption, not just clothing.

[5] The absolute earliest Italian sumptuary law was short lived, having been passed in Genoa in 1157 only to be repealed 4 years later. See Diane Owen Hughes, "Sumptuary Law and Social Relations," in *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West,* ed. John Bossy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 69-99.

[6] Unlike English ones, Italian sumptuary laws were notorious for their enforcement. See Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy 1200-1500 (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 112-14.

[7] Heller argues that some of the earliest cited sumptuary laws did not in fact exist. See Sarah-Grace Heller "Anxiety, Hierarchy, and Appearance in Thirteenth-Century Sumptuary Laws and the Roman de la rose," *French Historical Studies* 27 (2004): 311-348.

[8] See Wilson, *De Novo Modo*, 168, citing W.M. Ormrod, "Agenda for Legislation, 1322-c. 1340," *English Historical Review* 414 (1990): 4.

even that statute merely limited the usage of furs. The more detailed laws came in 1337[9]

and 1363, during Edward III's reign, which suggests that fashion's transformative effects

(and consequences) reached England a bit later than they had Italy or Spain. Because we

have no records of sumptuary laws being enforced in England,[10] their prevalence and

increasing reach is often seen as reflecting anxieties of the ruling elite around the subject

of social mobility and the weakening of traditional social boundaries.[11] That is, the laws

not only express the ideals of the ruling class, but also the distinct awareness that those

ideals are now threatened.

I find this compelling, but in order to refine this a bit for England, I'd like to

examine the sumptuary law passed in 1363. This ordinance originated in the Commons,

which complained that "various people of various conditions wear various apparel not

appropriate to their estate."[12] The law was then drafted by the King's Council with

particular help from Edward himself, who wished that it be passed as an ordinance rather

than a statute so that it might be amended or repealed at the next parliament.[13] Indeed,

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[9] The 1337 statute was less interested in distinguishing between estates than between nations in that it forbade the wearing, purchasing, and importation of cloth not made in England, Ireland, Wales, or Scotland. It did however include further details about the donning of furs. As the 14th century developed, the laws began to use more specific language with respect to types of cloth and levels of access.

[10] Or really throughout Europe. Italian states were the lone authorities who consistently enforced sumptuary law.

[11] The classic work on English Sumptuary Law that also makes this argument is Frances Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary legislation and personal regulation in England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1926).

[12] The complaint continues: "that is to say, grooms wear the apparel of craftsman, and craftsmen wear the apparel of gentlemen, and gentlemen wear the apparel of esquires, and esquires wear the apparel of knights, the one and the other wear fur which only properly belongs to lords and knights, poor and other women (femmes povres et autres) wear the dress of ladies, and poor clerks wear clothes like those of the king and other lords." See W. M. Ormrod, "Edward III: Parliament of October 1363, Introduction," in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson et al. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005).

[13] Ormrod, 'Parliament of October 1363,' Items 38-39.

less than two years later in 1365, the law was repealed at the request of the Commons.[14]

This episode tells us a few things: 1) even though their members were the primary targets of the law, the Commons, not just the Lords, were interested in maintaining social boundaries on principle; 2) Edward was cautious about these reforms, either with respect to their specifics or their efficacy, but he was also intent on aggressively disseminating them; 3) The repeal spoke to uncertainty over exactly how to address what was a common concern. Thus English sumptuary laws were not just top-down reforms which pitted the will of the elites against the emerging merchant class. Instead, they reflected broader tensions between shifting identities, and a certain uncertainty with respect to how to maintain social structure. In short, Edwardian laws betray a culture in flux, attempting to reconcile social ideology with social practices, and to provide order in "social organization where structure was ambivalent."[15]

From the details of the 14th century sumptuary laws, it is also clear that the laws were not just about maintaining difference between the estates. Much of their language delineates not between peasant and lord but between knights, grooms, craftsman, esquires, yeoman, artisans, etc.: in other words, the lower gentry and wealthy townspeople. In fact, the short-lived 1363 ordinance makes no mention of anyone above the rank of knight worth more than £1000 per annum. As Kim Phillips notes, "English medieval sumptuary legislation offers merely a masquerade of social comprehensiveness, while in actuality focusing one's gaze on the upper middle groups of knights, gentry and

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[14] For more detail on this oddity, see Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls,* 173-5.
[15] Hughes, "Sumptuary Law," 99.

wealthy townsmen."[16] The earliest laws paid special attention to the middle class

because they could potentially threaten decorum: the common peasant was not worth

mentioning. Edward III deliberately complicated the stratification of the elites during his

reign, expanding the two ranks of the upper nobility (earl and baron) to five. With the

help of sumptuary laws, the ranks below them began to fracture even more.[17] That

fashion is at the flashpoint of these diverging interests testifies to its symbolic weight in

medieval England, as well as its ability to disrupt.

Besides royal productions and laws, the Church enforced a number of clothing

restrictions on its clergy as well as religious outsiders. Boucher informs us that clothing

edicts in the 13th centuries in England and France specifically forbid certain costumes for

"particular classes of persons, such as Jews, Saracens and people condemned for offences

connected with religion."[18] Lepers were similarly required to carry "a kind of oliphant or

horn," and some diocese attempted to provide an off-white uniform for them.[19] And in

another grisly example, prostitutes were often required to wear particular dress[20] which

differentiated them from respectable women and from the community at large,

encouraging their mistreatment. Clothing did not, then, merely delineate social roles, but

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[16] Kim M. Phillips, "Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws," *Gender & History* 19, no. 1 (2007), 24.

[17] See A. L. Brown, *The Governance of Late Medieval England 1272-1461* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1989), 137.

[18] François Boucher and Yvonne Deslandres *20,000 years of fashion: the history of costume and personal adornment* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 189.

[19] Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 136.

[20] The specific rules for this seem to have varied by region, but there were thematic overlaps. In Marseilles, they wore a striped cloak, whereas in England they had a striped hood. Later these prescriptions were replaced by tassels or stitched bands of fabric. Almost always, "the prescribed colours were the same as the colors of the circles worn by Jews: yellow…green, neutral white, and even red…in short, colours that would stand out against normal clothing"(140).

also distinguished between different religions, citizens and outcasts, and the pious and impious. Françoise Piponnier adds that in the church, "By the Late Middle Ages, the meaning of colour had been codified…The big festivals were celebrated in red and white, red symbolizing the blood of Christ and, by analogy, the blood of the martyrs, brilliant white symbolizing light and divinity."[21] While the meaning of colors sometimes shifted slowly over time (blue for instance was later dropped from the liturgical scheme), institutions consistently attempted to use different aspects of clothing (fabric, cut, length, and color) as a specifically classified language with which to categorize the populace. This is why the new religious orders used the color of their robes as identifying markers and symbolic metaphors for their ideological differences. In adopting a greyish brown habit, Franciscans differentiated themselves from the other orders. However, they went further and often emphasized their own poverty by refusing to wash their robes.[22]

The medieval practice of livery worked to indirectly reinforce what the sumptuary laws decreed. While the records of Edward III's Christmas procession are one example of livery, the practice of distributing clothes as either payment or charity was extremely common among other lords as well. The Black Prince, for instance, was responsible for dressing his men-at-arms (with his insignia, no less) as well as for dressing noblemen and women in his service. One record from 1346 shows the detail invested in these outfits, in which the prince's clerk is to have made and delivered two sets of chaperon of green and

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[21] Piponnier and Man, *Dress*, 118-9. She notes an interesting exception here in that Bishops "could not be identified by colour or by any other feature." Of course, liturgical figures broadly were identifiable, and Cardinals had the privilege of wearing "a wide-brimmed red hat encircles with silken cords."
[22] Piponnier and Mane, *Dress*, 128.

white, with the green always on the right side.[23] This kind of detailed, branded clothing

was often a major and heavily negotiated aspect of a worker's salary. As the practice

expanded in the 14th century, so did its codification, whereby the employer would not

only provide cloth, but also an insignia that would inscribe the wearer as a subordinate to

an institution. We know that the distribution of clothes to the poor was nearly universal

throughout France and England, but even this charitable work also had the effect of

branding even the most humble citizens. Newton offers the example of Jean de Veux,

who donated seven outfits to an equal number of *pauvres de Christ,* who would then

presumably wear his inscribed biers, tunics, and hoods around town, advertising both

Jean's workmanship as well as his piety.[24] Richard II infamously used the badge of the

White Hart in order to liken himself to Christ and demonstrate numerical dominance.

Indeed, by 1394 Richard employed and liveried over 750 Cheshire men in his personal

bodyguard, sending some of them to intimidate the Revenge Parliament of 1397. Like

many of Richard's choices, the liberal distribution of the badge was criticized

(particularly by Lancastrians) as excessive and extravagant. Ostensibly, the Cheshire

bodyguard was hired in order to reassert royal authority in the face of baronial resistance.

But the overuse of livery seems to have had the adverse effects of confirming many of his

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[23] Newton, *Fashion*, 70. I am relying on Newton's scholarship as a way of sidestepping a significant problem with historical accounts of clothing. Many visual depictions from the 14th century and earlier make use of conceptual clothing conventions (either biblical or classical) rather than realistic clothing of the day. They are evidence of attitudes toward clothing, but not what contemporary clothing *was*, and because so little medieval clothing survives intact, determining how clothes actually looked from literary sources is tricky. Likewise, sumptuary legislation provides us some details about changing trends, but the laws are rarely specific enough to help us picture what medieval clothing would have looked like. Wardrobe accounts and wills, which Newton bases her book on, provide a nice balance or specifics in terms of outfits, cost, and hierarchy. Further, because the wardrobes were less ideologically driven than clothing invectives of the day, they were less exaggerated in their accounts.

[24] Newton, *Fashion*, 72.

detractors' claims (the total cost of Richard's affinity and his Cheshire guards' annuities was an astounding £20,000, which forced Richard to propose new taxes) and deepening the divide between Richard's loyal followers and the other nobility whose support was rapidly eroding.[25] Further, the sheer volume of badges distinguished Richard from his fondly remembered grandfather, whose retainers never numbered more than a few handful. Thus, the badge itself became a symbol for those with or against the king, isolating Richard and sowing discontent. Nevertheless, Richard's emphasis on the livery itself serves as yet another example of medieval branding used to construct hierarchies of power.[26]

Across the courts, the liveries and the Church, we can see that 14th-century clothing was calculated with extreme precision with, "the result that not only within the precincts of the royal and noble courts but in the streets and byways all over England information as to each man's place in the society of his time was openly communicated to every one of his fellows." [27] However, clothing's role as social definer was complicated by the so-called Birth of Fashion in the mid-14th century.[28]

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[25] For more on this divide and Richard's household costs, see Gerald Leslie Harriss, *Shaping the nation: England 1360-1461* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 483-9.
[26] For more on the White Hart and its connection to alchemical conventions, see Jonathan. Hughes, "King of the White Hart," *History Today 62*, no. 12 (2012): 17. For more on Richard's extensive use, see Jonathon Alexander, "The Portrait of Richard II in Westminster Abbey," in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*, ed. Dillian Gordon et. al. (Coventry: Harvey Miller, 1997).
[27] Newton, *Fashion*, 70.
[28] Amongst clothing historians, the origin of European fashion is a vexed subject. While many (such as Heller or Pinponnier) maintain that the origin of fashion can be traced back earlier than the 14th century, claims of fashion's *true* origin stretch from the 12th to 19th centuries.

New Beginnings

There is broad support for a "birth of fashion" in the Middle Ages, and many clothing historians refer to the 1340's as such.[29] However, there is disagreement amongst scholars as to when in the Middle Ages fashion can be said to have begun,[30] and how we are to distinguish fashion as a system from dress. Because much of the disparity stems from either field bias or chronological chauvinism, I am reluctant to claim that 1340 was the year fashion was *born*; Scott and Heller have offered enough counter examples to suggest that at least *seeds* of fashion existed prior to Edward III's ascension. If some measure of fashion existed beforehand, so be it. Regardless, the 1340's marked a period where fashion's influence and variety reached a critical mass. If the previous centuries were characterized by the slow alterations of uniforms, the 1340s introduced a period of rapid change and a radical new fashion to boot. Around 1340, tunics and long gowns[31] fell out of favor, and dress that fit more tightly to the body became popular, leading in men to pourpoints and doublets that accentuated waistlines and in women to tighter bodices and plunging necklines. In other words, the clothing of this time got shorter and

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[29] Those in the 14th century camp include Boucher, *20,000 years*; Gilles Lipovetsky, *The empire of fashion: dressing modern democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); Newton, *Fashion*, and Odile Blanc, "From Battlefield to Court: the Invention of Fashion in the Fourteenth Century," in *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts, Images*, ed. Désirée Koslin and Janet E. Snyder (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 157-72. Among others, Laver argues for seeing the Middle Ages as a crucible for fashion, but does not specify exactly when. James Laver, *A concise history of costume*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969).

[30] See either Margaret Scott, *Medieval dress & fashion* (London: British Library, 2007) which argues for fashion in the 12th century, or Heller, *Fashion in medieval France*, which finds evidence of fashion in the 13th. Of course, Early Modernists put fashion's birth later. The next three citations have fashion starting in the 15th, 16th, and 17th century respectively: Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Carole Shammas, *The Preindustrial Consumer in England and America (*Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990); Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988).

[31] "Garments that sweep up all the filth off the ground for no useful purpose." Cited in Susan Schibanoff, *Chaucer's queer poetics: rereading the dream trio* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 37.

more sexually definitive. The reversion to short clothing was not unique to history or even to the Middle Ages, as both short and long clothing had been in vogue at different times over the centuries[32]—with longer clothing having dominated much of upper class dress since the 12th century. What made the 14th century switch unique was that, contrary to earlier shifts that would last for centuries, the 1340's introduced a period of rapid change that was less driven by large societal developments than by the capricious desires of those wealthy enough to afford new clothing.[33]

For Laurel Wilson,[34] clothing becomes fashion when aesthetic conditions override practical ones, when change is constant, and when little modifications (such as slight tightening of waistlines or lengthening of sleeves) add up to broader, substantive shifts (such as the change of the silhouette). One other aspect is choice, which while not unheard of in the Middle Ages, was nevertheless increased significantly.[35] From roughly the twelfth century onward in Western Europe, longer clothing dominated formal occasions while short clothes were reserved for workers or military men. However, once fashion started to affect norms, both short and long clothing became acceptable in both formal and informal occasions. The 1363 Wardrobe—three years after the Christmas

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[32] King Edgar, for instance, is captured in 957-75 wearing short clothing. Wilson, *'De novo modo,'* 56.
[33] Or as Crane has put it, "change itself [became] an object of consumption." Susan Crane, *The Performance of self: ritual, clothing, and identity during the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 14.
[34] Wilson's whole project is predicated on locating fashion's birth in the 14th century as a product of both the buildup of the wool trade, a richer mobile middle class, and the standardization of clothing.
[35] I mention Wilson's criteria not because I'm particularly interested in whether or not the 14th century constituted the birth of fashion. Instead, I want to highlight how this period changed patterns in dress.

procession—records Edward receiving some eleven *gouns*, of which nine were long and two were short.[36]

Having options forced wearers to stay on top of fashion, as they (or their servants) would have had to weigh an increasing number of cuts, lengths, and accessories each and every day. Moreover, keeping up with the latest trends was increasingly expensive,[37] making one's ability to remain fashionable as much an expression of one's access to capital as anything else.[38] For much of the Middle Ages, the enormous cost of fabrics meant having them required financial assistance from the court. However, as the 14th century developed, trade of luxury goods expanded, lowering the costs and expanding circulation.[39] Dramatic, luxurious clothing was no longer the privilege of the wealthy gentry and above.[40] This trend is crucial for understanding fashion's influence, because it helped establish a cycle that drove individuals of means to purchase ever more ornate dress. As nobles sought to distinguish themselves through dress, they demanded more luxury goods, which in turn enriched the merchants who provided them. With their new

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[36] Wilson, '*De novo modo*,' 126.

[37] Piponnier and Mane, *Dress*, 82.

[38] Danielle Queruel has demonstrated that as the 14th century developed, both moralistic tracts and romances reflected a more specific, object oriented performance of status. Earlier works focused on abstract visions of man's position in society, whereas later works (while not necessarily questioning the hierarchy) use detailed clothing and jewelry to accomplish the same goal. See Danielle Queruel, "Attitudes and Social Positions in Courtly Romances: Hainault, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Showing Status: Representations of Social position,* ed. Willem Pieter Blockmans and A. Janse (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1999).

[39] Wilson, '*De novo modo*,' 132.

[40] Working in estate records, Frederique Lachaud makes a compelling case for some wealthy burgesses' wearing clothing suited to the upper estate in 13th century England. That the wealthiest merchants were dressing extravagantly should not surprise us, however, and does not threaten the line I'm taking here. It's not that no wealthy townsperson had ever bought scarlet: it's that as trade increased and prices dropped, a much wider array of people began to afford better clothing in the 14th century. See Frederique Lachaud, "Dress and Social Status in England Before the Sumptuary Laws," in *Heraldry, pageantry, and social display in medieval England*, ed. Peter R. Coss and Maurice Keen. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2002).

capital, those same merchants turned around and bought fancy clothes, which pushed the nobility in a very expensive game of one-upmanship. Part of fashion was about individual expression, but a large part of it was an attempt to maintain and define difference in a newly mobile society.

It's worth pointing out that these two trends—that is, the codification of clothing and the rise and spread of fashion—overlapped significantly. One need only refer back to Edward's 1360 Christmas Wardrobe to see that his highly structured livery was in place some two or three decades after the so-called fashion revolution. Among historians, it remains an open question if fashion so disrupted traditional dress that sumptuary laws *had* to be written in order to preserve those traditions, or if fashion conflated identity with consumption, which in turn encouraged rulers to define rank by codifying style. Put another way, was Edward III trying to save a centuries old system of dress that fashion put at risk, or was he in fact helping to construct these elaborate clothing practices in response to the greater interest in luxurious clothing and a greater emphasis on outward appearance in general?

Part of the problem with answering that question is that we have inconsistent evidence about the degree to which individual's identity was *worn* prior to the sumptuary laws. Several religious groups in the 13th century, such as the Dominicans and Franciscans, settled on definitive garb for their members, and some professions adopted the long clothing of the clergy to better command respect. Boucher, citing Jean de Jeandun, notes that physicians in the 13th century had conspicuously colorful gowns and "doctoral caps" that the University of Paris (along with other universities) defined

"suitable" but not uniform attire for its masters and students, and that in 1252 English

students were forbidden to wear the buttoned chaperon. However, those purposeful

choices were limited to specific groups of people, and, perhaps more importantly, those

choices do not go that far back. Before the 12th century, we know precious little about

how individual estates distinguished themselves through dress.[41] Long clothing was

associated with the clergy and had been since the 6th century, but it was not unique to

them.[42] Short clothing had been for centuries associated with the poor and the military,

but by all accounts, Charlemagne's everyday dress involved a short, knee-length tunic

(similar to what would be later called the short *bliaud*) that exposed his ornamented hose.

We have accounts of rich people being accused of excessive ornamentation,[43] and fabrics

like silk, as rare as it was until the 13th century, would have identified its wearer as

wealthy. There are also plenty of images of monarchs in richly ornamented gowns, but

long clothing was common in Western Europe anyway as early as the mid-10th century,

especially on formal occasions.[44] Beyond those scraps of evidence, we could surmise that

the everyday dress of commoners was distinguished by the markings of their profession:

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[41] Hyer and Owen-Crocker's study provides an exhaustive examination of some of the limited extant textile artifacts from the Anglo-Saxon world. Despite careful analysis, the shreds they have provide few clues as to the regulations around who wore what. Maren Clegg Hyer and Gale Owen-Crocker, "Woven works: making and using textiles," in *The material culture of daily living in the Anglo-Saxon world,* ed. Maren Clegg Hyer and Gale Owen-Crocker (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2011).

[42] Indeed, when in the 12th century, long clothing came back in vogue, many religious moralists were horrified at its excesses, and condemned those who wore it. Boucher says they were condemning the excessive lengths of some clothing, not long clothing in general (171). After all, the monks themselves wore long clothing. Wilson, however, sees the moralists as instinctively protecting the dress that distinguished them from laymen. Their horror "conscious or not" was rooted in the fear of losing a visual distinction they so prized (63).

[43] Boucher, *20,000*, 170.

[44] Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge [England]: Boydell Press, 2004), 155.

the manure of the field or the scorches of the forge, for instance. But we have no evidence that those kinds of distinctions were formally understood.

Another problem with answering the above question is that there is a significant amount of literary evidence in France and Italy of an increased emphasis on appearance as far back as the late 12th century. It seems plausible then to assert that the English legislation we see in 1363 was both an outcrop of the fashion revolution of the 1340's and of a centuries long trend in increasing European superficiality.

It remains outside the scope of this dissertation to speculate on the exact cause and date of the new emphasis on clothing.[45] We do know that sumptuary laws spread as trade in luxurious clothing increased. We also know that sumptuary legislation spread across Europe around the time of fashion's arrival. Lastly, we know that there was no consensus on the exact determining characteristics of one's status. Thus, fashion and sumptuary legislation worked together to merge costume with some form of "real status" (calculated in English law by combinations of wealth, rank, and occupation) in the minds of citizens. However, that solution for establishing social control also contained within it the seeds of disruption. As I discussed above, sumptuary legislation conflates a person with that which they consume. And even as fashion provided more ways to define individuals through more choices in design, it also provided consumers with a tool of resistance. Once status is commodified, "the self is to some degree for sale."[46] Indeed,

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[45] Monica Wright compellingly argues that at least in France, emphasis on appearance was the direct result of nobles looking to distinguish themselves in peacetime. See Monica L. Wright, "What Was Arthur Wearing? Discrepancies in Dress Descriptions in Twelfth-Century French Romance," *Philological Quarterly.* 81(2002).

[46] Claire Sponsler, *Drama and resistance: bodies, goods, and theatricality in late medieval England* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 12.

medieval moralists actively worried about clothing's ability to falsify status rather than merely reflect it: "For we may se now al day that, be it never so pouer a man, and a have on a gay gowne of selk...eny man is fain to make him cher and also for to be mek and lowliche to him."[47] Just as the legislation got more specific, some writers openly wondered what clothing meant at all.

We can see this tension play out in the 15th century, as sumptuary laws tightened,[48] but the literature expressed cynicism in the signifying power of clothing. Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes,* for instance, was written some 60 years after the "novo modo" took root in England. However, the allegorical work still struggles with the loss of standardization of dress. In the opening section the narrator meets an Old Man in an episode reminiscent of Boethius' meeting with Lady Philosophy. However, whereas Philosophy's torn rags directly paralleled Boethius's philosophical understanding, the Old Man is more interested in the material reality of contemporary dress:

> Sumtyme afer men mighten lordes knowe
>
> By hir array from othir folk, but now
>
> A man shal studie and musen a long throwe
>
> Which is which. O lordes, it sit to yow
>
> Amende this, for it is for your prow;
>
> If twixt yow and your men no difference
>
> Be in array, lesse is your reverence. (442-8)

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[47] Sponsler, *Drama*, 13, quoted in Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*.
[48] Piponnier and Mane, *Dress*, 84.

Here, the Old Man laments the loosening of clothing norms. Sometime earlier—the exact period is unclear and indeed may be imaginary—clothing lined up with status, making everyone's role in society clear for all to see. However, things have changed: what one wears no longer distinguishes lords from lay people. This ambiguity is not merely confusing. By weakening the barrier between estates, the lord's "reverence" is also weakened. Here the Old Man links the power of dress to the propagation of lord's authority. Dress is not just custom: it serves a clear function of differentiating the powerful from the less.

Hoccleve wrote this in the early 15th century, so the Old Man's complaint helps confirm some observations about the mid to late 14th century, while echoing many of the justifications for contemporary sumptuary laws. Although the Old Man will go on to echo Chaucer's Parson and link fashion with bankruptcy, his emphasis (like the Laws themselves) is on preserving class distinctions. Moreover, he does not say that clothing practices *are changing*. The phrasing here describes a change that has already occurred in full. For the Old Man, clothing *now* has a remarkably different role than it used to.

The other point I'd like to make is that this is a generically liminal moment in the text. Again, the whole set up for Hoccleve's narrator meeting the Old Man is similar to Boethius in that a down-on-his-luck narrator meets a wizened but somewhat disrespected figure whose appearance sparks a dialogue that leads to ostensible enlightenment. Among the many changes Hoccleve has made (such as making the allegorical figure Male), the treatment of clothing stands out in that it is nearly opposite to that of Boethius. In the earlier work, Lady Philosophy's robes explicitly reflect her spiritual or philosophical

state. However, when the Old Man speaks of clothes, he thinks of them in terms of their material function. Dress once had the ability to express its wearer's societal role, but contemporary practices (rather than philosophical neglect) have led to its being less reliable. And unlike the *Consolatio,* where poor dress symbolized undeveloped philosophy, the sorry state of dress is not reflected in its appearance. Far from it: later the Old Man will complain about beautiful costly new fashions that bankrupt the wearers who aspire to be admired for their appearance. The problem is not the look itself so much as what it costs, both to the reverence of lords writ large and to one's pocketbook.

2. Allegory and the Materiality of Abstraction

In the previous section, I discussed how the rise of fashion along with the sumptuary laws helped to create a culture where bodies were reduced to their adornment, and clothing became both a tool of social control and an avenue of resistance. If we think of the self as necessarily embodied, and if we see that body as being subject to material and discursive forces which provide it with meaning and limits, then we can start to see how the debates around clothing shaped what a body could signify in public. The rules for what a piece of clothing meant kept changing, which meant the rules for how a clothed body interacted with society kept changing. This dissertation is an examination of how those same debates and anxieties shaped how characters could signify on the page. I will specifically focus on allegory in part because material-culture approaches to allegory are rare, and in part because allegory is profoundly interested in the fraught connection between exterior appearance and identity.

Allegory is a mode of literature that is frequently misunderstood and often assumed to have perished sometime in the centuries before we developed computers. One common understanding of allegory is that it generates meaning through its attachment to some higher, abstract thought rather than through being an object of perception itself. For instance, consider Lady Justice in sculpture[49] or the Vices in medieval and Early Modern drama.[50] When we see Lady Justice in a public square, we know that she *is* Justice. When he enters on stage, we know that Avarice, however dressed, *is* Greed. Even when allegory does not rely on personification, it relies on imagery to communicate ideas. In other words, allegory is an embodied form that focuses our attention on performed appearances. While literary convention plays a part in shaping any character's appearance, the dynamic shifts in fashion and legislation of the Late Middle Ages impacted how characters looked, and what their appearances signified, even in the abstract, self-conscious mode of allegory. However, before we get much further, it is worth defining the mode in detail. What the following section shows is that allegory as a concept is so fraught that one does not define the mode so much as negotiate its meaning.

Recovering from the Romantics

Allegory has been defined as a work of art that means something other than what it says. I do not ascribe to this definition—it's far too broad—but it is a useful starting

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[49] Discussed in detail below.

[50] Personification is not the defining attribute of the mode, but allegory often uses it, with the common effect of simplifying a character's identity.

place for considering how allegory and allegoresis fell into disrepute. After achieving

dominance as a literary form in the 15th century, the allegorical mode waned both in

terms of popularity and critical appreciation.[51] Starting in the 19th century, romantic

aesthetics, voiced famously by Goethe,[52] argued for a distinction between symbol and

allegory. The latter sought to define the general through the particular and worked from a

predetermined series of images (for instance, justice is a blind a woman holding scales).

By contrast, symbol unconsciously found the general within the material, and thereby

"reveal[ed] the unity of the material with the transcendent."[53] Put another way, the

interpretation of allegory is finite because it is overdetermined, but the interpretation of

symbol is infinite.[54] Schopenhauer was harsher, declaring that allegory is directly

opposed to the purpose of art. For him, art was "the presentation of an Idea that can only

be apprehended intuitively," whereas allegory was mere "hieroglyphics" that is capable

of expressing "nothing more than an inscription might, and in fact rather less."[55] Until the

mid-20th century, Schopenhauer's and Goethe's views formed the dominant takes of the

form: allegory was broadly held to be the antiquated, stilted mode that restricted inquiry,

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[51] Allegorical interpretation stretches as far back as the 6th century B.C.E. with philosophical interpretations of Homer. However, I begin my historiography of the mode with the romantics because their approaches directly shaped much of modern criticism.
[52] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maxims and reflections* (London: Penguin Books, 1998).
[53] Eric Chafe, "Allegorical Music: The "Symbolism" of Tonal Language in the Bach Canons," *The Journal of Musicology* 3 (1984): 341.
[54] Writing about 19th century aesthetics, Bukofzer describes Goethe's distinction well, "This transition from the notion "it means" to that of "it is" marks the transition from the baroque style to its successor, the classical romantic style." Manfred F. Bukofzer, *Music in the baroque era: from Monteverdi to Bach* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1947).
[55]Arthur Schopenhauer, Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway, *The world as will and representation (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 263-4.

the multiplicity of interpretation, and even the individual.[56] As the perceived opposite of

both the romantic symbolism and the new realism of the 19th century, it had no place in

visual art or poetry.

Allegoresis was given new life in the 20th century in part when scholars like

Honig, Frye, and Fletcher began to argue that all commentary was to some degree

allegorical.[57] In his theory on symbols, Northrop Frye argues that a poem cannot literally

be anything other than a poem, and thus all commentary is the process by which the critic

uses discursive language to make explicit what is implicit in the poem. As such, the

romantic distinction between "what it is" and "what it means" is conflated.[58] However,

even defenders of the mode, like Frye, had a tendency to focus on the concept behind the

allegory rather than the images the allegory uses or the responsibility given to the reader.

For instance, in *The Great Code,* Frye offers two similar definitions of allegory: the first

is "…allegory, which is a special form of analogy, a technique of paralleling

metaphorical with conceptual language in which the latter has the primary authority" and

later, "allegory, as in Dante, where a metaphorical narrative runs parallel with a

conceptual one but defers to it."[59] For Frye, an allegory works on two levels, where the

plot of the narrative (what he refers to as "metaphorical") is determined, not by realistic

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[56] Schopenhauer's views are oft quoted in 19th century English journals as well: see William Ashton Ellis, *The Meister: quarterly journal of the London Branch of the Wagner Society* (London: George Redway, 1888), 56. "What really produces the effect which allegory secures is the abstract thought, not the object of perception."
[57] See Angus Fletcher, *Allegory, the theory of a symbolic mode (*Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964); and Edwin Honig, *Dark conceit: the making of allegory*, (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1959).
[58] Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom, *Anatomy of criticism: four essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 86-9.
[59] Northrop. Frye, *The great code: the Bible and literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 10 and 24.

character motivations or the actual condition of the setting, but by a more profound system (what he refers to as "conceptual"). For example, Dante's three day journey in the *Commedia* is less governed by how long it might take to traverse the expanses of Heaven and Hell than by the narrative's adherence to Dante's typological link with Christ.

The idea of narrative and conceptual levels is broadly applicable to a wide range of texts, including the subject of Chapter 1, *Piers Plowman*. Early on in *Piers,* the folk make a pact to plow a half acre, but end up failing to finish it when many of the peasants become sick or injured. Frye would conclude that they failed to plow it not because of their physical limitations, but because they are fallen, and societal forces cannot fix their collective spiritual condition. A plausible reading to be sure. However, this definition of allegory has two major flaws. First, Frye's scheme relies on a reader's ability to consistently discern between plot details and conceptual truths that determine them. It is *possible* to generate a framework from the text itself without the help of a guide, but even contemporary readers often found allegories opaque without some strong hints. For instance, Spenser's *Letter to Ralegh*, which was published in the 1590 edition of the *Faerie Queene*, was designed to provide a concrete way for middle-class readers to approach the poem while avoiding "gealous opinions and misconstructions."[60] The letter's very existence suggests how difficult it can be to untangle metaphorical from conceptual narratives, and to distinguish between authoritative moments and details which defer to those moments. For Frye's scheme to work, a reader must have that information before reading the text or be provided with it sometime during the process,

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[60] A. C. Hamilton, "Spenser's Letter to Ralegh," *Modern Language Notes* 73 (1958): 481-485.

and the reader must further be certain that this framework is consistent throughout the entirety of the text. Second Frye's definition reduces the potential ways "realistic" details can be used. For Frye those details are always secondary, even though texts which are unquestionably allegory, such as *Piers Plowman*, often use realistic elements to question the validity of conceptual truths to everyday life. Frye's definition does not allow allegory to do anything except confirm what the ideal reader already knows.[61]

C.S. Lewis's approach to the genre is less structured but just as limiting. For Lewis, allegory is a universally human tendency to turn the immaterial into material. We make intangible things like emotions picturable in order to better understand them. Indeed, Lewis argues that allegory is the result of the pagan turning his mind inward, and finding within it a series of allegorical figures at war with one another. In some texts, like *Roman de la Rose,* this approach generates a psychological realism, but realizing the meaning of the figures is not enough. For Lewis, "the way to read an Allegory is, after all, to see a simile from the other end."[62] The images used to convey meaning are not to be discarded once the abstraction is absorbed: they help crystallize the abstraction in the reader's mind. "It is not enough to see that the dreamer gazing into the fountain signifies the lover first looking into the lady's eyes."[63] We must imagine the scene, and thereby empathize with the lover's experience. I sympathize with Lewis's formulation, and I agree that the imagery used to convey an abstraction is not to be thrown away once we

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[61] Tuve is equally critical of reducing allegory to a series of rigid levels because it transforms the poem into a series of moral maxims. See Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical imagery; some mediaeval books and their posterity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 26.
[62] C. S. Lewis, *The allegory of love: a study in medieval tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 125.
[63] Ibid., 157.

fill out our worksheet, that is once we align the image with some Concept we think is at work in the allegory. But Lewis repeatedly insists that history cannot explain the mode's patterns or origin, and because of that, he is unwilling to consider material culture when examining the imagery. By removing historical context, Lewis reads the allegorical images *symbolically,* that is, he assumes their decontextualized meaning will be intuitive to all readers. When he talks about allegory changing over time, he ascribes it to intellectual epiphanies (for instance "the pagan turning his mind in")[64] rather than historical or material developments. Lastly, he views allegory as exclusively interested in the immaterial—it does not comment on the material world so much as use the material world to better comment on our minds. Lewis understands that, to use Frye's terminology, the narrative level does more than merely convey the conceptual. Unfortunately, he approaches symbols as if they were historically static (that fountain means the same to the 13th century Frenchman as it does to the 21st century American) and limits the reach of the allegorical method to the inner life: "love, religion, and spiritual adventure."[65] By contrast, I will argue that allegorical imagery is explicitly limited by the politics of the moment, and that that imagery is always commenting on the material world. For as much as medieval and Early Modern allegories were sincerely interested in spiritual truths, their scope was not limited to God or love.

Along with Frye, Angus Fletcher was very influential in helping rehabilitate allegory's reputation in the early 60's. He called allegory a "natural mirror of

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[64] Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 113.
[65] Ibid., 166.

ideology."[66] That is, the allegorical mode is didactic in service to hegemonic norms. For example, both Spenser's focus on the virtues of a gentleman and Bunyan's focus on the Christian life emphasize dominant norms while drawing clear lines between the righteous and the evil. But as this work will show, Allegory does not simply assume or restate dominant ideology. Nor does allegory merely examine the dominant assumptions of its epoch. Instead, allegory scrutinizes the "culture's assumptions about the ability of language to state or reveal value."[67] Allegory is not a "mirror of ideology" so much as it is a dark mirror of ideological language, both reflecting and disturbing our assumptions about signs' ability to mean.

Walter Benjamin's 1928 take on the mode remains one of the most provocative, and it is worth recounting if only to better understand the complete rejection of romantic approaches.[68] In *The Origins of German Drama,* he argued that allegory was not merely a mode of designation but a "form of expression."[69] Even as allegory constantly referred to meaning outside of itself, it offered a multiplicity of images, each of which was imbued with a huge amount of significance because of its possible connection to that external meaning. In this way, allegory is like a "ruin," in that each detail of a ruin bears witness to some past history, which connects each stone, stairway, and arch to some larger story. The problem is that, like the ruin, allegory does not spell out the connection between each

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[66] Fletcher, *Allegory, the Symbol*, 368.

[67] Maureen Quilligan, *The language of allegory: defining the genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 221.

[68] Although it was written in 1928, long before the so-called rehabilitation of allegory, I'm placing Benjamin here because *The Origins of German Drama was* not widely available until it was published as a two-volume set in 1955 and not in English until the 70's. Tuve, Fletcher, Honig, and Lewis do not mention it.

[69] Walter Benjamin, *The origin of German tragic drama* (London: NLB, 1977), 163.

image and that larger story. When the reader is confronted with an ostensibly conflicting set of images, he must actively assemble them in order to generate meaning. All the while, the images remind the reader of the passage of natural time, suggesting decay and change.[70] This readerly onus and emphasis on the erosion of the material allow for the divergent interpretations that Goethe thought were so unique about symbols. For my purposes, Benjamin is useful because he is part of a larger movement of 20th century scholars who drew our attention to the objects of perception in allegory, the literal words that readers often ignore on their way towards parsing conceptual levels of meaning.[71] Rather than approach allegorical figures as if they were static (such as the fountain or a particular Vice), this dissertation will show how each is subject to change within the text.

Instead of reducing the literary worth of allegory to a worksheet, as Frye would have me, I argue that allegory at its best frustrates any critical attempts to tie it to established, doctrinal treatises. While it often references and employs those doctrinal concepts, it also manipulates and stretches them. And instead of removing the historicity of these allegories by separating them from the material cultures that produced them, as Lewis would have it, I argue that allegory blends signs, concepts, and concrete elements of the real world as a way of puzzling the reader and compelling him to put the pieces back together. The mode therefore distinguishes itself from metaphor in its aim—or put

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[70] For instance, in *Piers Plowman,* we meet Gluttony who is tempted to go into a bar while on his way to Church. As expected, he drinks too much and passes out. Benjamin would emphasize that his decay was both the product of his nature and the fact that he is a man with the limits of a man. When Gluttony is later shamed by his family, he promises to reform, but the potential designated meaning (that Gluttony is most effectively corrected by others) is complicated by the embodiment of that act. Gluttony is a man after all. Is he merely hoping to reform, or, even more cynically, is he just telling his wife what he thinks she needs to hear?

[71]Tuve has a similar take on the importance of the objects in allegory: "If large portions of a work have to be covered with blotting paper while we read our meaning in what is left, we are abusing instead of using the images." Tuve, *Allegory*, 234-5.

another way, allegory uses metaphor to achieve a particular linguistic goal. It uses realistic imagery to convey conceptual ideas, yes, but it also comments on the material world as it does so, forcing the reader to not just consider the themes of love or spirituality at stake, but also the words we use to talk about those themes. Instead of seeing allegory as a tool by which hegemonic discourse is disseminated, I argue that good allegory tests broad concepts through juxtaposition, questioning not just the words we use to describe norms, but also the norms and categories themselves. Indeed, we will see that ostensible deference to hegemonic norms was used to set up some of the most devastating social critiques.[72] Lastly, like Benjamin, I am interested in the way allegory creates meaning by imbuing material objects with meaning. Rather than merely designating some timeless Concept for the reader, allegory works by creating historically bound images that intersect with and rely on contemporary understandings of those material goods. In romantic symbolism, a rose is just a rose. Its meaning is intuitively understood. But in allegory, images are contextually understood: they are bound by the material discourses surrounding them. A doublet is never *just* a doublet.

Allegory is a hodgepodge of abstractions and concrete images because it is not so much of a genre as it is a mode. All of the allegories this dissertation will cover are hybrids. *Piers Plowman* is an allegorical series of dream visions. *Margery Kempe* is, in part, an allegorical autobiography infused with conventions from legendary saints' lives. *The Castle of Perseverance* is a mixture of an allegory and a sermon. *Mankind* is an allegory and a mummer's play. *The Faerie Queene* is, among other things, a mixture of

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[72] As we'll see in Chapters 1 and 3, both Skelton and Langland praise authority figures just before eviscerating them.

allegory and romance. I could go on. Because of the wide range of genres the allegorical

mode has been used in, not all allegories *look* the same. They do not share the same

formal qualities, nor do they all use the same tropes. Instead, the mode is linked by its

focus on language and the need to refine our understanding of signs. In the texts I will

cover in this dissertation, the allegories are also linked by a profound fascination with the

language surrounding clothing.

Quilligan's Linguistic Formulation

This labyrinthine,[73] networked sense of the genre is expressed by Maureen

Quilligan in her monograph, *The Language of Allegory.* For Quilligan, allegory is made

up of three parts: the Text, the Pretext, and the Context. First, the Text is never a

straightforward statement that has been translated into narrative, but rather an intricate

series of puns that focuses on language's ability to signify precisely. Words in allegory

thus "extend meaning" by remaining allusive throughout the narrative.[74] For instance,

while much of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is driven by a strong emphasis of "courtly"

ideals, each book examines a particular virtue. Book VI questions the *courtliness* of

courtesy. Spenser begins that Book with, "Of Court it seems, men Courtesie doe call,/For

that it there most useth to abound."[75] This punning introduction signals a linguistic

tension, and the rest of the book is built to challenge the supposed link between the court

and the virtue of courtliness. For instance, when the noble Calepine leaves his lady

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[73] As Joan Heiges Blythe has put it, "The allegory of *Piers Plowman* is not a catechetical effort enervated by a closed down system of signification, but rather a labyrinthine, encyclopedic, metaphoric, inferential network of inward and outward epistemic access." Joan Heiges Blythe, "Trasitio and psychoallegoresis in Piers Plowman," in *Allegoresis: the craft of allegory in medieval literature*, ed.Russell, J. Stephen (New York: Garland Pub, 1988) 147.
[74] Quilligan, *Language of Allegory,* 98.
[75] 6.1.1.

Serena alone in the forest, the disconcerting and altogether malodorous Salvage man appears to protect her. While the Salvage man stays by Serena (in contrast to Calepine), Spenser is able to contrast high born characters who lack courtesy, like Calepine or Timias, with low-born characters who are paragons of loyalty and military prowess. Doing so allows him to also critique the link between "base born" and "base," thereby questioning language's ability to describe reality and forcing the reader to reconsider old assumptions. The wordplay essentially asks how "much confidence may a man put in his language, or in words themselves?"[76] The idea of this interrogation of signs is to both demonstrate how easily language can be misinterpreted by characters (the fluidity of signification) and to hint at the possibility of arriving at a true meaning (what Blythe would call "an authentic language"). The goal of the narrative is to develop the characters abilities to differentiate specious interpretations from correct ones, which often ends with what Quilligan calls the "redemption of language." As Quilligan later explains, "The result is that the reader will become conscious of the significance of these words—of the very process by which they do in fact signify."[77]

Quilligan's work is provocative because she conceives of allegory as an investigation of signs. How well can we trust them, and at what point does language deceive more than illuminate? How does the same sign function in different narrative contexts, and to what degree does it hold onto its earlier meaning? What about our understanding of language has to change in order to facilitate more insight? Throughout this chapter and this dissertation, I will use these questions; however, instead of

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[76] Quilligan, *Language of Allegory,* 46.
[77] Ibid.*,* 68.

examining how the allegories conceive of language writ large, I will restrict my inquiry

to descriptions and use of costume—essentially taking Quilligan's analytic techniques

about signs in allegory and applying them to clothing and armor. The goal will be to

consider how the function and meaning of clothing shifts throughout different moments

in the allegories in question. How much trust do the writers afford clothing, and how

does a given allegorical image undercut or support popular conceptions of costume's

ability to signify?

Quilligan's second pillar of allegory is what she calls the Pretext, or the allegory's

primary referent. She offers two such examples: the Bible and Virgil's *Aeneid*. "Primary

referent" does not mean that the Text slavishly repeats the material from the Pretext.

Instead, the Text uses narrative to reenact and distort passages as a way of frustrating

interpretation. For example, in Book 1 of the *Faerie Queene,* Redcrosse defeats the

Dragon after a three day battle and then, instead of marrying Una, immediately departs on

a second quest. First, the episode's obvious typological reference to Christ's resurrection

and defeat of sin assumes the reader is familiar with the Gospels, theology related to the

Gospels, and typological representations of Christ. In other words, the text assumes the

reader has a certain degree of familiarity with the Pretext, and relies on that familiarity to

create meaning. Second, Redcrosse's departure is troubling. Instead of allowing the

reader an extended celebration of sin's defeat, the ending of the Book cautions the reader

against relaxing his vigilance until the Second Coming. The point of this distortion is to

refine our interpretation of the Bible and of sin—to redeem its language for use in

describing reality.

But of course the allegories in question are not simply commenting on the Pretext itself, but rather interpretations of that Pretext. For instance, in Chapter 1, I will talk about Hawkin the Active Man and his link to Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Feast. While the link exists, the episode in Langland is also commenting on medieval interpretations of the Parable that sometimes equated dirty clothing with sin or decay, such as Boethius' *Consolatio,* and sometimes questioned that equivalence, as in *Cleanness*.[78] Even if Langland were not intimately familiar with the *Pearl* poet's work, *Piers Plowman* engages the broad discourse around the parable, choosing to engage the textual conversation surrounding the Pretext rather than just the passage in the Gospel.[79] As such, *Piers Plowman* assumes a high degree of sophistication in its reader, which can make the experience of reading Langland very difficult for the modern reader.[80]

The last pillar of Quilligan's theory of allegory is the Context, which she defines as the historical conditions of textual production. This formulation is obviously not unique to allegory. However, if we take her ideas about allegory's consistency seriously—this is, if we assume that allegory's central tactics do not change—we can use that consistency to distinguish historical periods. More concretely, if both Langland's and Spenser's verse comments on linguistic assumptions of their respective centuries, we can compare the way each allegory connects meaning to descriptions of clothing. That

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[78] For more on Cleanness's critique of clothing's relationship to piety, see Mary Raschko and Joseph S. Wittig, *Rendering the Word: vernacular accounts of the parables in late Medieval England*. Thesis / Dissertation ETD, 2009.

[79] As Jon Whitman puts it, "Acts of interpretive allegory are trans- actions between fluctuating critical communities and formative texts." Jon Whitman, *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*(Boston: Brill, 2003), 6.

[80] Indeed, the first two sections of Tuve's monograph--which mostly focuses on *The Faerie Queene*--works to better define 16th century pretexts that would have intersected with Spenser's audience. Her focus on 16th century discourse highlights the intense focus on language the mode demands.

comparison can lead to insights about how different historical periods approach clothing in general. How much can we really gather about someone from their robes, and how do historical assumptions about clothing change as the Middle Ages give way to the Renaissance? Moreover, if, as Quilligan asserts, allegory is an attempt to both interrogate signs and point to an ideal language, then we ought to assume that those authorial ideals would be subject to change—that the conclusions, not the tactics, of the allegories would reflect aspects of their historical moment. What can clothing ideally communicate, and how do those ideals fit with contemporary or Biblical norms?

Applying Quilligan's approach to Dress

I want to take Quilligan's conception of allegory as an investigation of signs, and use that approach to examine the uses of clothing and their narrative contexts. Just as Quilligan argued that allegories try to refine language by experimenting with different meanings, so do I explore how allegories direct us to think about an individual piece of clothing. How are we supposed to understand a character's elaborate jewelry, for instance, or the cut of someone's doublet? How do these concrete details affect our understanding of character, and to what degree do they complicate the text's direction? I will do this by tracking the rules by which dress functions in an allegory as a whole, and applying those rules to specific moments. For instance, before I can examine one particular article of clothing, say Hawkin's soiled coat in *Piers Plowman,* I need to explore the patterns of dress Langland provides us with, as those patterns set us up to read Hawkin's coat one way or the other. The goal will be to examine a network of signs

associated to clothing, showing how these allegories act as testing grounds for descriptive language's ability to signify.

In doing so, I am deliberately moving away from foregrounding the "Concept" of any given allegory in order to focus on how the images are presented to the reader, and how those images are themselves dependent on contemporary norms. I'm particularly interested in the way ideas about fashion—both with respect to fashion writ large and individual styles—inform the ways allegorical authors clothe their characters. Again, for those who treat allegory as a series of levels of meaning, my approach may seem to be a categorical error in that it is applying information from one level (say the Literal) to meanings in another (the Conceptual). However, allegory is only able to signify through a shared window of discourse. It relies on convention, but that convention intersects with materiality and helps to construct new materialities.[81] For example, earlier I mentioned Lady Justice, an allegorical figure who appears all over the world as the personified moral force behind the justice systems. Her scales and sword are nearly impossible to miss wherever she is displayed, and yet each sculpture of Lady Justice is different. Sometimes the sword is pointed up; sometimes down. Some put her in clothes appropriate for the time period; others provide her with a toga. The meaning of her clothing is disputed: the toga is often seen as a reference to her Greek origins (Justitia), but the trope's use in places like Hong Kong suggests either cultural deference or the echo of colonialism. Sometimes her chest is bare, or she is naked altogether. Most

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[81] In "Allegory Without Ideas", Fletcher argues that later allegories produce this effect, but he does not see the active engagement in the material until Spenser, and really not until the 17th century. See Angus Fletcher, "Allegory Without Ideas," in *Thinking Allegory Otherwise,* ed. Brenda Machosky(Stanford University Press, Redwood City,2009). For my money, Fletcher is only willing to let the Platonic ideals--that he imagines are foundational for allegory--go once the Middle Ages have ended.

surprising of all, the tell-tale blindfold is inconsistent. In many post-15th century

representations, she is blindfolded in part to emphasize her impartiality and reliance on

pure reason. However, some sculptures, such as the one atop the Old Bailey in London,

leave the blindfold out. According to local brochures, her "maidenly form" was assumed

to demonstrate enough impartiality, rendering the blindfold redundant. In fact, Justice

first appeared blindfolded in Brant's 1494 *Ship of Fools,* but that blindfold was intended

to mock the ignorance and dishonesty of the courts.[82] So not only does her representation

shift according to location, the meaning of those representations shifts as well. Like the

concept of justice itself, for all of the formal conventions surrounding Justitia, her figure

is as much a product of historical conditions as it is an expression of an abstract idea.

Moreover, my approach to the figure of Lady Justice is consistent with how

medieval writers approached allegory as a whole. Even a cursory examination of

medieval commentaries on clothing reveals that medieval authors saw clothing as having

social, moral, and spiritual qualities. As noted before, most of the defenses of sumptuary

laws focused on the law's role in maintaining social hierarchies (as opposed to the

arguments relating to cost). The invectives against new fashion trends were more diverse,

accusing the styles of being too tight, too revealing, too capricious, too sexually

ambiguous, too ornamented, or too fragmented.[83] What this shows is that, regardless of

the actual problem, these writers connected material clothing to *character*. Clothing then

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[82] Gregory G. Colomb, *Designs on truth: the poetics of the Augustan mock-epic* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 50.
[83] Wilson summarizes the diatribes on 141-9. She also makes the case that the critiques of clothing changed after the "birth" of fashion by their referring to specific aspects of an outfit, such as its dagged edges in their rhetoric. In other words, pre-14th century, most of the criticism of clothing was broader, and as fashion took hold, writers started referencing particular styles they disapproved of.

was not just a status or economic choice: it was a moral one. There are numerous examples, but one from Jean Venette, written in 1340, will do: "Men were now beginning to wear disfiguring costumes...Men thus tricked were more likely to flee in the face of the enemy, as the event afterwards many times proved true." And later in 1356, he writes, "Now they begin to disfigure themselves in a still more extravagant way. They wore pearls on their hoods...by night they devoted themselves immoderately to the pleasures of the flesh."[84] Here Jean connects the new style to cowardly and lascivious behavior, suggesting both a lack of morals and a lack of masculinity. He was neither alone in his criticism nor terribly original. Social invectives relating to clothing cited the Book of Isaiah and can be traced back at least as early as the 13th century. But to the point, Jean's very banality suggests that medieval discourse broadly positioned material clothing as both a material good--that is, made up of physical objects with financial cost—and a spiritual referent. In other words, medieval clothes were symbols as much as they were fabric.[85] Moralists brought literary conventions to bear when analyzing clothing, thereby bridging the gap between literary allegory and the material world. If they conceived of

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[84] Jean De Venette and Guillaume de Nangis, *The chronicle of Jean de Venette* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 34 and 63. Jean goes on, describing the cost of the noble's vanity, namely making the ruling elite seem effeminate and therefore inadequate.

[85] For another example, see the *Westminister Chronicle*, British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra A XVI, fol. 154, reprinted in Tait, Chronica Johannis de Reading, 88-89. "Alia notanda pauca bona hoc anno [1344] fuerunt, Anglici tum insaniae alienigenarum adhaerentes velut de adventu Hannonensium, annis quasi xviii praeelapsis, annuatim varias deformitates vestium mutantes, longorum largorumque indumentorum antiqua honoestate deserta, vestibus curtis, strictis, frustratis, scissis, omni parte laqueatis, corrigiatis, botonatis cum manicis ac tipeitis supertunicarum et caputirum nimis pendulis, tortoribus et, ut verius dicam, daemonibus tam indumentis quam calciamentis similores quam hominibus." This passage is translated in the Brut chronicle as "and another tyme schorte clothis and stret-wasted, dagged and ket, and on every side desslatered and boned, with sleves and tapets of sircotys and hodes overe longe and large, and overmuche hangynde, that if y soth schal say, they were more liche to turmentours and devels in hire clothing and scheqyng and other arraye then to men." Friedrich W. D. Brie, ed. *The Brut, or, The Chronicles of England* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner for the Early English Text Society, 1906), 2:297.

the physical world in almost allegorical terms, then material changes, not just could have, but must have affected literary representation.

In short, there are three main ideas I hope to develop over the course of the chapters that follow: 1) Allegory is interested in the fluidity of signs, and how the reader is supposed to interpret them; 2) Clothing had a very particular role in the Late Middle Ages that the mid-14th century upset by both expanding choice in and access to fashion; 3) Because allegory in general is impacted by material concerns, the works we find in the 14th century onward express various forms of anxiety relating to appearance and its significance.

By advancing diachronically, from Langland to Spenser, I am able to address changes in specific styles, such as those of Henry VII versus those of Henry VIII. But more broadly, I want to use the lens of costume anxiety to better understand the way medieval and Early Modern writers approached the transformative power of dress as a whole. Post-plague England saw higher wages and greater geographic mobility for peasants, the reduction in serfdom, the rise of the land-holding yeoman, the increasing influence of the market economy in more and more towns, and, in some regions, the rise of the cloth industry that would enrich a generation of merchants. Tudor England also witnessed the consolidation of power in the monarch and, in the cases of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, a greater emphasis on ostentatious appearance. Because dress was so linked with societal roles, how do understandings of clothing's potential respond to increasing levels of social mobility, wealth, and attention directed at Westminster? To what degree

does costume help foster change or restrict it? How much power does choice of clothing provide someone, and to what degree is the exercise of that power acceptable?

Chapter 1 begins by focusing on the clothing of Hawkin and Lady Mede in *Piers Plowman.* Langland deploys clothing convention after convention in order to undercut the reliability of each. And Langland's main tactic for disrupting conventions is the injection of material concerns, which decouple individual articles of clothing from their designated role. Then I explore *The Book of Margery Kempe* and argue that it demonstrates how difficult expressing individual change through clothing can be, especially for women. In both cases, the works present the reader with an idea of how clothing could be read, and then shows it being misread continuously.

In Chapter 2, I explore the rise of the morality play by perusing *The Castle of Perseverance, Mankind, and Hyckescorner.* Morality plays are often assumed to be heavy handed lectures that impose categorical imperatives on their audience members. Some of them do this by sterilizing the text of any material references and harmonizing the past, present, and future into one cohesive experience in order to maximize the didactic effect.[86] However, as this chapter shows, English morality plays are inescapably material, political, and explicitly related to their historical moment. While the frame of man's fall and eventual redemption remains largely intact over a century of moral theater, the three

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[86]I'm convinced that the contemporary dismissal of allegory partly comes from what Stanley Garner calls our "classroom view" of *Everyman* as the textbook example of the mode. *Everyman's* straightforward and Boethian message mark it as unsophisticated and intellectually stifled--that is, "medieval" in the popular sense of the term. See Stanton B. Garner Jr., "Theatricality in Mankind and Everyman," *Studies in Philology*. 84 (1987), 273. Tudor scholarship has mostly focused on Elizabethan drama, which witnessed the waning (though not disappearance) of allegory in favor of more "realistic", Shakespearean styles. Because we still see the Renaissance as an improvement over the Middle Ages, and we still see Shakespeare as the height of English drama, the seemingly less developed forms which preceded *King Lear* are treated with less critical attention.

plays I focus on provide us with a much more varied sense of what that fall looks like, and what kinds of influences cause or stop it.

In Chapter 3, I compare Skelton's *Bowge of Court* to his one surviving morality play, *Magnyfycence*. While both are courtly, dramatic allegories, they establish different rules under which clothing can signify and include different individuals. I argue further that Skelton's allegorical systems changed according to the differing courtly atmospheres in which he wrote his works (the former under Henry VII and the latter under Henry VIII). The different kings approached dress is wildly different ways, and the texts demonstrate how responsive to fashion trends allegory is, even when written by a nostalgic curmudgeon like Skelton.

This fourth chapter will explore how Spenser grapples with tensions between clothing, class, and identity. Spenser's anachronistic phrasing and use of medieval tropes make his work a reflection on his English literary past as much as it looks towards the future. I'm particularly interested in Britomart—the female knight—as both a transvestite ideal and a representation of Elizabeth's virginal Chastity. Throughout the chapter, I show how Britomart's character fundamentally changes from the first half of the *Faerie Queene* (Books I-III, published in 1590) to the second half (Books IV-VI, published in 1596) and that those changes are heavily indebted to shifting perceptions of Elizabeth. While Britomart is but one "mirror" of Elizabeth's character, the knight works as a gauge on Spenser's feelings towards his monarch, and her performance of gender and chastity. The 1596 representation of Britomart, along with her submission to male rule, shows how Spenser had soured on the Elizabethan courtly game.

Chapter 1: Langland, Kempe, and the Politics of Shame

In the Introduction, I focused on three main ideas: 1) Allegories emphasize the slipperiness of signs and expect the reader to work to assemble meaning, 2) Fashion and the sumptuary laws radically changed how clothing functioned in the Late Middle Ages by expanding access to a wider variety of fabrics and conflating identity with the consumption of those fabrics, and 3) Allegory is always-already material. That is, for as much as a given text may appear focused on conceptual matters, it engages those matters using a shared discursive field, and thus each allegorical image smuggles in material concerns at the point of composition. This chapter will explore how anxieties around clothing in the 14th century bled into William Langland's depictions of clothing, and how he undercut clothing's reliability as a signifier throughout the B-Text of *Piers Plowman* (c. 1377). Later, I will compare Langland's late 14th century work to *The Book of Margery Kempe* (c. 1436) as a way to establish continuity within the period and explore the relationship between realistic biographical elements and allegorical tropes. The main claim of this chapter is that if the allegorical mode is employed to test the "possible permutations of truth" within language, then late medieval allegories reflect a lack of faith in clothing's ability to transform identity.

William Langland wrote three different versions of his masterpiece, *Piers Plowman,* [87] over two decades. The second version, the B-Text, is the subject of this chapter, and it is in this text that Langland's social and political views come into sharp focus. Composed as it was from 1370-1390, *Piers* comes on the heels of Edward's sumptuary legislation, right as fashion took hold in English culture. The text is a winding, self-referential dream vision in which Will, the narrator, searches for the true Christian life within a confusing, fallen world. This journey takes the format of several quests within several visions. Will, at different times, searches for Piers the Plowman, St. Truth, and the trio of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest (Do-Well, Do-Better, and Do-Best). Along the way he meets figures whose conceptual conflicts are bound up in their material reality, which makes the poem a natural place to start examining the intersection of the figurative and fabric.

It should be noted that much of the clothing in Langland—from Lady Mede's robes to Hawkin's soiled coat—has been read as purely allegorical, that is, uninterested in the material conditions. [88] However, that critical pattern results from a lack of attention to the material valences Langland repeatedly brings to bear in his narrative. Indeed, a number of times in the poem, Langland shows knowledge of and interest in the physical production of clothing. For example, late in the poem, Anima uses the process of fulling woven cloth as a simile for a sinner's redemption: "Clooþ þat comeþ fro þe weuyng is

[87] William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: J. M. Dent, 1978). All quotations of the poem will come from this version and will give the book and line number.
[88] See for instance John A. Alford, "Haukyn's Coat: Some Observations on 'Piers Plowman' B. Xiv. 22-7." *Medium Ævum* 43 (1974): 133–38; Malcolm Godden, "Plowmen and Hermits in Langland's Piers Plowman," *The Review of English Studies* Xxxv (1984): 129–63; and James Simpson, *Piers Plowman: an introduction to the B-text*, (London: Longman; Huber, 1990); Emily Rebekah, "Langland's Confessional Dissonance: Wanhope in Piers Plowman B," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 27 (2013): 79–101.

noȝt comly to were/ Til it be fuled vnder foot or in fullyng stokkes,/Wasshen wel wiþ water and wiþ taseles cracched,/Ytouked and yteynted and vnder taillours hande."[89] For as much as clothing in *Piers* appeals to allegorical convention, we should never forget Langland's personal interest in its material aspects. If we see Langland's allegory as an attempt to wrestle with the value of images, and if we bring in the rapidly shifting norms of dress in the period of composition, then *Piers Plowman* can be seen as an attempt to unpack the role of clothing in society and its ability to mean.

This section examines several episodes in *Piers Plowman* where the narration especially focuses on clothing: the marriage of Lady Mede, the dinner with the Doctor of Divinity, and the Hawkin encounter. Throughout these scenes, Langland appeals to allegorical descriptive techniques only to undercut their reliability. In doing so, he trains the reader to react skeptically when another figure, even an ostensibly positive one like Holy Church, explains what an image or a character means. This removal of ethos forces the reader to consider exactly how much can be expressed with fabric.

1. Lady Mede's Splendor

Lady Mede is the personification of reward, recompense, or the desire for worldly gain. As a force she had the potential to corrupt men through bribery and the profit motive, or she had to potential to allow appropriate recompense for services rendered.[90] The debates in *Piers* about her marriage wrestle with these conflicting potentialities, and attempt to define her role as either productive or noxious. Will encounters Lady Mede

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[89] XV: 450-2.

[90] In the 14th century, the "overt self-interest" of the feudal system and the complexity of financial obligations rendered Mede rather influencial, and increasingly bewildering to moralists. See John A. Yunck, *The lineage of Lady Meed: the development of mediaeval venality satire*, (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 130, 232-7.

early in Passus II, and is immediately impressed by her clothing: "Purfiled with pelure, the fynest upon erthe; Y-crounede with a corone—the kyng has non better./ Fetislich hir fyngres were fretted with golde wyre,/And thereon rubyes, as red as any glede…"[91] The description goes on for another four lines, detailing the precious stones that adorn her along with the scarlet of her robe. It is clear that the lady's dress is ornate, but the reader does not even know who she is, or "whas wyf she were."[92] In response to her appearance, Will immediately seeks to place her, and to frame what her clothing must mean. Likewise, the reader is uncertain about these displayed riches. Even though allegorical meaning will eventually be built into the robes, Will's inability to immediately discern their significance suggests a measure of ambiguity here. All Will can definitively say is that the unnamed, unmatched woman is "worthily atired." Even that is perhaps ironic in context, because the reader has to wonder *for whom* is Mede worthy.

In answer to Will's questions, Holy Church provides a reading of both the character and her clothing, tying them both together: Mede has "noyed" her "ful oft", is a "bastarde", and never tells the truth. In Holy Church's estimation, Mede's clothing therefore suggests a few particular, nefarious aspects about its owner. It suggests she is a liar, a seductress, and a corruptive agent. Holy Church does not reference the clothes or the jewelry specifically, but if we take her word for it, we can infer that Mede's clothing therefore attracts men in order to corrupt them—and that by coveting Mede their conscience is overcome. Further, by giving us an allegorical window into Mede's materiality, Langland also offers the reader one interpretation that will be compromised

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[91] II: 8-11.
[92] II:18.

as the narrative progresses. The exact nature of Lady Mede and her role in this dream world will be debated over the next two Passus. While the reader may be inclined to trust the judgment of such an unimpeachable authority as Holy Church, the very length of the debate after her speech suggests hers is not the last word.

One specific problem with Holy Church's explanation is that it doesn't quite explain what her robes are doing. They are alluring, perhaps, but the details related to the specific stones and types of fabric are so striking that they must be doing more. And indeed, the exact function of the robes has been debated by scholars for some time. For Simpson and Baldwin, Mede's attire is neither interesting nor specific.[93] It is simply the garb of a noblewoman, and therefore symbolic of powerful lords whose financial influence corrupts. My issue with their cursory take is two-fold: 1) Langland spends too long—10 full lines—on the robes themselves for them to simply be an estate marker. 2) Mede's costume is far too lavish to simply be that of a noblewoman. In fact, her costume surpasses most of the Queen's robes described in detail in Newton. The lines may ultimately mark her as upper class, but that is not their sole function.

In "Class, Gender, Medieval Criticism, and *Piers Plowman,*" Aers criticizes Simpson's and Balwdin's approaches for seeing Mede's gender as "transparent."[94] Simpson should have asked, "Why would a poet represent as female the competitively masculine magnates of his society?" For Aers, the neglect of gender corrupts the

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[93] Simpson *Piers Plowman*, 43-60; Anna P. Baldwin, *The theme of government in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: D.S. Brewer, 1981), 20-40.
[94] David Aers, "Class, Gender, Medieval Criticism, and *Piers Plowman*," in *Class and gender in early English literature: intersections*, ed. Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 66. For further reading see Clare Lees, "Gender and Exchange in *Piers Plowman,*" in Harwood and Overing, 112-130.

historical reading and reduces the complexities of the text. However, for as much as Aers attempts to analyze what had previously been taken for granted, he falls back onto old patterns with respect to Mede's dress, saying that she is dressed in "the figure of a courtly lady…[and] as the figure of the *common prostitute.*" What Aers does not stop to ask is if clothes define identity, then how can Mede occupy such a morally ambiguous position without oscillating between outfits?

For those critics who wish to focus more on Mede's specific clothing, two possible options are available, one historical and the other allegorical. With respect to the former, Mede's appearance has often been likened to Alice Perrers, who scandalized the English court in the 1370's with lavish dress, ambitions to power, and a certain ability to manipulate the king.[95] The connection between Perrers and Mede is strong if a little reductive.[96] While Langland fashions Mede from contemporary accounts of Perrers, Mede's rather extended narrative role and allegorical title ought to remind us that the historical parallel is but one layer of her character—perhaps a starting point rather than a universal marker. With respect to the latter, Mede has also be compared to the Whore of Babylon, who likewise wears scarlet robes and corrupts those around her. While some critics have chosen one of these options, many have acknowledged the availability of both, while warning against leaning too heavily on one-to-one historicism.[97] In other words, there is a small consensus that Mede might *reflect* aspects of either Perrer's

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[95] For further reading see Stephanie Trigg, "The Traffic in Medieval Women: Alice Perrers, Feminist Criticism and Piers Plowman," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 12 (1998): 5-29.
[96] Indeed, Huppe used the robust historical parallels to date the A-text. See Huppé, Bernard F. 1939. "The A-Text of Piers Plowman and the Norman Wars." *PMLA.* 54 (1): 37-64.
[97] Namely, Aers, "Class, Gender," 1994, Lees, "Gender and Exchange," and Malcolm Godden, *The making of Piers Plowman* (London: Longman, 1990).

reputation or the Book of Revelation to Langland's audience, but that Mede *is* not Perrers just as she *is* not the Whore of Babylon. I agree with that position, and I think it's crucially important to realize that an intimately detailed set of clothes can mean so much so widely: Langland crafted the scene to give such ambivalence to the robes he spent so long describing. Both comparisons are available, which expands the range of meaning afforded to the clothing while resisting any reductive moves, and imports material realities into the allegorical dream world. Langland is using real figures to wrestle with abstract ideas. If the verse is liminal, so too is Langland's reach. Real world clothing can have allegorical significance, *and* allegorical clothing can have material concerns. This is central to my understanding of Langland's technique, and it will continue to define Langland's use of costume.

We have seen how Holy Church's explanation failed to define Mede's clothing adequately, but Holy Church's diatribe against Mede also fails to fit the latter's behavior. Throughout Passus II, Mede is very passive and speaks rarely—she does not do much corrupting. Many figures fight over her, but those potential suitors are False and Favel. They are not corrupted by their desire for her so much as they desire her because they are already corrupt.[98] When Theology objects to Mede's marriage (lines 115-140), he refers to her femininity half a dozen times in a 25 line speech while insisting that the fault is not with Mede—she has not deceived anyone—but in what Simony and Civil have *done* with Mede. There is the sense that her female qualities undercut her agency. As the Passus

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[98] In fact, as Godden has shown, one can read Mede as actually an otherwise neutral figure who is corrupted herself by False and Favel, rather than the other way around. See Godden, *The Making of Piers Plowman*, 36.

develops, Mede is reduced to a grammatical object, as she is led to London, set on a foal,[99] overmastered with merry speech and taken into custody. Indeed, one of the only times Mede acts as a subject is the final clause of the Passus, where she "trembled for drede."

When Mede finally does act in the king's court, she bribes, flatters, and condescends to the courtiers and friars. In other words, she fulfills a lot of Holy Church's predictions. She gains forgiveness from a confessor for a "seme of whete", a "bedeman" for a "nobel", and servants for gold cups and silver "copes".[100] While her behavior is clearly bribery, and her funds provide for lords to exercise their lechery, her influence also provides for a new roof and cloister for the church and coats for clerks. The moral ambiguities are reflected in Mede's speech to the king, in which she describes her many uses to him, such as maintaining loyal subjects and paying for foreign mercenaries. But of course, she is also necessary for the Pope to command obedience, for the Minstrel to eat, and for tutors to be paid. The argument is that Mede, however morally manipulative, makes "pees in londe," and that "no wighte, as [Mede] wene, withoute Mede may libbe."[101]

It's worth noting at this point that Passus II and III are playing out the way Quilligan described, in that the allegorical plot is developing in order to better define a rather complex word. First, Will asks who Mede is—in other words, what does Mede *signify*?—and the reader is met with one ostensibly dogmatic definition (Holy Church's)

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[99] The available comparison to Jesus on a donkey riding into Jerusalem heightens the sense of corruption and parody in this scence, but again, Mede is not acting so much as being acted upon.
[100] III: 40, 45, and 23.
[101] III:221, 226.

that is eventually complicated by the combination of Theology's and Mede's speeches. As such, the narrative moves us from an early specious interpretation to a more encompassing understanding of the word. That is not to say that Holy Church's arguments are completely invalidated: Mede never once denies that she encourages small amounts of corruption or greed. She just claims that the depth of her corrosion is minimal (For kulled I nevere no kynge ne conseilled therafter"[102]), and that her presence is necessary in the material world. However, for as much as Will's understanding of language is getting more refined (we are working our way to that true language), the clothing remains static. Mede's appearance never once changes, even as her body and behavior are given more attributes. This would be sensible if her traits were complimentary, but at this point in the poem, the robes have absorbed a number of contradictory meanings. With each new speech, their ability to mean one thing or the other decreases, suggesting our ability to settle who or what Mede *is* may be frustrated.

Is Passus III, Conscience gives two speeches about Mede, the first of which echoes most of Holy Church's concerns. However, in the wake of Mede speech about her own utility, the King is convinced, saying "Bi Christe, as me thynketh/Mede is wel worthi, me thynketh the maistrye to have."[103] In response, Conscience is then forced to break Mede into two different kinds: spiritual and earthly. Again, the momentum of the Mede narrative had worked to undercut Holy Church's original interpretation before replacing it with Conscience's more refined language. Thus, we can continue to see

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[102] III: 187.
[103] III:228-9. This phrasing is a little difficult. The King essentially says, "By Christ, as I think, Mede has argued worthily, and, I think, has the upper hand." Again, the sense that she is "worthi" appears over and over alongside the various estimations of her worth.

Quilligan's process of moving from confusion to certainty with respect to language. Conscience's riposte provides an ostensible debate victory for himself and therefore a cohesive understanding of Mede. But, besides the lack of an explicit end to the debate (the king stops it before any winner can be determined), the text is even more confusing than before, as there are now *two* allegorical Medes to consider, each having multiple valences. The symbolism of the clothing is confused as well, as it is unclear which Mede is wearing the extravagant outfit. We might say that both Medes are clothed the same way, but then the dress becomes even more ambivalent, as it may symbolize sexual excess or corruption (Whore of Babylon), political expedience (Perrers), the necessary wealth needed to maintain a kingdom (as Mede's speech suggests), or some form of spiritual favor (as the rich clothes of the daughter do in *Pearl*). The multiple allegorical traditions do not cohere well.

To sum up, at the beginning of this episode, Holy Church offered us a classically allegorical way to view Mede and her robes. But with each new development, Holy Church's original description becomes less reliable, along with the significance of the clothes themselves. When Langland finally offers us a clear understanding of Mede via Conscience, the complexity of the solution undercuts any solid reading of the clothes. Mede is alluring and deceptive, yes, but like her name, she is dangerous and necessary, spiritual and material. When the meaning of her robes can only be implied—for all their talk on the definition of her name, Mede's supposedly definitive clothes are ignored—Mede's expanding definitions do not clear up the ambiguities present from the beginning. Langland has appropriated conventional allegorical imagery in order to demonstrate both

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how misleading it can be and also how difficult it is to fully parse. Similarly, the topical valences of Mede's dress muddy the significance of material clothing. Even if we find the link between Mede and Perrers convincing, the expansive, ubiquitous formulation that Conscience and the King settle on do not clarify how we are to read Perrers or her fashion. It would be hard to read Perrers as a spiritual reward for the king, but is she necessary for the kingdom or a corrupting influence, or both? And if it is both, what does scarlet therefore signify? Or rich jewels?

Those questions lead to a more profound one: why bother with the ostentatious description if it is to become so riddled with contradiction? I think that Langland here is trying to both unsettle how readers think about Mede and also how readers think about clothing. It is hard to imagine Mede without including her robes, as they are her most unequivocally described trait. She is therefore trapped by them despite their vexed significance. Potential, divisive readings of the jewels and fabric are available to the reader, but they are both shortsighted and reductive.

Most of the scholarship around Mede has made an attempt to fix her in place. I think this is partly because allegoresis often seeks a sort of key to unlock allegorical texts, but I also think this critical practice is the natural result of personification allegory. Mede is a fixed figure with a fixed outfit, which generates a powerful desire to define.[104] However, even though Langland allows the debate to reach some sort of conclusion (Conscience's probable victory is interrupted by the king), the clothes remain profoundly ambivalent. As such, the text resists the critical need to fix clothes to attributes. Even

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[104] For Lees, this desire to define is partly the result of Mede's gender. See "Gender and Exchange," 114.

more interesting is that the clothes themselves are both allegorical and material: they exist within literary traditions and contemporary England. As such Langland is not only demonstrating the ambivalence of clothes in allegory—he's also expressing a deep skepticism concerning the power of material clothes to define.

2. Hawkin's Soiled Coat

Having explored Langland's use of clothing with respect to Lady Mede, I'd like to turn my attention to a second passage which foregrounds clothing, namely Passus XIII and XIV. In these sections, Will wanders the earth as a "mendynaunt" (friar) for many years while considering the visions he has had up until that point. Soon though, he falls asleep again and dreams of an elaborate dinner with a Doctor of Divinity (another friar), Clergie, Patience, and Conscience. Later, he meets Hawkin the Active Man, whose clothes, like Mede's, are described in detail and immediately. Although my analysis will focus mostly on Hawkin, I want to start with the dinner because it provides a useful foil for reading Hawkin's Coat. The tension in the dinner revolves around gluttony and hypocrisy, whereas the Hawkin encounter relies on the difficulty of reform.

In Passus XIII, Will falls asleep while still contemplating the nature of the Do-Well trio. This subject dominated much of the Third Vision (Passus VIII-XII), suggesting that the "resolution of Passus XII has been partial."[105] According to Simpson, while the value of works in God's judgment has been established it still remains for Will to make the "moral effort" required. Thus, the subject and role of penitence must be established to further Will's understanding of Do-Well. To that end, he is invited by Conscience to dine

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[105] Simpson, *Piers Plowman*, 143.

with himself, Clergy, Conscience, and Patience. The dinner is extravagant, but the Doctor eats so much of the "puddyng, /Mortrewes and othere mete" that Will and his entourage "no mussel hade."[106] Will is naturally taken aback and tells Patience that he saw this Doctor preach about the virtue of penance some time before, effectively accusing the Doctor of hypocrisy.

This tension infects the dinner conversation, as Will repeatedly tries to castigate the Doctor only to be silenced by Patience and Conscience. Patience wants to know what the Doctor thinks of Do-Well, despite the latter's demonstrable duplicity. The Doctor's answer, that Do-wel is doing whatever "clerkes techeth," Do-Bet is teaching others, and Do-Best "doth hymself so as he seith and precheth,"[107] provides the early understanding of the Trio. However, the Doctor's character has already been compromised by his own behavior, so the reader knows that his formulation will be refined if not wholly superseded in the upcoming Passus. The Doctor's flawed character produces flawed language which a more righteous character—in this case Piers himself—will eventually correct.

All of the above fits the Quilligan model, in that the definition of the word Do-Wel provides the driving action of the plot, and that the early attempts to define "Do Well" are wanting and will end up refined. However, despite the Doctor's incomplete understanding of Do-Wel, he is dressed "as a frere"[108]—a detail which even surprises Will. Whereas in the Mede episodes, clothing was provocative but ultimately unclear, the

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[106] XIII: 107-8.
[107] XIII: 116-8.
[108] XIII: 74.

Doctor's clothing merely marks his profession without commenting on his character. We will see in the next section that Hawkin's coat inevitably marks him as a doomed sinner, but the Doctor's clothing fails to indicate any sins at all. Instead, here the clothing covers up the Doctor's clear infractions by tying him to an institution of power. His robes may heighten his hypocrisy, but they do not themselves reveal his inner character. At least in this episode, clothing obscures the truth by conflating an individual with an institution. Will's incredulity with the Doctor's behavior and habit emphasize the degree of skepticism the reader must bring to the robes. I want to hold onto that skepticism as I transition from the Dinner to the Hawkin encounter.

After dinner, Will continues searching for the Do-Wel trio and meets Hawkin the Active man. Hawkin represents much of what is good about the active life, telling Will that he, like a good laborer, hates idleness.[109] But he also embodies the limitations of that life, represented by his coat, which is soiled in many places with sundry spots," signifying both his sins and distance from salvation. [110] Throughout the rest of the scene, Will's entourage works to set the wayward laborer on a righteous path through religious instruction. As tensions within the scene grow, we watch as Hawkin becomes condescending, then defensive, and finally contrite. Nevertheless, the encounter neither brings about Hawkin's salvation nor provides him with a method to clean his coat, and the Passus ends with Hawkin collapsing in tears and shame.

Historically, there have been two ways to read this scene. One school of thought sees the episode as further evidence that the *Active Man* neglects spiritual priorities.

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[109]XIII: 238.
[110] XIII: 273.

Hawkin's focus on industry and profit distract him from seeking salvation, and he is too wedded to the idea of profit to change. Thus his damnation at the end of the scene is a warning to those who would privilege temporal concerns over divine.[111] The second approach deemphasizes Hawkin's failures and focuses on those who would try to save him. Scholars such as David Aers or Lynn Staley highlight the conflicts between the new market economy in which Hawkin finds himself and Christian ideals. They argue that the failure of Will and Patience to save Hawkin demonstrates how the clergy has been inadequate in its efforts to help the laity apply Christian teaching to daily life. For this second school of critics, Hawkin represents a Lollard battle cry.[112]

The first argument is completely reductive. Given that the Doctor's clear iniquity was hidden by his robes, I find it hard to read the Hawkin passages straight. That is, if the Doctor's clothes fail to reflect his spiritual state adequately, we should not expect Hawkin's Coat to merely signify his fallen status, even as it condemns the Active Man in the eyes of his peers. Contrastingly, while Aers and Staley's work on Langland's irony and sympathy for Hawkin remains compelling, I want to take their arguments in a different direction. Their tendency is to think of *Piers Plowman* in political terms, and they spend most of their time parsing the rhetoric of Patience's sermon and its disconnect

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[111] See for instance Stella Maguire, "The Significance of Haukyn, Activa Vita, in Piers Plowman," *The Review of English Studies* 25 (1949): 97-109; Alford, "Haukyn's Coat," 136; Julia Bolton Holloway, *The Pilgrim and the Book: a Study of Dante, Langland, and Chaucer* (New York: P. Lang, 1987); Bernard S. Levy, *The Bible in the Middle Ages: its influence on literature and art* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), 2.

[112] For commentary on Hawkin specifically, see for instance David Aers, *Community, gender, and individual identity: English writing, 1360-1430* (London: Routledge, 1988.) or Lynn Staley, "The Man in Foul Clothes and a Late Fourteenth-Century Conversation About Sin," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer: the Yearbook of the New Chaucer Society* 24 (2002): 1-47. For Langland as Lollard, see David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The powers of the Holy: religion, politics, and gender in late medieval English culture* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

from the physical world—deemphasizing or naturalizing the robes Langland is so careful to describe.

My intervention then is to point out two observations: 1) Hawkin's coat exposes his sins and overwhelms other aspects of his identity and 2) the other pilgrims' overemphasis of those clothes accentuates Hawkin's wanhope, ensuring his spiritual death. Rather than reading this scene as a Wycliffite political weapon, I see it as a comment on how appearance can lead to public humiliation, and how medieval communities interpret the language of clothing problematically. As with Mede, I will provide a close reading of the Passus first before tying it back to the broader observations about clothing and Langland.

> I toke greet kepe, by Crist! and Conscience boÞe,
>
> Of Haukyn Þe Actif Man and how he was ycloÞed.
>
> He hadde a cote of Cristendome, as Holy Kirke bileueÞ
>
> Ac it was moled in many places wiÞ many sondry plottes,
>
> Of pride here a plot, and Þere a plot of vnbuxom speche,
>
> Of scornyng and of scoffyng and of vnskilful berynge.[113]

It is clear that Will and his entourage can see Hawkin's many faults, which have manifested themselves physically. The tension between metaphor and physical exhibition echoes the tactics used in the Lady Mede passages. If Mede's clothing was reminiscent of the Whore of Babylon model, then Hawkin's soiled coat is likewise reminiscent of the

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[113] XIII: 271-6.

Man in Foul Clothes.[114] And like Mede, Hawkin exists simultaneously as category and

character. It's worth noting here that in the C-Text, Hawkin becomes just *Activa Vita*. By

dropping the name, Langland dehumanizes Hawkin and removes some of the moral

ambiguity in the scene. Nevertheless, the later omission suggests that Hawkin's name—

his character not his category—are central to understanding the whole encounter.

Upon viewing Hawkin's clothes, Conscience tells Hawkin that his coat "moste

ben y-wassh." Hawkin agrees and willingly admits to having stains and being sinful:

> "Ye, whoso toke hede," quod Haukyn, "bihynde and bifore,
>
> What on bak, and what on body half and by þe two sides—
>
> Men sholde fynde manye frounces and manye foule plottes.[115]

Again, there is an emphasis on the visual manifestation of Hawkin's sins, and the implied

connection between the state of one's clothing and of one's spirit. The "frounces" and

"foule plottes" that Will keeps discovering suggest that as he looks more closely,

Hawkin's transgressions seem even more numerous.[116] But I want to point out two other

things here: 1) Despite having been labeled a braggart, Hawkin is remarkably open to

Will, a stranger, about his shameful shortcomings, and 2) Hawkin is intensely aware of

his transgressions as well as their own visibility. He knows that if anyone bothers to

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[114] The Man in Foul Clothes comes from the Parable of the Wedding Feast, which relates the tale of a benevolent and welcoming host—taken to be God—who, in an attempt to fill vacant seats at his son's wedding, has his servants drag in anyone off the streets that they can find. After the people are gathered, the Host approaches a guest who is not wearing proper attire and asks him how he got in. The improperly dressed guest is "speechless", and the Host has him bound hand and foot, and thrown out into the darkness. While interpretations varied widely, there was a general understanding amongst both clergy and lay people that God punishes the unclean. See Staley, "Man in Foul Clothes."

[115] XIII: 313-8.

[116] A contemporary poem, *Purity,* also emphasized clothing as the indicator of piety. See Lynn Staley, "Chaucer and the Postures of Sanctity," in *The powers of the Holy: religion, politics, and gender in late medieval English culture* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966), 237-9.

examine him closely (and he urges them to do so) they are bound to find a rotten soul. In Hawkin we have a man who knows both the spiritual predicament he is in and how he appears to others. Moreover, while Hawkin's sins are many, his own admissions stand in stark contrast to the Doctor's lack thereof. Hawkin will go on to tell Will of his many misdeeds, but we never see them or their consequences: we have to take the Active Man's word for it. By contrast, we see the Doctor's greed firsthand, but his robe, title, and self-righteous attitude protect him from Conscience and Patience's sermonizing.

Will and Patience continue to notice more spots in Hawkin's clothing, adding to the litany of his sins: Hawkin "Dooth non almesdede, dred hym of no synne,/Lyveth ayein the bileve and no lawe holdeth."[117] So, from the mouths of others and Hawkin himself, *the Active Life* is more interested in and more trusting of material things than spiritual ones. And yet Hawkin is aware of the cost of his behavior. "That into wanhope he w[orth] and wende nought to be saved."[118] At this point, Hawkin's stained coat is a performance of his ambivalence towards spiritual laws, and his despair stems from the *awareness* of his own failings and helplessness in the face of impending doom. "I have but one hatere" or 'outfit', Hawkin tells us. "It hath ben laved in Lente" and he has been assigned penance for his deeds, but he admits that he is unable to keep it clean more than an hour. Hawkin is trapped. Not only can he not stop sinning, but also he cannot stop himself from baring his sins to all. And being unable to remove the coat, Hawkin is trapped by his appearance, which begins to signal not only his failings but also his doom.

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[117] XIII: 413-4.
[118] XIII: 406.

There is a rhythm to the way this section builds. At first Hawkin explains who he is and his sense of place, then Will notes his dirty clothes. When Hawkin explains again, Conscience notices "many moles and spottes,"[119] which in turn trigger further confession. When Hawkin is done, Patience notes further spots, leading to an even longer and more pitiful speech detailing the ways Hawkin tricks his neighbors in order to garner profit. This tag teaming emphasizes Hawkin's individual failings while also deemphasizing his other characteristics. What we see throughout his conversation with Will, Patience, and Conscience is an enumeration of more and more of his spiritual failings. Hawkin's clothes have made him incredibly transparent, and thus vulnerable to the onslaught of criticism from the pilgrims. Each layer of spots reveals more and more of his darkest secrets.

But the Hawkin's problem is not merely that the spots are revealing: he has no control over how revealing they are or how invasive his interlocutors become. Once they show up in the narrative, he is obliged to bare everything. Unable to regulate the level of intimacy his clothing invites, Hawkin loses the ability to determine how others view him. In the eyes of the others, the stains on the coat have come to define him, and because he cannot change, they can see nothing else. Again, given the way the Doctor's robe seemed to excuse his own indiscretions, Hawkin's harsh exposure ought to signal that something is amiss: even if Conscience is right about Hawkin's sins, there is something inconsistent about the way different outfits function. The inconsistency could be linked to authority, in that those with power are less subject to examination than those without. However,

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[119] XIII: 313.

Mede is both influential and cross-examined by the pilgrims. Despite being much more powerful than Hawkin, she faces an intense amount of scrutiny from the moment she appears. More likely, the double-standard hinges on the fact that Mede and Hawkin are *in* the world, whereas the doctor studies it. Both Mede and Hawkin are worldly, in that their sins seem ambivalently linked with their social utility. However, the Doctor of Theology portends to study the nature of the world, and is therefore less prone to examination by others, despite his clear sins. When Patience and Conscience stop Will from accusing the Doctor of being hypocritical, we can see that he further enjoys the support of the church, which helps him by silencing critics of his gluttony. This dichotomy between the way he is treated and the way Hawkin and Mede are castigated further highlights the social distance enforced between the clergy and the people in that they are evaluated according to different standards, or rather one is constantly being evaluated while the other remains aloof. If the same standards applied to both, we would have seen spots on the Doctor's coat as well.

After Hawkin speaks his last and sinks into wanhope, Will spends the next 80 lines describing what wanhope does to men:

> …man moorneþ noȝt for hise mysdedes, ne makeþ no sorwe;
>
> Ac penaunce þat Þe preest enioyneþ parfourneþ yuele;
>
> Dooþ noon almesdede; dred hym of no synne;
>
> Lyeþ ayein þe bileve and no lawe holdeþ.
>
> Ech day is halyday with hym, or an heiȝ ferye.[120]

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[120] XIII: 410-14.

Here Will turns Hawkin into an exemplum of what happens when man falls into wanhope. We should note two things: First, Will's narration is at best ambivalent in the poem. Whenever he is certain of a truth, a character will be introduced who questions that insight. Indeed, Will's ostensible certainty is what drives a lot of the linguistic refining in the poem. Secondly, the man of wanhope that Will described does not fit Hawkin. Our Active Man does perform his penances poorly, but as noted above, he mourns for his sins, does almsdeeds, and does not spend every day feasting. If he did, he would not remain an Active Man for very long. If anything, Will is describing the Doctor rather than Hawkin, which points back to the double-standard at work throughout this section. The Doctor's clothing and his position within the church hierarchy effectively gave him a free pass from the moral inspection Hawkin is subjected to. The upshot here is that Will's reflection reduces Hawkin—supposedly the representation of the Active Life—to a caricature of a sinner. This false equation does a disservice to Hawkin in that it ignores the details that Langland has been careful to build into his character. It also raises the question that if Hawkin is thus damned, what hope is there for other industrious laborers? How can they live and work but still avoid Hawkin's fate?[121]

The waferer is both a fleshed-out character and an allegorical figure, but Will's flattening of Hawkin constitutes a poor reading of Hawkin's robes. By focusing on only the allegorical aspect—much like Holy Church does to Mede in Passus II—Will twists Hawkin into a warning and dehumanizes a figure that Langland has been careful to humanize. Reading Hawkin's clothing this way, instead of attempting to unpack his

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[121] For more on this, See Aers, *Community, Gender*.

liminal identity, Will reduces Hawkin to a bad *exemplum*. Of course, Will is not completely off the mark in this case. In fourteenth and early fifteenth century allegory, the image of the sinner was often equated with the improperly dressed guest at the parable of the Wedding Feast: "belapped with black stinking clothes of sin."[122] There is no doubt that Hawkin's appearance is similar to the archetypal image of the doomed sinner. But Will's ambivalent authority in the poem along with Langland's conscientious humanization of Hawkin signal that we should not equate Will's pronouncements with Langland's. We should not take Will's word for it.

There is good news, however, because in the next Passus, Patience offers Hawkin a way out. Labor will not save him, but Patience urges the sinner to give up the active life in favor of voluntary poverty: citing Matthew 6: "Ne solliciti sitis, etc.; volucres celi Deus pascit, etc.; pacientes vincunt, etc"[Have no care, etc.l God feedeth the fowls of the air, etc.; the patience overcome, etc].[123] Here Patience takes the cited Biblical passages literally, advising Hawkin to become a hermit like himself. If he follows this advice, Hawkin is promised he will be saved, provided for, and his coat will be bleached: "none heraude ne harpoure [will] have a fairer garnement/Than Haukyn the Actify Man."[124] Applying Patience's advice will cause Hawkin to become less of an "Actify Man" in that he would leave the active life in order to gain salvation. Thus, Patience's solution does not solve the troubles of the active life as much as ask Hawkin to leave it altogether.

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[122] The term comes from Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* (c. 1388), but the imagery is all over the place, such as in the aforementioned works of the *Pearl* poet, *Cleanness* or *Patience*. See Walter Hilton, *The scale of perfection*, ed. John P. H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward (New York: Paulist Press 1991), 126-7. Richard Newhauser explicitly connects Hawkin to Hilton. See Richard Newhauser, *In the garden of evil: the vices and culture in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 216-219.
[123] XIV: 34.
[124] XIV: 25-6.

Nevertheless, Hawkin has a path to heaven— he still has a chance to avoid the wanhope waiting in the wings.

The problem with Patience's sermon is that it does not so much offer Hawkin the Active Man a way to live in this world and do well, but rather asks Hawkin to give up his industrious side. From a broader perspective, Patience's sermon does not construct a way for good laborers to remain productive and spiritually sound. They must choose one or the other. As Godden has noted, "the food Patience offers Haukyn is purely spiritual."[125] And patient, willful poverty may be virtuous, but it is not the foundation upon which a society can be built. Everyone can't be beggars because then they would have no one to beg from. Indeed, Hawkin's reaction demonstrates how ineffective Patience's sermon was:

> 'Allas,' quod Haukyn þe Actif Man þo, 'þat after my cristendom
>
> I ne hadde be deed and doluen for Dowelis sake!
>
> So hard it is,' quod Haukyn, 'to lyue and to do synne.
>
> Synne seweþ us euere,'…
>
> 'I were noȝt worthi, woot God,' quod Haukyn, 'to werien any cloþes,
>
> Ne neiþer sherte ne shoon, save for shame one
>
> To cover my careyne,' quod he, and cride mercy fast,
>
> And wepte and wailed—and þerewiþ I awaked.[126]

Hawkin's desperate pleas reflect his fraught position: as Patience encourages him to embrace poverty as virtuous, Hawkin insists that sin seweþ, or pursues, him always. He

[125] Godden, *The Making of Piers Plowman*, 115.
[126]XIV: 320-333.

sees himself as trapped regardless of attitude. But he does not use that as an excuse for his behavior so much as an existential truth. Sin pursues him always. Moreover, his assertion that his own failures make him unfit to wear any clothes infuses Hawkin with character beyond a mere symbol. Even as the passage works to identify Hawkin with his entire outfit, Hawkin here insists that he is even below the fabric itself. In doing so, he insists on an identity similar to but distinct from his Coat—there is more here than meets the eyes, even if Patience and Will have trouble seeing it.

Patience's sermon further exposes Hawkin's shame and produces contrition, but the industrious sinner is left with no way out. Hawkin cannot continue to function in the marketplace without compiling his damning sins, but patient poverty also rings hollow in a poem so interested in the role of labor and community. David Aers captures this tension between the ideals of his spiritual advisors and the pressures of the market which put Hawkin, a waferer concerned about making enough money to feed his family, in a difficult, if not helpless situation. For Aers, the dilemma generates "feelings of isolation and separateness from the community."[127] In Aers' model, Patience's sermon marks a failure within the church to account for the changing economic circumstances in which many of the parishioners found themselves. They wanted to focus on the Tower of the prologue, but were distracted by the plow. Normal workers were caught between the harsh rhetoric of the church and the demands of their daily life. That the two are incompatible in this episode speaks to the clergy's inadequate framework for teaching. Patience then, even as he works to properly define words like "Poverte" (XIV 275-322),

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[127] Aers, *Community, Gender*, 16.

becomes another example of a clergy that is disconnected from its subjects. That the progress of linguistic refinement fails to bring a material result then speaks to a certain impotence of language to resolve these issues—or at least an impotence in clerical language.

Complicating this reading is Patience's outfit, which was described back in XIII as "pilgrymes clothes."[128] In the dinner scene, Patience's robes and their juxtaposition against the Doctor's fine garb afforded him a sense of righteousness. The clothes themselves also echoed the outfit Langland gives to Piers the Plowman: one of the only unimpeachable characters in the poem. Insightful figures in simple outfits are a mainstay of medieval literature,[129] and Langland uses earlier material, other characters, and literary conventions to give the reader every reason to trust Patience's judgment. However, as I have demonstrated above, Patience (while never so flawed as the Doctor) does not provide a real solution for Hawkin. Neither fine nor humble clothes suggest linguistic authority.

As with Mede, Hawkin's clothing is ultimately unreliable. But Langland builds onto the skepticism in three ways. He establishes inconsistency across class, a necessity to refine understandings of clothing given the heightened stakes of misinterpretation, and a rigidity of clothing. The final paragraphs of this section will unpack each of those ideas while attempting to position Langland as responding to changing ideas about clothing in his time. First, in light of the way the Doctor was treated by the same allegorical

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[128] XIII: 29.
[129] Some examples: The Parson in *The Canterbury Tales;* Adrian, the helpful priest in Capgrave's *Life of St. Katherine;* the old woman in *The Wife of Bath's Tale;* Mercy in *Mankind;* the Old Man in *The Regiment of Princes;* and Reason, Rectitude, and Justice in *The City of Ladies.*

authorities, Patience and Conscience, these passages not only demonstrate a fundamental misreading of clothing, they also point out how inconsistently clothing is read. Mede and her finery enjoyed early influence in the court, and while Conscience's argument in Passus III restricts her power, she is never completely rejected. Likewise the Doctor, despite observable hypocrisy, enjoys respect and fine food in proportion to his fine robes. However, Hawkin is significantly poorer than those two, and his clothes are used to condemn him out of hand. And indeed, Langland works hard to make explicit connections between Hawkin's poverty and the state of his coat. More than once, Hawkin complains about the lack of recompense provided by the lords to whom he sells.[130] He only has one coat because he cannot afford another. This works on the allegorical level, in that if his Coat is his soul, then he can only ever have one, regardless of his economic circumstances. But, by connecting the coat to Hawkin's status, Langland reminds us that the performance of identity is inherently linked with money.[131] Further, the discrepancy in terms of wealth and treatment again highlights the crudity and inconsistency of reading through fabric. When the other pilgrims focus on Hawkin's dirty coat, they can only see the sins—not the labor, the folksy humor, or the fleshed-out man underneath. They are not wrong so much as reductive. Similarly, the advice offered by Patience that Hawkin should accept poverty in the face of material failure in order to save his soul is not so much incorrect as ironically tone-deaf. Hawkin's main issue is that his participation in the market as a waferer directly causes him to sin, and he struggles with how to righteously

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[130] This is a good example of *Piers Plowman* becoming self-referencial, in that one wonders if Hawkin's material problems stem from a lack of Mede.
[131] See Aers, *Community, Gender*, 22.

produce in this world. Poverty may be a way to avoid sin, but it does not directly address

Hawkin the Active Man's concerns, and thus falls on deaf ears.

If we continue to think of *Piers Plowman* as an attempt to refine language, then

Passus XIII and XIV emphasize the need to refine the language of fabric. By

characterizing Hawkin as poor but active, productive but sinful, Langland showcases how

allegorical understandings of clothing and identity are unreliable. To some degree, the

Doctor's robe suggests his office, and the truncated dialogue he has with the other

pilgrims confirms his occupation. But of course his gluttonous and self-aggrandizing

behavior belies the sanctity the robes would otherwise imply. Likewise, Patience's robes

suggest a piety not shared by the Doctor, but that piety does not aid him in helping

Hawkin. In fact, Patience's pious sermon not only intensifies Hawkin's *wanhope* but also

leaves the waferer isolated in his spiritual failure. The rupture between Hawkin and his

community is emphasized when he says that he is not worthy to wear any clothes save for

shame, and the use of "careyne", or cadaver, suggests his own death. The shame Patience

engendered has not fixed a broken member of a community, but rather cast him out. And

in this instance, the consequences of their mistake are so disturbing that Will wakes from

his dream with a start. If Langland had simply presented us with a character-less sinner

(as the C-text does), the scene would be more easily read as a traditional warning against

worldly endeavors.[132] However, Hawkin has personality, charm, and is at least partially

admirable. We will need laborers like him in order to plow that half acre. The cognitive

dissonance of seeing the complex if flawed figure categorically condemned—especially

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[132] Indeed, the C text removes Hawkin's name, and if the C-text is more socially conservative as it is often read, then Landland's changes suggest that he knew how powerful and empathetic Hawkin was.

when the Doctor of Theology was acquitted—was too much to bear. The section suggests that clearer understanding of clothing's ability to signify is not just a function of defining words like Poverty or Do-Wel. If a crude understanding of clothing can cause a productive member of a community to be cast out, then a better understanding may help hold a community—especially a poorer one—together.

The elusive and labyrinthine nature of Langland's allegory puts the fixed clothing of characters in relief. Langland complicates Mede's, the Doctor's, Hawkin's and clothing by importing material concerns into an allegorical dimension. Either the verse obscures the meaning of the clothing and highlights the disparity between appearance and reality (Mede), or it discourages us from simply likening a character to his stains (the Doctor). But in all three cases, the Doctor, Hawkin and Mede are unable to change their outfit, even as their exact identity shifts throughout their episodes. In light of the skepticism with which Langland has infused clothing throughout the poem, this in itself is remarkable. For Langland, clothing can only provide crude details about its wearer, those details are subject to public interpretation that is bound to mislead, and one's outfit cannot be modified to reflect change. These characters then are trapped in an imprecise semiotic system which arbitrarily favors the rich and powerful.[133]

As discussed in the Introduction, clothing in the *early* 14th century was a public, communal experience often used to categorize the populace into different roles. The ability to do that rested on the people's reliance on static, reliable markers imbedded in

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[133] In fact, the only time characters *do* change their garb is in Passus II, when Liar and Guile sneak past the king's guards by donning Friar's robes (ln 220-240). Clothing, it seems, is only malleable (and therefore extra deceitful) when it is used by the church.

the fabric itself. However, composed shortly after fashion took hold in the 1340's, *Piers Plowman* occupies a fraught historical moment. Recall that in the same period in England, dress became both an official designation of status due to the sumptuary laws and a de facto vehicle for resistance, in that identity could be bought by buying the right kind of clothing. The potential for dissimulation in the material world is reflected in the poem, in which clothing becomes decoupled from otherwise certain allegorical markers. Langland constantly makes use of allegorical conventions only to undercut their reliability by melding them with material concerns. Although clothing in English society was often viewed as a tool for categorizing the populace, Langland's verse insists that clothing's ability to signify is at best crude, and at worst counterproductive. As such, the text expresses some of the angst that the fashion revolution must have introduced to medieval England.[134]

3. Margery Kempe[135]

I have set up Langland as the representative case study for late medieval allegory. The unreliable clothing and the inability of individual characters to manipulate their appearance undermine allegorical conventions. Therefore traditional understandings of clothing's ability to signify in the *material* world are limited as well. However, having

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[134] There is a natural objection here that Langland's depiction of *allegorical* clothing may not reflect his views on contemporary norms in fashion. However, Langland's continuous infusion of material details into the allegorical world suggests that he is not merely talking about abstractions: his poetry traverses the liminal space in between the allegorical and material, and thus comments on both.

[135] All quotations come from Margery Kempe and Lynn Staley, *The book of Margery Kempe* (Kalamazoo, Mich: Published for TEAMS (the Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages), in association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1996). For each citation, I will provide the book and line number, as in: 1.194-6. Throughout the discussion, I'll refer to "Margery" when I speak of the main character in *The Book of Margery Kempe,* and I'll use "Kempe" to refer to the author of said text.

erected Langland as an example for late medieval thought on clothing's role, it is worth comparing *Piers* to other late medieval texts in order to see how my observations regarding Langland hold up.

Written in the 1430's, *The Book of Margery Kempe* provides another example of clothing as a central if vexed signifier. On the face of it, *Kempe*—a narrative about a married woman whose vision of Jesus causes her to forsake her business and family— seems less like an allegory than an autobiography. It contains, for instance, less dialogue about the nature of individual words than does *Piers.* Nevertheless, the text focuses on the complicated significance of imagery and icons, the tension between interpretation and intention, and of course Kempe's own unique language. Much of the narrative is also interested in unpacking the strange illness which Margery contracts after the birth of her first child. The exact definition of her "hysteria"[136] (and its consequences) along with the definition of heresy drive much of the plot. Most importantly, *Margery Kempe* portrays Margery in the hagiographical *legenda* of female medieval saints, especially the Swedish mystic, "St. Bridget, to whom Margery quite explicitly compares herself—and with whom she often competes."[137] While Kempe was a real historical person, the character of Margery we see in the book is a conflation of real details and spiritual models.[138]

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[136] After her vision and her new devotion to Christ, Margery tours both England and the continent, living a life of piety and tears in public. Her crying is both a rejection of the values of her peers and one cause of her mistreatment at the hands of authorities.

[137] Gail McMurray Gibson, *The theater of devotion: East Anglian drama and society in the late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 47. Gibson offers some details of how Kempe's real life does not line up with the narrative presented in the book, namely that the real Kempe was admitted to the powerful Trinity Guild of Lynn in 1438, at the same time that the fictional Margery was enduring "martyrdom by slander."

[138] For instance, Margery reports seeing a meditational vision of Christ conversing with Mary about the resurrection, but that whole scene comes out of the 13th century *Meditationes vitae Christi*, which Nicholas Love translated into English in 1410. See Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, 49.

Therefore, even though much of the action ostensibly takes place in the real world, and the main characters are not themselves personifications of abstract ideas, significant sections within *Margery Kempe* fit comfortably inside the Quilligan model of allegory. Or at the very least, the text participates heavily in the allegorical mode.[139] But I have not chosen to compare Kempe to Langland simply because of their modal similarity. Instead, I am interested in the way Kempe routinely inverts Langland's technique. If Langland imports material concerns into allegorical clothing, then Margery Kempe brings allegorical concerns to material clothing. Likewise, just as Langland generates tension by trapping his characters in their clothes and then imposing judgments on them, much of *Kempe*'s conflict is the result of a character changing their clothing and then being castigated after the fact.

Despite the microscopic focus on dress throughout much medieval literature, we rarely witness characters changing their clothing. For instance, in Chaucer's *General Prologue,* the Miller does not put down his bagpipe, nor does the Wife of Bath take off her hat. Their costume is perhaps not the whole of their character, but their clothes are frozen even as they develop as characters. When some medieval characters do change clothing, as in *Erec and Enide,* the change is often not *self*-fashioned:[140] Queen Guinevere puts Enide's royal robes on her.[141]

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[139] For a longer take on allegory in Kempe, see Rebecca Louise Sumner, *The spectacle of femininity: allegory and the denial of representation in the Book of Margery Kempe, Jane Eyre, and Wonderland*. Ph.D. Diss., University of Rochester, 1991. See also Robin Waugh, *The genre of medieval patience literature development, duplication, and gender*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). While Sumner's chapter on Kempe insists explicitly that *Kempe* is as much of an allegory as it is autobiography, Waugh argues that *Kempe* is "patience literature", akin to *The Clerk's Tale.*
[140] For more on the robing of Enide, see E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed : Reading through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2014), 155-163, in which

Margery Kempe is one of the few exceptions to this rule in that she changes

outfits in a deliberate attempt to publicly express her inner conversion.   The big costume

change comes in Chapter 5, when the Lord commands Kempe to dress all in white. Up

until then, Margery has told us that, "Hir clokys also wer daggyd and leyd wyth dyvers

colowrs betwen the daggys that it schuld be the mor staryng to mennys sygth and hirself

the mor ben worshepd."[142] These "daggyd" clothes reflect Margery's awareness of

fashion and a clear decision on her part to follow certain norms. But they also

demonstrate her ability to manipulate her reputation. She knows that wearing certain

styles of clothing will affect the way she is seen, and describes how her early, elaborate

clothes help reinforce her family's status.[143] She understands then, that her new white

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Burns discusses how Erec, Guenever, and the robes given at Erec's request "make [Enide]," rather than the other way around. By contrast, Burns also discusses Oiseuse, a noble lady in *The Roman de la Rose,* who is constrantly creating herself with clothing, and thus more in line with Margery's attempts. For more on the possibilities of clothing in French literature, see Monica L. Wright, *Weaving narrative: clothing in twelfth-century French romance* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

[141] Some of the other obvious objections to this pattern may be *Bisclavret* and *Silence*. But in both of those, while the clothing unequivocally allows or represents character's progress and identity, the changes themselves are not unilaterally achieved. Bisclavret can only don his *own* clothing, which must be provided to him, along with a discreet room to change in, for his humanity to be restored. In the same way,both Eric and Enide require royal approval (specifically the approval of a figure of a higher status) before they can take on their definitive robes. Silence is a more complicated example, in that she is able to pass as a man for decades before her true sex is revealed (by Merlin of all people). However, the narratives stresses the difficulty of the deception along with the training Silence had to endure in order for her masculine identity to be maintained. Moreover, none of this was her choice: in fact, she seems to have actively desired to end the deception several times before she is unwillingly unmasked by another. Lastly, *Silence* stresses the harm done to nature by the cross-dressing, along with the inevitable need for her to assume her *true* sex as a woman. Some amount of deception is therefore possible, but *Silence* is hardly an example of self-fashioning.

[142] 1.194-6.

[143] For more on the popular practice of dagging and its castigation by contemporary moralists, see John Block Friedman, "The Iconography of Dagged Clothing and Its Reception by Moralist Writers," in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles 9*, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale Owen-Crocker (R. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 121–138. Friedman discusses Margery's use of dagging in particular, noting that while she deliberately employed it to garner the envy of her neighbors, she did not conceive of it as related to noble status, as many French writers did. This is another good example of clothing's ambiguous ability to mean: does dagging merely represent conspicuous consumption or some more ambitious attempt to fashion status?

outfit is supposed to proclaim her devotion to Christ and vow of chastity. The problem

with the all-white clothing is that, as many characters will point out, it was equated with

virginity, something Margery, a mother of 14, could not claim to still have. And while the

final decision to wear white is sanctioned by the Bishop of Lincoln and her husband,

Margery worries that, "yf I go arayd on other maner than other chast women don, I drede

that the pepyl wyl slawndyr me. Thei wyl sey I am an ypocryt and wondryn upon me"

(I.734-5). She knows that people will understand the significance of her clothing change

and note the contradictions between her actions and her self-fashioning. As it turns out,

she is right, and for much of her *Book,* Margery endures rebuke after rebuke from people

she does not know, calling her everything from hypocritical to damned.[144] One of the

most memorable sequences in the Book comes when the Archbishop of York interrogates

her for supposed Lollardy. In the middle of the examination, he asks, "Why gost thu in

white? Art thou a mayden?" to which she replies, "'Nay, ser, I am no mayden; I am a

wife.' He comawndyd hys mené to fettyn a peyr of feterys and seyd sche schulde ben

feteryd, for sche was a fals heretyke. And than sche seyd, "I am non heretyke, ne ye schal

non preve me." Here, the Archbishop's dismissive conclusion is explicitly based on the

contrast between her white clothes and her sexual past. Later he asks her to leave his

diocese before her excessive crying and dress pervert any other parishioners. The terms

of her conversion, personal significance of the white clothing, and her special relationship

with Christ are neglected in favor of maintaining more established societal norms.

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[144] She also endures a significant amount of abuse from her husband for her conversion, although his main complaint is not limited to her costume, and he eventually repents. See Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her world* (London: Longman, 2002), 70-75 for more on Margery's flouting of her marriage roles.

Margery's struggle with clothing reflects her larger post-conversion difficulties with self-fashioning. Late in her *Book*, Margery once again travels to London—this time in pilgrim's garb and incognito: "desiryng to a gon unknowyn into the tyme that sche myth a made sum chefsyawns, bar a kerche befor hir face."[145] Unfortunately, the residents of London all recognize her and immediately treat her badly, teasing her for having flip flopped on her vegetarianism. Back in Book 1, Jesus relaxed his order for her to abstain from meat, as she had become frail and needed strength. However, just like when he ordered her to don white, Margery was immediately concerned for how her radical change would be understood by her peers: ""A, blisful Lord, the pepil, that hath knowyn of myn abstinens so many yerys and seeth me now retornyn and etyn flesch mete, thei wil have gret merveyl and, as I suppose, despisyn me and scornyn me therfor."[146] 'Merveyl' is especially important here. It seems to be positively charged when attached to individuals, such as when the Archbishop marvels at Margery's travels or when Margery herself has "gret merveyl" her heart for the Lord, but negatively charged when attached to groups, as in when the people "merveyl" at her weeping.[147] The public's general shock at her radical shifts forms the basis for her insecurity. She knows they will *merveyl*—they will not understand and will therefore criticize. Despite her attempt at disguise, the people do not disappoint. In fact, much of her time in London is spent rebuking the citizens—all men—for lying about her. "Sche sparyd hem not, sche flateryd hem not, neithyr for her giftys, ne for her mete, no for her drynke."[148] The

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[145] Kempe, 2:551-2.
[146] Ibid., 1:3827-9.
[147] Ibid., 1:3176, 3347, and 3486.
[148] Ibid. 2:597-8.

frustration in the prose is clear. Even at this late stage in the *Book*, Margery cannot control her own narrative either with clothing or with words.

Nevertheless, it's unclear why, unlike the entirety of the Book, Margery here wishes to go unnoticed. For Goodman, Margery's shyness reflects Kempe's lack of desire to be recognized out of her customary white (for which she lacked the funds). The embarrassment about yet another change in garb coupled with her own rising debt reflects Margery's still impactful, high breeding.[149] The London visit is particularly useful here in that Kempe's main source of comfort are reminders of her old life: fine food, distinguished hosts, feasts. Dressed as a pilgrim, she accepts gifts fit for a burgess.[150] And that irony contains one of Margery's stumbling blocks: for as much as she tries to reinvent herself around her conversion, her old identity keeps compromising the very clothes she wears.

Margery's son, whose conversion begins Book II, provides an interesting comparison. When we originally meet him, he is an ambitious merchant, "usyng marchawndyse and seylyng ovyr the see," whom Margery—once a burgher herself—hopes to draw away from his materialist life. Also like Margery, he is susceptible to lust, and despite her proddings "he fel into the synne of letchery." For both mother and son, the prolonged sin has physical consequences; in the son's case, he is stricken with boils and sores, a curse that the text hints may have come from Margery herself. Lastly, he

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[149] Goodman, *Margery Kempe*, 54.
[150] A love of the good life and an affinity for class privilege are perhaps two of Margery's vices. For another example, this one of a Bishop hosting and feeding her on the basis of her father's esteemed reputation, see Kempe, 1:2524-54.

shares his mother's love of fine, "daggyd" clothes, which he eventually gives up after heeding his mother's wishes.[151]

The striking parallels between the narratives are belied by a few important differences. First, the son does not convert because of a mystical vision from God: he does so because of Margery's insistence. Second, he is never told to change his clothes. He does so just as a byproduct of his conversion, without comment. Third, unlike Margery, he is never told to abandon the world. In fact, his lechery originally outcasts him—people think his boils are leprosy—but his conversion brings him back to his business, allows him to marry (he does not have to forgo sex altogether—just sex outside of marriage), and connects him with the broader community. He simply becomes a righteous burgher. Likewise, her son does not have to wear her definitive white robes— he just has to give up the "daggyd clothys." For Karen Winstead, the mundanity in the son curbs some of Margery's radical lifestyle. By positioning herself as a maternal figure who does not expect her sons to leave the world altogether, the passage "reassures readers that she is not the anti-family radical many of her detractors in Book 1 accuse her of being."[152] I find that convincing, but I think the play with the son's "daggyd" clothes is doing something else.

As I noted above, the son does not have a discussion with his mother about his clothes; they are simply changed when he visits her after he reforms: "For afor tyme hys clothys wer al daggyd and hys langage al vanyté; now he weryd no daggys, and hys

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[151] For more on this conversion and its parallels to Margery's life, see Karen A. Winstead, "The conversion of Margery Kempe's son," *English Language Notes*. 32 (1994), 9-13.
[152] Ibid., 12.

dalyawns was ful of vertu. Hys modyr, havyng gret merveyl of this sodeyn chongyng."[153]

Compared to the extended conversations about his materialism and lechery, it is strange

that the clothes are both an important indicator of a substantive change *and an*

afterthought. Their simplicity is more of a precipitate than a driver of change. More

importantly, unlike Margery's, the son's conversion and change in clothing lead to

stronger ties to his community. Why is he accepted when Margery is largely outcast? If

Margery's experience with external performance of conversion was so negative, how

does her son's experience differ? The answer may lie in the passage quoted above. Notice

that we do not learn exactly what he is wearing; we only know his outfit is no longer

dagged. Presumably his exact costume is unimportant because the son wore clothes

appropriate to his station. Also note that his clothes do not explicitly speak to any

religious iconography. They seem mundane, if humbler than before. In other words, her

son experienced less isolation because he did not rock the boat. Although he was able to

successfully express his conversion outwardly without bearing more criticism from his

peers, his range of expression was particularly conservative. In the son's case anyway,

clothing can imply a certain degree of humility, but it is incapable of reliably expressing

more complex ideas. Moreover, Margery is not at first convinced by the son's clothing.

Immediately after the son comes back from a voyage, "hys modyr, seyng this

mervelyows drawte of owr Lord, thankyd God as sche cowde, takyng good heed of hys

governawns for dred of symulacyon. The lengar that sche beheld hys governawns, the

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[153] Kempe, 2:67.

mor sadde sche thowt he was and the mor reverent to owr Lordward."[154] Margery keeps a

close watch of her son for "dred of symulacyon." In other words, she fears her son is

putting on an act in order to gain her, and by extension the Lord's, favor. Her

skepticism[155] can only be resolved through prolonged observation. Although the stripped

down outfit speaks of change, even Margery—someone who ought to have appreciated

the value of her son's gesture—does not think it can stand alone. "Governawns" then

creates and maintains spiritual states which clothing can only hint at. If the son's story is

some sort of exemplum, then Margery's caution is as well: while clothing may reflect

genuine reform, it is hard to discern without the benefit of time. Having said that, the

son's greatest advantage with respect to maintaining good relations with his community

may be his sex.

As numerous studies of Kempe have shown,[156] the tension between domineering

patriarchal roles and her asexual, radical choices drive much of the book. Early on,

Margery is both explicit about her distaste for sex and about her husband's insistence:

"And so sche seyd to hir husbond, "I may not deny yow my body, but the lofe of myn

hert and myn affeccyon is drawyn fro alle erdly creaturys and sett only in God."[Her

husband] wold have hys wylle, and sche obeyd wyth greet wepyng and sorwyng for that

sche mygth not levyn chast."[157] Contrary to her lecherous youth, Margery continues to

have sex exclusively because of the "dette of matrimony," and is only released from her

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[154] Kempe, 2:70-72.
[155] For more on Kempe's skepticism, see Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and pilgrim: the Book and the world of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 168-79.
[156] For more bibliography on this, see John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis, eds, *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2004), 223– 40.
[157] Kempe, 1:259-261.

duties after she pays her husband in cash. Adding to her burden was the church. David

Aers argues that despite her class privileges and relative wealth, Margery had to endure

years of "legalized rape" with her husband. These marital practices were propagated by

the Church, which defined the duties of a wife and the goals of sexual activity without

ever mentioning emotional affection or physical desire. "Christian dogma," he goes on to

say, "sactif[ied] such female subjugation."[158] It should come as no surprise then that

Margery's mystical conversion led to her resisting her marital duties and male religious

authorities. They were the ones oppressing her in the first place. But in so doing, she also

made herself vulnerable to attack: "Margery departed from the conventional female roles

of housewife or nun, and as a result, she lived among men or remained solitary."[159] These

departures from traditional female roles *and* subversions of clerical authority caused her

to be "seen as a threat to the foundations of Law and Order, to Man and God."[160]

In an example similar to the York one above[161], Margery's experience in

Canterbury is laced with gendered rhetoric:

> On a tyme, as this creatur was at Cawntyrbery in the cherch among the
>
> monkys, sche was gretly despysed and reprevyd for cawse sche wept so
>
> fast bothyn of the monkys and prestys and of seculer men ner al a day

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[158] Aers, *Community, Gender*, 91. For more detail on the medieval commonplaces of marital love as well as the church's complicity in female subjugation, Aers' whole chapter is useful: pg. 73-116.

[159] Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 233.

[160] Aers *Community, Gender*, 98.

[161] The York episode is loaded with gendered threats as well. After the Archbishop claims Margery is a "heretyke", he returns in force "Sythyn the Erchebischop cam ageyn into the chapel wyth many worthy clerkys, amongys whech was the same doctowr whech had examynd hir beforn and the monke that had prechyd ageyn hir a lityl tyme beforn in Yorke." The second examination is more excruciating than the first, as Margery is literally surrounded by judgmental men (some of whom are described as wearing extravagant hoods) who insist she be banished from the diocese for fear she may pervert other worshippers. Again, while her behavior is indeed strange, the terms of her banishment and the ubiquitous male authority emphasize the particularly male nature of religious oppression.

bothe afornoon and aftyrnoon...So an eld monk, whech had ben tresowrer

wyth the Qwen whyl he was in seculer clothyng, a riche man, and gretly

dred of mech pepyl, toke hir be the hand, seying unto hir, "What kanst

thow seyn of God?" "Ser" sche seyth, "I wyl bothe speke of hym and

heryn of hym," rehersyng the monk a story of scriptur. The munke seyd, "I

wold thow wer closyd in an hows of ston that ther schuld no man speke

wyth the."[162]

This is a typical scene for Margery, in that she is in a male space, surrounded by male

authority figures, and abandoned by her husband, the only male who may have offered

her support. The monk's extreme rebuke merely serves to confirm what we as readers

would have expected by now.[163] And of course the words are particular: the monk wishes

her to be both silent (echoing 1 Timothy) and encased in stone (invisible), thus

constraining her troubling behavior and voice through the authority of the masculine

Church while removing her troubling figure from sight. Indeed, his method for

controlling Margery echoes the Archbishop of York's call for "fettyrs". But what

interests me here is the monk's personal history, which Kempe juxtaposes against his

words. His life bears some resemblances to Margery's, in that he was once rich and

influential, but has now given up his "seculer clothyng" and devoted his life to the

Church. The similarities contribute to the injustice of the scene, in that the man ought to

be more sympathetic, if only because he went through a similar outward transformation.

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[162] Kempe, 1:640.

[163] See Waugh, *Medieval Patience*,173. Waugh sees *Kempe* as an example of "patience literature", which she defines as literature that praises the ability of a protagonist to endure ceaseless punishment while maintaining their identity. For her, this particular remark is a synecdoche for the whole of Margery's suffering.

But whereas Margery's changes led to her being "gretly dispysed", his led to more respect from the "peple" (who apparently do not "merveyl" at his life). The gender disparity, along with the man's own hypocrisy, could hardly be clearer.

Of course, it would be disingenuous to claim that all men Margery encountered were antagonistic. Beyond her confessor, who often encourages both her donning white and her wailing, Margery meets a few sympathetic men. And indeed, throughout the narrative, the supportive men are identified through outward signs. After helping quench a fire that threatened St. Margaret's Church, three men suddenly appear to offer their thanks: "Sone aftyr, comyn into hir three worschepful men wyth whyte snow on her clothys, seying unto hir, 'Lo, Margery, God hath wrowt gret grace for us and sent us a fayr snowe to qwenchyn wyth the fyr. Beth now of good cher and thankyth God therfor.'"[164] These three individuals, whose entrance is as surprising as their exit is immediate, are covered in *white* snow. Their appearance clearly indicates the men's' broad support of Margery—not just her efforts with the fire—while belying *clothing's* ability to do the same. The snow is not chosen so much as divinely provided, and the men have simply accepted what they cannot change. As the snow is already the symbol of divine grace and favor, the men are divinely marked rather than self-fashioned. The removal of fraught, complicated clothing makes their entrance simple and anodyne.

The occasional sympathetic man notwithstanding, throughout her travels, women's responses were broadly more positive and welcoming than men's. Danielle

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[164] Kempe, 1:3871-3. For another example of men who oppose Margery simply by appearing, see Kemple 1, 2524-60, in which she castigates some men who she does not know simply for their dagged clothing. They only chide Margery after she accuses them of being "lykar the develys men."

Régnier-Bohler discusses this exact trend, hypothesizing that their implicit support was due to the fact that Margery's tears and dress "perhaps expressed what they wanted to say themselves.[165] Régnier-Bohler cites an episode in Book 1 in which Margery, after having been accosted by yet another man who accuses her of being possessed by a devil, is comforted by a lone women: "Than the lady had hir into a gardeyn be hemself aloone and preyd hir to tellyn why sche cryid so sor...Than the lady was ille plesyd wyth hir preyste that had so spokyn ageyns hir and lovyd hir ryth wel, desiryng and preying hir to abydyn stille wyth hir." The whole scene is built to highlight the tension here between the threats of the male priest and the safety and intimacy of the female commoner. Again, Margery is able to find men who grudgingly accept her judgments, but across Europe, women more readily come to her aid and work to understand her costume and behavior. While she faced opposition from both sexes, there is a consistent empathy from women that transcended even questions of theology.

Sarah Salih has argued that Kempe's experiences parallel (and perhaps were influenced by) saints lives, in which male saints' conversion were demonstrated through dramatic life changes, including costume. By contrast late medieval female saints' conversion narratives focused on internal, rather than external, change, Kempe attempts to resist this trend. Margery's struggle to express her new relationship with Christ "highlights the difficulty of producing an external effect that is an accurate counterpart to Margery's inner certainty: she can be read, but also misread." Salih focuses on the scene

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[165] Danielle Régnier-Bohler, "Literary and Mystical Voices," in *A History of women in the West*, ed. Georges Duby, Michelle Perrot, and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber(Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 473-5.

in which Margery is ordered to wear white in order to parallel Margery's dress with common portrayals of Mary. For both women, their white clothing sets them apart, "not only from secular women but from chaste women too." The whiteness shows how the two figures have not only forgone sex but transcended sexuality—they are not merely chaste, they are asexual. As such, the white clothing removes Margery from "familiar sexual categories altogether."[166]   In a similar vein, Sarah Beckwith has convincingly shown how Margery Kempe's performed conversion deliberately echoes the theatrical conventions of the *Corpus Christi Plays*, thereby substituting her body for Christ's. Through her clothing, wailing, and suffering, Margery herself becomes "the object of piety, of the veneration of others, one to whom in fact, others might do well to do pilgrimage."[167] With this act, she subverts clerical authority and laid claim to a radically singular connection to Jesus. It is perhaps impossible to know if Margery was echoing the *Corpus Christ Plays* specifically or just the hagiographical conventions of her time, or both. However, by showing how her attempts to follow male theatrical conventions are met with resistance, Kempe highlights the limits of clothing's ability to signify internal change, specifically for women.

My point in all of this is that while Kempe maintains her marriage and gains some support from clergy and religious figures like Julian, the public—specifically men—is represented as mostly unwilling to accept her white, weeping figure. Indeed, as Margery's isolation deepens, it becomes clear that, however holy she may be in the eyes

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[166] Sarah Salih, "Digby Saint Plays and The Book of Margery Kempe," in *Gender and holiness: men, women, and saints in late medieval Europe*, eds. Samantha Riches and Sarah Salih. (London: Routledge, 2002), 123-30.

[167] Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's body: identity, culture, and society in late medieval writings*, London: Routledge, 1993), 107.

of God or her husband, she is unable to publicly craft a new identity for herself. Part of the difficulty stems from Margery's gender, and part stems from the disconnect between the subject and the object—between the clothing choices made and how they are understood. This whole text shows profound awareness of self-fashioning, but it also stands as a testament to the limits of what clothing changes could achieve, and the limitations for women attempting to self-identify. Even with God's help—even under God's orders—her newfound dress is misunderstood and castigated.

Conclusion

Starting in the mid-14th century, clothing began to function very differently in England. The introduction of sumptuary laws, the expansion of access, and the growth of variety in styles made dress the subject of intense intellectual inquiry for moralists and poets alike. As a result, medieval allegories, which often depended on stable clothing markers, instead worked to undermine classical clothing conventions by infusing the verse with material concerns. Of course, values of clothing and its transformative abilities varied among late medieval allegories, just as values about clothing varied among conduct books and social criticism. What remained consistent, if not absolutely so, is that these allegories resisted any one-to-one reductions of clothing to meaning and were reluctant to allow their characters to change their dress. In *Piers Plowman*, clothing's exact meaning was difficult, if not impossible, to define. In *The Book of Margery Kempe,* an explanation for Margery's clothes was supposedly provided by God, but, with few

exceptions, Margery's peers neither understood nor condoned her behavior.[168] Both

works emphasize the tension between the character's understanding of his or her clothing

and the way that clothing was read (either by other characters of by the flesh and blood

reader). In either case, clothing was misinterpreted, and the individuals wearing those

misunderstood outfits suffered for it. Both works also demonstrated the effects of class in

limiting or allowing individual expression. Whereas Hawkin was trapped by his class and

lower position within the market, Margery's relative wealth afforded her a degree of

freedom, however qualified by religious authorities. Lastly, both works wrestled with

gender's influence on clothing's ability to mean. Even though much of the clothing

diatribes of the mid to late 14th century focused on men's fashions, the only characters in

this chapter who successfully performed their identity through dress were male,

specifically rich male religious figures. Clothing's ability to signify is thus intimately

related to—or perhaps reliant on—privilege. Whatever the contemporary discourse on

clothing may have been, these two works highlight the discrepancy between the way

clothing signifies when worn by those with access to power (the Doctor of divinity and

the friar who admonishes Margery) and by those without or with only marginal access

(Mede, Hawkin, and Margery). The ability then to self-identify through clothing is

clearly limited to rich men who benefitted from a fashion system that been codified and

developed for centuries and was backed by an ostensibly immutable establishment.

Characters outside that enclave were more likely to be misread than understood. In short,

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[168] Interestingly, this inverts the Quilligan model by providing a divine understanding of the clothing to the reader and showing how rarely those signs are understood by others. If Langland attempts to refine language, then Kempe shows how easily clothing signs are misunderstood, and further develops the consequences.

Langland and Kempe make clothing unreliable or easily misinterpreted, and most

characters are limited in, if not prohibited from, self-fashioning through clothes.

Chapter 2: Morality Plays and the Paradigms of Redemption

At the turn of the 15th century, a genre known as the "Morality play" appeared in England, although that specific term was not used until the Renaissance (and then not to describe the plays that now fall under its banner). But what exactly is a "Morality play"? Like allegory, the term has been accused of carrying with it some degree of ambiguity.[169] Robert Potter's work has provided one of the more canonical definitions of the genre. Potter writes that morality plays fundamentally illuminate "the invisible truths of time" by dramatizing the sequence every individual must go through. As such, the plays share a "unity of purpose" and a singular worldview. Further, all of the morality plays follow the same structure, where Man begins in a neutral state, falls, and is eventually redeemed. For Potter, this structure distinguishes the moralities from other medieval religious dramas such as the Corpus Christi or the York Cycle. They eschew specific narratives in order to present broader visions of the life cycle: "The events which occur on stage in the course of the play are not mimetic representations of life, but analogical demonstrations of what life is about."[170]

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[169] See for instance, Katie Normington, *Medieval English drama: performance and spectatorship* (Cambridge [England]: Polity, 2009) 2-16.
[170] Robert A. Potter, *The English morality play: origins, history, and influence of a dramatic tradition* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1975), 8-33. Potter also says that the morality plays have a rhythm "even older and more fundamental than tragedy. [They have] the rhythm of the victory of life over death,"(10).

This chapter tracks the way costume functions in three different "morality" plays: *Castle of Perseverance* (c. 1405)*, Mankind* (1465)*,* and *Hickescorner* (c. 1514)*.[171]* In tracking these three examples, I want to fracture Potter's understanding of the genre. Late Medieval drama often goes underappreciated, either because it is under read or because critics take *Everyman* to be the paradign of the genre. Potter's definition, and others like it, both overemphasize the structural similarities and overgeneralize the spiritual thrust. The plays do share a range of anxieties, but their divergent political references belie the continuity their formal and geographical similarities would otherwise suggest. I aim to develop a more nuanced understanding of the genre by focusing on the way these plays looked in performance, both with respect to the costume and staging. I think both aspects— the physical scaffolds and the donned costumes— reinforce a tension between the material and the metaphorical, and are avenues for the playwrights to negotiate that balance. This is particularly true for *Castle of Perseverance,* where the staging and the costume work together to reinforce barriers between the malicious world and the holy playing space.

Critics have managed to flatten the genre is by ignoring its theatricality and emphasizing a link between each play and Prudentius' *Psychomachia.* David Bevington's definition of morality does just that*,* claiming that the 4th century poem was the basis for

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[171] All quotations for *Castle of Perseverance* come from David N. Klausner, ed. *The Castle of Perseverance* (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010); *Mankind* quotations come from Kathleen M. Ashley and Gerard NeCastro, eds. *Mankind* (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010). *Hyckescorner* comes from John Matthews Manly, ed. *Specimens of the pre-Shakespearean Drama* (Boston [etc.]: Ginn, 1897). Despite its importance, I am not focusing on *Everyman* in this chapter in part because of its foreign origins. Of course, there's no reason to assume that works written in English were merely the product of English thinking, but unlike the other plays in this chapter, *Everyman* is a translation.

every extant morality play in English—indeed every play until Marlowe.[172] The connection is intuitive; however, I think Bevington and the others who see Prudentius as the father of 15th century English drama miss a crucial distinction. The *Psychomachia* conceived of man's struggle as ultimately an internal one, whereby his good and evil impulses battle for control of his identity. We see such battles between vices and virtues in early morality plays like *Castle of Perseverance,* but later plays dramatize an external conflict between man and the contemporary forces of the world. Even *Castle* does not show a victory over Vice, but rather a retreat from the world that vice inhabits, suggesting that Vices are external threats to man's otherwise innocent frame who can be stopped by erecting physical barriers. In other words, although 15th century English moralities include battles, the location of those battles (and therefore, the location of the threat) lies in contemporary culture rather than a universalized set of impulses. As such, the plays as a whole are nostalgic for a simpler past and a purer world, and spend a lot of their time worrying about contemporary norms, particularly clothing.

The geography of composition is also important here: all three plays come from East Anglia, the place Victor Scherb describes as the "West Broadway" of England in the 15th century.[173] East Anglia was one of richest and most pious regions in England, and its prosperity allowed its denizens to produce a wide range of devotional art, from sculpture,

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[172] See David M. Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe; growth of structure in the popular drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 9-10. Thompson also stressed *Psychomachia's* importance, saying the poems influence could "hardly be overstatated." See Elbert N. S. Thompson, *The English moral plays* (New Haven, Conn: Published under the auspices of Yale University, 1910), 34.

[173] *Hyckescorner* is a little bit of an outlier here, as it takes place outside of East Anglia in London. However, as I will discuss below, there is good reason to think the play was written with the Duke of Suffolk in mind. In either case, the London-set play is in part a product of the same economic forces that made East Anglia so artistically productive.

to stained glass, to drama.[174] But with those spectacular expressions came a unique

religious culture. Working with East Anglian wills, Gail Gibson has demonstrated how

the region's denizens allegorized their own family, future, and funeral.[175] In particular,

she cites John Clopton, whose will bequeathed a set of lavish velvet robes and other

ornaments specifically to decorate the Host that was "buried" and "resurrected" on

Easter.[176] Moreover, Clopton's will insisted that this liturgical drama be acted at his

sepulcher over his very remains. Before his death, Clopton had already built and

decorated (with verses from Lydgate, no less) the chapel where he would be interred. In

that sense, he became "both director and player in the devotional threater of his Suffolk

village." Indeed, it was "the bones of John Clopton, family and parish patriarch, as much

as the reserved host wrapped in its symbolic gravecloth, that enacted the death of

Christ."[177] Gibson also cites John Baret, whose will prescribed an ornate, allegorical

funeral in which five men would dress in black to symbolize Christ's wounds, and five

women would wear white to symbolize "oure ladyes fyve joyes."[178] That Baret could

conceive of his remains as part of this allegorical drama, and that he knew the audience

would understand the symbolism offers us a snapshot into the East Anglian mind. We

will see how the drama to come out of the region also sanctified "the secular" and

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[174] For a longer account of East Anglian economics and its connection to the sponsorship of art, see Victor I. Scherb, *Staging faith: East Anglian drama in the later Middle Ages*, (Madison [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 19-30.

[175] Recall that Margery Kempe was also from East Anglia, and also participated in this conflation of secular and sacred.

[176] Each year until Reformation put a stop to the practice, the Host (following the doctrine of transubstantiation) was 'buried' in burial clothes on Good Friday and 'resurrected' on Easter Sunday.

[177] Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, 93. Gibson's study also demonstrates the guilty consciences of some of these richer wool merchants, whose wills often attempted to make up for the capitalistic practices that made them their fortune. Some of the wills list examples of financial exploitation, which makes the writers seem much like a richer version of Hawkin.

[178] Ibid. 79.

celebrated "the human concerns of its community as a manifestation of its ecclesiastical preoccupations."[179] In a very real sense, physical, costumed bodies were the site of spiritual narratives, and the plays reinforce the connection between social practices and devotional behavior.

The early moralities approach allegory in a remarkably regressive way. The very first such play was the *Pride of Life*, which was most likely written in the late 14th century. The earliest extant full length morality is the *Castle of Perseverance* which dates to about 1405. By that time, complex, concrete allegories such as *Piers Plowman* and *Roman de la Rose* had been both written and widely circulated. In that sense, the simplified allegory of the morality plays seems like a literary regression, and its heavy-handed, didactic style comes across as arcane. This style has been explained by many as simply being the product of medieval sermons: the plays were written by the clergy in order to complement the liturgy, and therefore were both traditional and abstract.[180] But the evidence of clerical authorship is less than definitive, and it grows less plausible as the genre evolves. This chapter will study the genre over time as the casts shrank, the staging simplified, and the texts generally adopted pre-professional attributes.

The progress of the genre adds yet another layer of nuance to the story of English humanism, but we have to treat that term with caution. If humanism is the revival of interest in classical learning and models, then these plays do not adhere to this

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[179] Gibson, *Theater,* 42.
[180] The source of this thesis is Owst, but Schmitt, Potter, and Leigh make the connection as well. See David Leigh, "The Doomsday Mystery Play: An Eschatological Morality," in *Medieval English Drama,* eds. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Natalie Crohn Schmitt, "Was there a Medieval Theater in the Round? A Re-Examination of the Evidence," in *Medieval English Drama;* G. R. Owst, *Literature and pulpit in medieval England: a neglected chapter in the history of English letters & of the English people* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1961), 526-45.

narrative.[181] If humanism means a greater emphasis on the individual over the universal, then these plays offer only little evidence of such progression.[182] If however, humanism is the gradual rejection of scholastic models in favor of a greater focus on secular human interests, the plays fit this definition. All of the plays are bound by their consistent focus on man's relation to himself and to the world. Instead of becoming more centered on classical learning, these plays become more explicitly political in their references and more explicitly concrete in their images.[183] As I will show near the end of the chapter, the later moralities also reduce the importance of clerical figures while stressing the need for individual choice. Put another way, all three plays dramatize the perennial anxiety about the relationship between the sacred and the profane, but their language and references become more immediately responsive over time. Furthermore, when we track clothing throughout the performances, we see that it is at the center of any character change, and that the plays fluctuate in their uses of costume. Like in *Piers Plowman,* the texts struggle to define clothing's rightful role in the metaphoric worlds they inhabit.

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[181] The emphasis on classical revival is most powerfully forwarded in Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance thought* (Harper & Bros. Pub, 1961).

[182] The original argument in favor of seeing humanism in this light is Jacob Burckhardt, *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1890).

[183] For more on this, see Robert Black, "Humanism," in *The New Cambridge medieval history*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick, (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 243-277. Black does a good job demonstrating how hard it is to define the intellectual status of a continent over 250 years (1350-1600), but he also comes to a few clear conclusions. First, despite its widespread adoption, humanism's genuine innovations such as the revival of Greek learning, were esoteric in nature. Second, although humanism claimed to offer more concrete solutions than scholasticism, many of the former's defining works and classical translations were no more "concrete" than normative medieval thinkers. Third, humanism's success lay in its ability to convince elites that without it, they were unfit to rule. In other words, humanism spread because it preyed on the elitism of the nobles and created a new standard by which a gentleman could be judged. In that sense, it was a fashion. For an even fuller, albeit similar take, see Charles G. Nauert, *Humanism and the culture of Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

1. *Castle of Perseverance* and the Trouble of Abstraction

The Castle of Perseverance is the earliest surviving complete morality play.[184] Its plot is more comprehensive than the others, but its pattern (Man begins in a neutral state, falls, and then is redeemed) nevertheless fits most. The play opens with long speeches from Flesh, the World, and the Devil, accompanied by the Deadly Sins. Then we meet Mankind,[185] who is "nakyd," "febyl," and accompanied by a Good and Bad Angel.[186] Over the course of the play the two angels fight for Mankind's soul, and Mankind is first won over by pleasure. Soon Penance and the Good Angel convince him to repent and put him in the Castle of Perseverance at the center of the stage. Then he is tempted by Greed, but before he is able to sin again, he is struck down by Death, defended by Mercy, and eventually pardoned.

The path is rather predictable, and would have been so for the audience. Beyond the plot, the symbolism of the play is also both stale and pedantic. The Castle represents a retreat from the world and an embrace of virtuous spirituality, whereas the World represents any number of noxious temptations that will distract Mankind from righteous devotion. As Schmitt summarizes, "Outside the castle man is in exile and wilderness. All is shown from the perspective in which the war for man's salvation is the central reality, a very inward view in which that which acts upon the embattled self—world, flesh, and

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[184] I should say that *Castle* is nearly complete. Two leaves are missing from the manuscript, which means about 200 out of over 3000 lines are missing. The earliest extant morality play is actually *The Pride of Life,* but most of the play is missing.
[185] The multiple instantiations of the character Mankind may easily be confused with the play, *Mankind.*
[186] *Castle,* 278-9.

devil—are things of equal reality."[187] Unlike some of the other plays we will look at in

this chapter, *Castle's* theology is unflinchingly orthodox. While Owst's claim that all

medieval plays were mere complements to medieval sermons is a generalization, *Castle's*

overt messaging fits his description best.

Given its tremendous scope and extensive production requirements, one has to

wonder how it was ever produced at all.[188] Like *Mankind* and *Wisdom, Castle* survives in

the *Macro* manuscript, but it is unique in one very particular detail. Preceding the play,

the manuscript contains detailed stage directions. The staging was to be made up of five

scaffolds, four of which corresponded to figures and compass points: God in the east,

World in the west, Flesh in the south, and the Devil in the north. The fifth scaffold was

Greed, which was in the northeast. While Greed's awkward positioning has caused

Klausner to posit that it is morally neutral and can be used for good or ill, we never once

see Greed generate anything other than temptation in the play.[189] There was also a Castle,

which naturally serves as a centerpiece. More difficult to interpret is the ditch around the

scaffolds, which has been taken to either separate the paying from non-paying audience,

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[187] Natalie Crohn Schmitt, "The Idea of a Person in Medieval Morality Plays," *Comparative Drama* 12, no. 1 (1978): 25.

[188] That is to say, in England. French productions were larger, longer, and more ambitious. The longest extant French drama is 60,000 lines long, 20 times that of *Castle.* They often required entire communities, audiences of several thousand, and admission prices. By contrast, *Castle of Perseverance,* along with most of the English plays, did not charge admission. English spectators of the York Cycle could choose to pay for a seat on a scaffold or contribute to a collection. French spectators *had* to pay. See Lynette Muir, "Medieval English Drama: The French Connection," in *Contexts for Early English Drama,* ed. Marianne Briscoe and John C. Coldeway (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1989).

[189] I think a more plausible interpretation is that Greed is unique among the sins in its capacity to draw men away from God, and that it operates apart from the World. See Klausner's intro to the text of the play in the website.

or to be a moat that surrounds both the actors and audience in a universalizing *platea.*[190]

In either case, if the plan is taken seriously, it describes theater in the round with a

massive, unwieldy set. The text does contain gaps for where town names might be

inserted, which suggests that the playwright expected the play to move; however, the

complexity of the staging calls any amount of mobility into question.

The casting requirements of the play are also extensive. Depending on the degree

to which doubling was used, the cast would have had to include more than 20 actors, and

perhaps as many as 36. In this way, the play echoes the earlier *Pride of Life,* in that the

latter also had a huge cast, a complex set of multiple scaffolds, and a long running time.

For both shows, the taxing amounts of people, materials, and money that each

performance required distinguish them from the later *Macro* plays. As the 15th century

wore on, the casts became leaner, the sets smaller, and the plays altogether more mobile.

If *Castle* was ever actually performed, it would have necessitated a massive initial capital

investment in a way *Mankind* and *Hickescorner* did not.[191]

However difficult a single performance might have been to produce, I want to

focus on the play's theatricality because the optics of the staging and the effort to build it

betray deep anxieties about the encroaching influence of greed and the need to physically

separate the audience from worldly influence.[192] As I stated above, while *Castle*'s

theology is commonplace, its particular focus on Covytyse makes it stand out. Indeed,

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[190] For instance, see Richard Southern, *The medieval theatre in the round: a study of the staging of The castle of perseverance and related matters* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1975), 123-42; William Tydeman, *English medieval theatre, 1400-1500* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1986), 78-85.

[191] Of the other extant moralities not specifically covered here, *Wisdom, Everyman, Mundus et Infans, and Youth*, none of them require more than 10 actors.

[192] Though no proof of any actual performance has been found, the critical consensus has held that its very existence in the manuscript suggests it was.

there are fifteen vices on stage, but ambition and greed are far more dangerous than the others, and far more capable of turning Mankind against God. Having made Greed into enemy number one, the play erects literal walls between Mankind and the noxious forces of the world. Unfortunately, as we will see, the play's costumes undercut the power of those walls to keep the world at bay.

When we first meet Mankind, he is naked and confused:

> Ful feynt and febyl I fare you beforn.
>
> I am *nakyd* of lym and lende
>
> For schame I stonde and schende.
>
> As Mankynde is schapyn and schorn.
>
> I not wedyr to gon ne to lende
>
> To helpe myself mydday nyn morn. [193]

In his opening speech, which goes on for another 30 lines, Mankind stresses his own nudity four times. Although it's unclear if the actor would have actually been nude, the repetitiveness of the verse provides the actor with the potential to play up whatever costume choices the acting troupe had made.[194] Whether naked or not, whether humorous or dour, the text nevertheless equates a lack of clothing with helplessness and a lack of identity. Mankind is very much like a child or a figure of Adam. In later morality plays—perhaps out of a desire to avoid any controversial costume decisions—Mankind is given a simple gown to mark his spiritual neutrality. Here, the author's refusal to commit

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[193] *Castle*, 278-283.
[194] *Castle of Perseverance* is not known for its sense of humor, but the beginning offers the potential for a few laughs.

to any clothing speaks to the difficulty of dressing the protagonist. In a society so delineated by fabric, any clothing classifies the actor on stage. But the absence of clothing at the outset does not so much resolve the dilemma of clothing an Everyman, as delay the inevitable directorial choice. He is not innocent but confused.

In the introduction and the previous chapter, I demonstrated how clothing was heavily politicized in the Late Middle Ages and how material clothing carried allegorical valences, and vice versa. Moralists, poets, and East-Anglians (i.e. Margery Kempe) understood the complex, symbolic way material clothing was interpreted in the real world. For a text wishing to demonstrate how to build barriers to keep worldly influences out, the very existence of material costumes complicates any of the play's lines. Even if that actor resides in the Castle (where the world is kept out), he is still wearing a garment of some material that places him on a social spectrum. The optics belie the ostensibly ascetic values.

The text returns to material and metaphorical dress over and over, but it does so in an inconsistent way. Before Mankind's first speech, the Secondus Vexillator of the play's bann introduces some of the onstage virtues, namely Concyens, who is "prycked ful pore," that is to say, dressed humbly.[195] The image is reminiscent of the Virtues who accompanied Will in *Piers Plowman.* While the other virtues do not have their clothing described, they are all working to help man restore "clennesse" to his "sowle" which has

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[195] *Castle,* 44.

"soylyd" with sins and sores.[196] The reliance on visual expression continuously reinforces the exterior nature of sin even as it will later equate fine clothing with its opposite.

Just fifty lines later, the First Speaker predicts that in his old age, Mankind will become greedy but have his wealth stolen by a thief, "wyth a torne hod,/I-Wot-Nevere-Who schal be hys name, hys clothis be ful thynne."[197] The play confirms these claims, in that near death, Mankind is visited by a boy named Garcio,[198] who does indeed seize his wealth and wear his clothes. The Boy first enters flaunting his stolen garments, and he immediately thanks Mankind for "thi grete gyfte."[199] The implication is that his new "wedys" are Mankind's old ones. Garcio adds that he is entitled to Mankind's possessions because the World granted them to him. The message is simple: greed only provides wealth until a younger, greedier man claims that same wealth for himself. Nevertheless, the fine "wedys" which Garcio sports are complex. In a way, they represent continuity between Garcio and Mankind—Garcio will inherit Mankind's predicament all too soon—but they also represent simple newfound wealth. In this moment, although the clothes cannot be divorced from their overt moral valences, they are explicitly material goods. "I am com to have al that thou hast," Garcio tells Mankind, "Ponndys, parkys, and every place./Al that thou hast gotyn fyrst and last."[200] For as much as the play may wish to lampoon the search for financial security, it also showcases rich, desirable clothing. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Margery Kempe donned similar clothing explicitly to make her neighbors jealous. Thus, at the moment when the play is supposed to be highlighting the

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[196] *Castle*, 40-53.
[197] *Castle,* 109-110. A thief with a torn hood, named I Never Know Who. His clothes will be yours.
[198] Garcio means boy, but it can also mean "knave."
[199] *Castle*, 2909.
[200] *Castle*, 2934-6.

negative effects of Greed, the costumes ironically showcase one of the concrete benefits of Greed—fine clothing— that any audience member would have immediately appreciated.

The most sustained conversation about clothing comes in the exchange between Mankind and the World, in which the World continuously cites fine clothing as the central reason for Mankind to betray the Good Angel. Mankind's desire for material gain is not surprising, although his formulation of that ambition, "I wolde be ryche in gret aray," is odd. Over and over he expresses this specific wish, linking the acquisition of riches merely with "gret aray."[201] Being "ryche" can grant you many privileges, but Mankind is fixated on the manipulation of his exterior appearance above eating fine foods or wine, buying land, or gaining political influence. It seems as though Mankind, as the sumptuary laws would have it,[202] equates consumption with identity: the one comes with the other. Indeed, the play is so obsessed with clothing as the great evil that it misses an opportunity to demonize a host of other temptations. Why?

John Watkins' answer to this question is both provocative and incomplete. He argues that the play highlights greed in order to discourage any sins leading to economic ambition. At a time when social mobility was a threat to social order, anything that might encourage social mobility was shunned. However, as Watkins makes clear, that same argument can be applied to virtually all of the morality plays—anxiety related to the "maelstrom of cultural forces loosening the communal ties that governed a stable,

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[201] See *Castle,* 380-600, where Mankind makes that connection explicit at least 4 times.
[202] In the Introduction, I explained how the sumptuary laws equated status with consumption.

hierarchical society" was not unique to *Castle,* or to the morality plays as a whole.[203] So while I think Watkins' summation is helpful, it also runs the risk of flattening *Castle* into a century's worth of conservative writings and neglecting that which makes the play different: its stage plan.[204] But before we can think about how the staging commented on contemporary anxieties, it is worth elaborating on some of the specific issues that troubled the 15th century church.

In "The World of the 15th Century Church", John Van Engen outlines some of the pervading tensions beyond social mobility that troubled the clergy.[205] He highlights in particular the ubiquitous mixing of the sacred and the profane.[206] For instance, the Corpus Christi processions that grew in prominence during the period, "embodied social rank while offering communal entertainment and personal religion."[207] Van Engen further documents how saints and altars began to be decorated with the latest fashions, turning objects of devotion into models of secularity. Even political enemies, such as Joan of

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[203] John Watkins, "The Allegorical Theatre: Moralities, Interludes, And Protestant Drama," in *The New Cambridge medieval history*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 767-8. Watkins' argument is more or less the standard. His take on the morality plays from *King of Life* to *Magnyfycence* is that they are permutations on the same theme, and he stresses their fundamental similarity throughout.

[204] Stanley Garner has pointed out how the study of medieval drama often ignores theatricality and difference because of the "classroom view of *Everyman* as the paradigmatic morality-a misleading choice, since of all the moralities Everyman seems (at first glance) to be the least dependent on performance" (273).

[205] For a longer take on the same content, see Gerhart B. Ladner , *The Idea of Reform* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959).

[206] John Van Engen, "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church," *Church History* 77 (2008), 257-284. This mixing is, of course, not unique to the 15th century. We saw it in *Piers Plowman* earlier. However, Van Engen insists that such concerns reached a crescendo leading up to the Reformation. For more medieval examples of calls for reform, see Mary Theresa Hall, "Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 38 (2007). For more on the church's attempts to root out Greed through reform, see Michael D. Bailey, "Religious Poverty, Mendicancy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages," *Church History* 72 (2003).

[207] For more on this, see Erik Paul Weissengruber, "The Corpus Christi Procession in medieval York: a symbolic struggle in public space," *Theatre Survey* 38 (1997).

Arc, were tried for heresy while "English propaganda promulgated the war effort through church rites and the cult of St. George."[208] This mixing spurred much of the reform movements with the clergy for the next 200 years, and much of the calls for "reform" or "renewal" centered on restoring a purity in the church that had somehow lost.[209] While this call was hardly new to the Middle Ages—the Franciscan critique was 200 years old when *Castle* was written—its volume rose as the era slouched towards the 16th century.

Into this compromised world eager for reform enters *Castle of Perseverance,* with a message of order, boundaries, and patient poverty. Indeed, everything about the play works to impart structure to a society too compromised by greed. From the equal numbers of Virtues and Vices, to the clearly demarcated scaffolds of the set, to the climactic conflict where each virtue confronts its opposite, the "play's almost compulsive drive towards symmetric categorization measures its struggle to discipline a world that resists received ethical models. "[210] Even the verse of the text contains elaborate rhyme schemes with an even more ornamental pattern of stanzas. Michael Kelley's article on the "flamboyant style" of *Castle* catalogues the 319 stanzas. He primarily focuses on the rhyme scheme (which is mostly abababcddc but sometimes switches to the shorter ababcdddc). What Kelley's deeply formalistic analysis shows is that the individual stanzas not only contain complex rhyme schemes, but also contribute to larger patterns wherein sequences of conversations between groups of three characters are given the exact same number of stanzas throughout the play. Even if the audience

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[208] Van Engen, "Multiple Options," 265.
[209] Gerald Strauss, "Ideas of Reformatio and Renovatio from the Middle Ages to the Reformation," in *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Jr.et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 2-30.
[210] Watkins, "Allegorical Theater," 769.

would not have noticed it, the play's versification reinforced the idea of an ordered universe.

The castle took center stage in this highly organized storyworld. While encouraging Mankind to enter the fortification, the Good Angel admonishes him to not only forsake greed, but to also forsake worldly goods in general. He finds salvation not in wholesome labor (as will be the case in *Mankind)* but in retreating from the spaces where temptation of any kind may exist: that is to say, he finds salvation by separating himself from the world. The physical castle provides a space where worldly influences have not penetrated and man can be insulated from the tireless vices that would threaten his soul. By listening to his Good Angel, Man can escape his economic situation, eschew worldly responsibilities, and establish strict boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Further, the plot suggests Mankind can do so while still alive. Likewise, the broader playing space—especially if the ditch circling the stage also circled the audience— physically separates the audience from the world. There is a literal castle to behold, after all, and seeing the play would have given viewers a chance to retreat from their own sinful desires. As such, the elaborate construction reinforces the message of the play's text while insisting on the possibility of erecting actual barriers between Vice and Virtue.

The problem for the playwright was that he was limited by the horizons of expectations of his viewers, who had complicated understandings of clothing in life and in narrative. The text used contemporary, secular paradigms of identity—that is clothing and its degree of finery—to describe spiritual states, all the while oscillating between more material (i.e. the Boy's *wedys)* or conceptual (the "poor" clothing of Concyens). It

is hard to establish a clear read on any of the clothes because they each contain multiple, divergent valances. The text attempts to establish a reality where borders remain secure and convince the audience of its reality, but it relies on signs already too compromised to control. Put another way, while the play ostensibly is telling us to retreat from the world, it can only describe those choices in material terms. The very text demonstrates what the staging cannot: however many ditches the audiences dig or scaffolds they erect, they cannot put up a barrier between the material world and the spiritual realities. Even as he enters the castle, Mankind carries with him his coat, an object that had taken on both material and spiritual significance. The coat is many things, but for the play's main conceit, it is a Trojan horse, undermining the call to purification.

To sum up, what some might dismiss as "conservative" allegory[211] is in fact an attempt on the part of 15th century clergy to fight the sense that religion had become hopelessly mixed with base society. *Castle of Perseverance* is an explicit attempt to distinguish and physically separate the sacred from the profane. There is a platea[212] where worldly concerns are rampant, and a castle where mankind is protected from those temptations. The stage plan, with its actual castle and ditch surrounding the audience, attempts to recreate that enclave, to provide a respite from the economic forces that the play is so anxious about. However, such an artistic process was problematic from the start in that the text relied on contemporary paradigms of identity, and therefore alloyed itself

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[211] Lewis is particularly dismissive of 15th-century allegories like *Castle,* see Lewis *Allegory of Love*, 232-296.
[212] A neutral acting space.

with the material. The Castle could not keep the material clothing out, which only confirmed contemporary anxieties.

2. *Mankind* and the Universal Personified.

Mankind has enjoyed critical popularity for some time,[213] but its unorthodox staging, unique characters, and reliance on humor have frustrated those who want to fit it nicely into the same generic category as *The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom,* or *Everyman. Mankind* fits the dimensions that Potter ascribes to the genre, in that it eventually discourages focus on worldly interests.[214] However, its theatrical effectiveness complicates its theology; the ostensibly shunned vices steal the show.[215]

Like *Castle, Mankind* tells the story of the character Mankind, who begins morally before giving in to temptation, and is later redeemed. The play begins with a Latin-speckled sermon from Mercy, the only positive influence in the play, however that sermon is interrupted by Mischief, who along with Nought and Nowadays make up the trio of Vices. For the next few hundred lines, the three Vices attempt to turn Mankind against Mercy, but he resists and continues to labor with his trusty hoe. Frustrated, the Vices call on their senior, Titivillus, who is able to trick Mankind into thinking Mercy is dead. Thus convinced, Mankind agrees to stop farming, join their gang, and help them beat up an unrecognized Mercy. Later, Mankind repents and is forgiven in death. The play ends with another short sermon.

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[213] For example, Garner "Theatricality," Stock "Structural Unity," and Paula Neuss, "Active and Idle Language: dramatic images in *Mankind,"* in *Medieval Drama,* ed. Neville Denny (London: Edward Arnold, 1973).
[214] See Potter, *English Morality Play*, 30-47.
[215] For more on *Mankind's* theatricality, see Garner, "Theatricality," 272-280.

Potter argues that *Mankind* was for rural audiences on the basis of its low humor, repeated sexual jokes, and characterization of Man as a farmer. The first two reasons are obviously reductive: Shakespeare relied on plenty of low humor, and it didn't drive his London crowds away. The last is more compelling, but ultimately speculative. It's more accurate to say that *Mankind* was written for a touring cast in East Anglia. Indeed, a range of scholars have asserted that *Mankind* was meant to be performed indoors, which would indicate a more urban audience.[216]

In either case, *Mankind* was built to be moved. At only 900 lines, it is remarkably short. The manuscript is missing a single leaf which would add 70 or 80 lines, but even including the leaf, the running time would have been a third of *Castle's. Mankind* also requires a smaller cast of no more than six actors, and it could have been performed by four depending on the speed and complexity of the costume changes.[217] The staging is also minimal, and while the play calls for an especially ornate costume for Titivillus, the figure standing in for the Chief Vice, that is its only significant material requirement.[218] A group of four or six actors would have been able to arrive, perform the play, and collect their fees in less than two hours. We see similar touring capability epitomized in *Mundus et Infans,* another morality from about 1508, which require as few as two actors to

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[216] Clopper is especially insistent on this argument, and Kelly is amenable.

[217] See Potter, *English Morality Play*, 30.

[218] For more on this, see Neville Denny, "Aspects Of The Staging Of "Mankind," *Medium Ævum.* 43 (1974): 252-263. Denny makes the observation that the script addresses two types of audience members, suggesting that the seating arrangement or staging somehow differentiated between those of different statuses. From there, he concludes that the staging must have had that function, and that the most likely venue would have been the yard in front of an inn. He makes for a convincing argument, although if the play moved, the actors must have been willing to adjust the script to fit different venues or audiences.

familiarize themselves with a skeleton script. *Mundus* actually calls for improvisation, lowering the bar for preparation even further.

Mankind* is also dramatically different from its generic forbears in that it specifically designates a moment for collecting a fee from the audience. It comes about halfway into the performance, just as Titivillus offers his first lines, but before he enters onstage. The three vices, New Guise, Nought, and Nowadays, then stop the play: "We shall gather mony onto," New Guise says, "Ellys ther shall no man hym se."[219] The "hym" the vice is referring to is Titivillus, whose bombastic costume must have been one of the main attractions of the show. For the next 15 lines, the vices bicker and joke amongst themselves. The moment is unique in English drama up until that point, in that it uses a pivotal moment in the play to leverage money from its audience.[220]

The shorter script, leaner cast, improvised set, and designated collection have led some to argue that *Mankind* must have been performed by a set of roaming professionals.[221] Even though I find that argument plausible, Neville Denny makes the essential argument that we do not actually know how *Mankind* was performed or by whom: "We have very little justification, for instance, for assuming the existence of a band of professional players in the first place, on tour in the provinces. A professional company may have been involved, roaming widely and perhaps annually through East

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[219] *Mankind,* 457-8.
[220] For more on the collection, see Lawrence M. Clopper, "Mankind" and Its Audience," *Comparative Drama* 8 (1974): 347-355. Clopper makes the point that the play must have stopped for a significant amount of time in order to collect all the money if only the three actors playing the Vices were doing it. I'd only add that the script is *only* 15 lines long, suggesting that if the play did indeed stop for longer than a few moments, the actors would have had to improvise more bickering to fill up the space.
[221] See Edward Gordon Craig and Franc Chamberlain, *On the art of the theatre* (London: Routledge, 2009), 350.

Anglia. Just as easily it could have been a group of local amateurs performing within a single parish. We have no means of telling."[222] In an undeniable sense, he's right that we do not know exactly how *Mankind* was staged. However, I would argue that even if professionals didn't tour with it, they should have. The play's improved efficiency demonstrates a new kind of sophistication with respect to staging and a new emphasis on the economics of theological instruction.

To further drive this point about theatrical sophistication home, I want to briefly discuss the other morality play included in the *Macro* manuscript, *Wisdom.* At 1163 lines, it is a little longer than *Mankind* and sports a much larger cast. The problem for *Wisdom* is that it seems to have been written by someone who was more familiar with scholastic theology than with theater. After Mind (the character standing in for Man) is tempted by the Vices, dancers enter, turning the scene into a spectacle of debauched ballet. But after this, the play almost disintegrates into a long lecture from Wisdom, and the characters are unable to offer dramatic reasons for their exits or entrances. We get the expected contrition and forgiveness, but instead of seeing it portrayed, there is a long explanation of the careful process by which salvation is brought about. The reliance on monologue and the breakdown of character renders this a dramatic failure, despite the learned theology that undergirded it.[223]

Assuming *Wisdom* was written within a decade of *Mankind,* it therefore offers us yet another data point by which we might judge the level of professionalization. The

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[222] Denny, "Aspects of Staging," 254.
[223] For more on *Wisdom's* dramatic foibles, see Arnold Williams, "The English Moral Play before 1500," *Annuale Medievale* 4 (1963): 14-15. Potter has a nice explanation of the play's theology, pg 50-52.

former is an earnest attempt to dramatize a lecture, but its tonal inconsistency gives off the distinct smell of the amateur.[224] The latter understands how to blend entertainment with instruction, and how to wring the maximum amount of fees from its audience. Even though we cannot be certain of how it was performed, *Mankind's* author understood how to exploit a popular narrative for monetary gain and pared down the cast in order to maximize profits. It is too well designed to have been limited to a single parish.

I'm emphasizing the potentially cynical aspects of the play in part because I think it is ultimately more interested in the material politics of East Anglia than the intricate theology of its conclusion. We saw in *Castle* how the play focused on Greed as an all-encompassing threat. *Mankind,* by contrast, emphasizes the importance of labor, and the need to return to traditional roles.

One of Murakami's most significant insights into the play is that our protagonist, Mankind, is best described as a yeoman, rather than some universal figure. She points to Mankind's early speeches whose "aureate complexity, Latinate diction, and neologisms mark the East Anglian 'high style.'" However, Mankind does not maintain that rhetorical style throughout; he adopts the shorter, harsher style of the vices as he becomes more entangled in their schemes. In other words, he changes his cadence to fit his

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[224] In his book on flamboyant drama (Michael R. Kelley, *Flamboyant drama: a study of The castle of perseverance, Mankind, and Wisdom* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979.)) Michael Kelley makes the case that *Wisdom* is best understood numerically. He shows how the numbers 3, 7, and 10 dominate the play in terms of actors on stage, stanzas in speeches, or repetitions of actions. Three, especially, comes up often, and it has obvious significance. I have no problem with this argument, and the play may very well have been, as Kelley surmises, meant for private viewings within monasteries. I am generally skeptical of numerology in interpretation because you can always find objects to count, but even if we take Kelley's word for it, his argument only reinforces my claim that *Wisdom* was not written by a master dramaturge but rather by a theologian who may have wanted to liven up a sermon.

surroundings, which was associated with "ambitious lower gentry" rather than with peasants.[225]

To complement Murakami's point, after Mankind's fall, the Vices shorter his ambivalent side gown into a "jackett." Most immediately, the gesture associates fashion sense with vice. But just as important, the 1463 Sumptuary Laws barred the short jacket to anyone under the rank of lord, esquire, or gentleman, "unless it be of such a length that the same may cover his privy members and buttocks."[226] The specific reference to jacket and the length makes it clear that Mankind is attempting to change his social status, and by attaching the *moral* failure to a *social* transgression, the play links fashion with facades, and limits the availability of mercy to the conservative adherence to social roles.

Of course, the jacket is not the only reference to clothing throughout the play. The first specific line about fashion comes before Mankind ever enters, when Mercy differentiates between the "good new gyse," which he condones, and the "vycyouse gyse," which he condemns without specifying exactly what either one means. The pun here on "gyse" as behavior and gyse as appearance conflates the two into one concept: those who adopt virtuous behavior will look it, and vice versa. It's appropriate given that New Gyse himself will later offer to change Mankind's coat. But the pun also highlights the symbolic way morality plays approached material choices: Mercy's language does not allow us to distinguish between the moral and the material.

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[225] Ineke Murakami, *Moral play and counterpublic: transformations in moral drama, 1465-1599,* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 24.

[226] See Great Britain. *The Statutes at Large: from Magna Charta, to the end of the reign of King Henry the Sixth : to which is prefixed, a table of all the publick and private statutes during that time Vol. 1, Vol. 1*, ed. Owen Ruffhead. Printed by Mark Baskett and others, 3:36:2.

There is a moment, however, where the play attempts to drive a wedge between the two gyses that Mercy combines. In his first speech, Mankind tell us that he composed of two parts: "a body and of a soul, of condycyon contrarye./Betwyx them tweyn ys a grett dyvisyon."[227] The dualism invoked here reflects orthodox thinking, but the full performance belies the "dyvisyon" Mankind insists upon. For one thing, Mankind's costume expresses his state every time he changes, making no distinction between his appearance and his spiritual status. The vices obsess over the same coat, arguing about how to shape and cut the fabric as they consider how to twist and manipulate Mankind. Even when we cannot see the character on stage, we are reminded that his clothes will reflect his identity, both with respect to his distance from Mercy and his increasing wealth. The dualism that Mankind asserts is even less convincing in performance. Garner has argued that in the morality plays, "the stage constitutes not simply an added effect, but a fundamental condition of meaning."[228] On stage, a single actor playing Mankind— holding the spade, taking off and donning new clothing, first arguing with Mercy, and later groveling before him in some form of afterlife—reinforces the singularity of identity and the indivisibility of man.

In the late 15th century, East Anglia was particularly ripe for "socioeconomic innovations," due to its proximity to major ports on the continent, its high percentage of freemen, and its status as one of England's most commercialized regions.[229] R. H.

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[227] *Mankind,* 194-5.
[228] Garner, "Theatricality," 275. Beckwith makes a similar claim about Biblical drama. See Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: social relation and symbolic act in the York Corpus Christi plays*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
[229] For more on the farming techniques that allowed East Anglia to flourish, see David Charles Douglas, *The social structure of medieval East Anglia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), and Alan R. H. Baker and

Tawney linked rising productivity with increased rents that threatened the holdings of peasants who lacked the coin.[230] Enter the capital-rich yeomen, who purchased these traditional holdings and converted them into larger and larger fields. Through their complicity in the enclosures, which cut off peasants from using the common land, some yeomen were able to become reasonably wealthy. Worse than depriving individual peasants from access to land, enclosures also destroyed villages. In 1459, around the time that *Mankind* was written, John Rous of Warwick made the first extant complaint of the yeomen, whom he referred to as the "avaricious men." [231] He was still complaining about enclosure twenty years later, and by that time had compiled a list of 60 villages that had been abandoned. Christopher Dyer also mentions the case of Ralph Wolseley. Wolseley acquired the rights to a large area near the town of Rugely and proceeded to enclose it in 1465. He then built several buildings on the land, including a brewery. "His novelties provoked the local population to riot, mainly because the enclosure deprived them of common pasture, but also because [Wolseley] threatened the local ale brewers."[232] Dyer emphasizes that the local peasants found the new behavior threatening, and often organized either violent protests or sustained legal challenges in order to combat it.[233] We also know that at the same time, as agricultural production grew and yeoman grew richer,

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R. A. Butlin, *Studies of field systems in the British Isles (*Cambridge [England]: University Press, 1973) 302-308.

[230] See R. H. Tawney, *The agrarian problem in the sixteenth century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

[231] Christopher Dyer, *Making a living in the middle ages: the people of Britain 850-1520* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 351.

[232] Ibid., 345. See also 344-351 for a longer analysis of the broader practice of enclosure.

[233] Dyer also cites Thomas More as having complained that "the sheep, once a meek and gentle beast, had become an eater of men"(351).

they often donned imported, illegal textiles.[234] In that environment, *Mankind's*

playwright equated the sumptuous dress with the dereliction of duty and the undermining

of the community. Such a yeoman was not accepting "ther ordynance," and was therefore

unable to receive Mercy.[235]

     Mankind's fate relies on his labor and the proximity of his trusty spade.

Throughout the play, the spade takes on a number of symbolic valences.[236] As the prop

Mankind first enters carrying, the spade evokes the universal image of Adam. When he

uses the spade to beat back Nowadays, it recalls the Virtues in *Psychomachia* who beat

back the Vices. When Titivillus plans Mankind's fall, the spade's centrality in the plan

links the tool with his earlier virtuous state. We get the same sense when he finally does

fall some 300 lines later; he laments using his spade, and asks the vices for forgiveness

while planning to profit from others' labor. In other words, while the prop serves several

functions throughout the performance, the text gradually refines its significance. By the

end, the spade is the traditional role of laborer for the peasant, by which Mankind beats

back the noxious forces of the socially transgressive World. "To eschew ydullnes, I do yt

myn own selffe," Mankind tells us, just as he begins to till.[237] That is, when he is at his

most holy. Only by recovering that spade—only by reinstating some form of idealized

feudalism—can Mankind take up his rightful role in society and thereby ensure his

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[234] For more on the tension surrounding the entrepreneuring peasants, the growing profits of East Anglia, and the exotic dress of some Yeoman, see Christopher Dyer, "The Agrarian Problem," in *Landlords and tenants in Britain, 1440-1660: Tawney's Agrarian problem revisited*, ed. Jane Whittle (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK : The Boydell Press, 2013).
[235] *Mankind,* 164.
[236] For more on the spade, see Murakami, *Moral Play*, 22 and Kathleen Ashley, "Titivillus and the Battle of Words in Mankind," *Annuale Medievale,* 16 (1975): 128-50.
[237] *Mankind,* 329.

Mercy. This emphasis on idleness and labor conjures up the image of *Piers Plowman* and overshadows Mercy's theology, refocusing the play again around how labor is organized, not how morality is maintained.[238]

This is a major reason why the play does not feature traditional vices and instead relies on the somewhat interchangeable trio of Naught, Nowadays, and New Guise. Ostensibly, it emphasizes how the world has lost its balance (the kind of balance epitomized in *Castle's* 15 vices and 15 virtues) in that there are three (four if you count Titivillus) noxious forces for Mercy alone to overcome. And indeed, so long as Mankind is alive, Mercy is unable to do so. The author also refused a more elaborate set of vices and virtues because to employ the imagery of the *Psychomachia* would imply that the political problems that plagued 15th century East Anglia (and tempted its wayward members) were congruous with those of Prudentius's fourth century Spain. The point of the play is to deemphasize sins of the flesh by simply excluding them, and to highlight how radically the economic rules have changed. This new form of exploitative capitalism needs to be abandoned in favor of traditional feudal roles.

That political message is also why the voice of the Church and the arbiter of the play, Mercy, is given such a poor part. As has been remarked by most critics, the three vices and their leader Titivillus overshadow or nearly overshadow everyone else. They are charming, funny, dynamic, fashionably clothed, and loud: "While they hold the stage, these figures constitute the heart of the play's diverting theatricality, establishing a stage presence so disrupting that it actually works against the conceptual calm on which

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[238] See Watkins, "Allegorical Theater," 77-78.

allegory and other more abstract levels of comprehension depend."[239] They also interact

with the audience throughout the play, building up a rapport. By contrast, Mercy gives a

conservative, boring speech in a style that is openly mocked by the vices. For instance,

after Mercy's opening speech, Mischief responds by mimicking Mercy's phrasing, "I

beseche yow hertyly, leve yowr calcacyon./Leve yowr chaffe, leve yowr corn, leve yowr

dalyacyon./ Yowr wytt ys lytyll, yowr hede ys mekyll, ye are full of predycacyon."[240] If

the audience members were willing to pay the *Vices* to watch this moral play because

they wanted to see more of them, then they may have found Mischief's argument

compelling, or at least disruptive enough to undercut Mercy's ability to hold their

attention. Later, New Guise criticizes Mercy's use of "Englysch laten," accusing the

latter's rhetoric of being stale and pedantic. To a potentially rural audience who would

have been used to having Latinate phrases lorded over them, Mercy's humiliation may

have seemed like a satisfying comeuppance. And indeed, Mercy's character does not

recover until the epilogue, when he again offers another Latin-laden speech.

This disparity between the theatricality of those the audience is supposed to shun

and the monotony of the most righteous figure has actually caused some critics to

conclude that the middle third of the play is some corruption of the original.[241] But I find

such readings unhelpful, as they limit the late medieval work to an orthodox original,

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[239]Garner Jr., "Theatricality," 276. Garner spends the most time on this point, but it is also highlighted by Watkins. For a radically different take, see Stock, "The Thematic and Structural Unity" which compares Mankind to Job and therefore the three vices to Job's three friends. I think Stock fundamentally misunderstands the fact that the play would have been performed by actors who wanted to entertain as well as instruct. Whatever theological message the text might carry with it, on stage, the bombastic vices are nowhere near as boring as Job's three friends.
[240] *Mankind,* 45-7.
[241] See Arnold Williams, *The drama of medieval England* ([East Lansing]: Michigan State University Press, 1961), 156 (quoted in Garner).

which they imagine could only have been raunchy after later revisions. Such an interpretation is guilty of the very historical idealism that *Mankind* is, in that it is trying to preserve some pure medieval mind whose holiness only fades when alloyed with the base theatrical tastes of later writers. More importantly, this tack of distancing the debauchery from the core of the play distracts from its central conceit. By undercutting Mercy, the text discourages the audience from looking to clerical figures for their salvation, and instead locates the burden of responsibility on the individual. Every man must take up his spade or fall prey to the vices who will inevitably discard him, just as Mankind is discarded and broken by the end.

The bigger point here is that *Mankind's* efficacy is based on its very reliance on concrete imagery and focus. For as much as it contains personified abstractions, the play does not even try to maintain the boundaries between the allegory and the material. If anything, the play conceives of morality as a function of labor choices rather than some abstract internal debate between vices and virtues. Greed here is not bad because it, as *Castle* would have it, inevitably leads to some vicious cycle. Greed is bad because it encourages a specific group of people, yeomen, to contribute to the growing trend of social mobility that was devastating a lot of villages and peasants.

This specificity is most clear when the vices consider visiting several named townspeople as part of their plot to tempt Mankind. W.K. Smart has worked to identify at least some of the individuals in the play, such as "Master Alyngton of Botysam", whom Smart explains was "nine times a member of the commission of the peace" in Bottisham

and partly responsible for both allocations of property and maintaining the peace.[242]

Given his participation in several property deals and his upward mobility (Alyngton eventually became a member of the Privy Council), the play seems to be targeting him with particular scorn. Nought decides to spare Alyngton while planning to rob others, suggesting the latter's complicity in similar foul play. Smart also identifies the "Master Woode of Fullburn" as Alexander Fullburn, who died some 8 years after the play was written, was a longtime member of the commission of peace in Cambridge, and owned a large amount of property therein. The Vices spare Fullburn again, presumably, because he was helping with their malicious agenda. The list goes on. What's remarkable to me is not that the playwright would know upwardly mobile community members, but that it would go to such lengths as to identify them as being on the vice's team. For any audience member familiar with these men (who were probably changed if and when the play moved to a different region), the public accusation would probably have been one of the more notable moments of the play.[243] Regardless of how compelling Mercy's final, Boethian speech may have been, it was too conventional to compete with the controversial fireworks of the middle third.[244]

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[242] Master Alyngton is mentioned in line 514 of the play. W. K. Smart, "Some Notes on "Mankind," *Modern Philology* 14 (1916): 293-313.

[243] The Vices use Titivillus's appearance to garner more funds from the audience just prior to these lines, which suggests that the demon's costume would have been noteworthy itself. But the lines about the specific townsfolk come within a few dozen's lines of Titivillus's entrance. If this was a play that toured, part of its reputation would have been connected to its ostentatious costume and its willingness to step on toes.

[244] For Murakami, this tension introduces "counterpublics" into the play, whereby the play dramatizes conflicting viewpoints without sufficiently guiding the audience towards one or the other. For more on this, see also Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 75-90, in which Sponsler describes how morality plays often made unruly bodies attractive. I call this the "*Simpsons* Effect". Each episode of *The Simpsons* contained a familiar, conservative lesson about the importance of family, the need for cooperation, or even the physical existence of the soul. However, the show was often portrayed as a menace to children because the antics of

Clothing's role here becomes less about signifying someone's spiritual state than identifying what team he or she is on. We can imagine that the three vices may have worn the flamboyant, revealing clothing that marked some of the most excessive fashions of the time (bold colors, very short jackets, tight hose, etc.), in order to link them with the lower gentry who worked in tandem with yeomen to consolidate land holdings.[245] Moreover, there is good reason, Clopper argues, for Mercy to have been dressed as a Dominican monk because it would allow the play to highlight the pomposity of the Dominicans while maintaining a healthy regard for redemption as a concept.[246] Similarly, the short jacket that Mankind is given marks him as part of Titivillus's proto-capitalism, and its eventual removal pairs him with the "nostalgic feudalism" of Mercy.[247] As such, the ability to tell between moral and material in terms of symbolism is lost: indeed that is the point. Mankind's sins fade in relevance when compared to the political movements that he either espouses or eschews.

3. Hickescorner and Clothing of Dynasticism

I'd like to close this chapter by turning to *Hyckescorner,* the "hybrid" morality from about 1513.[248] *Hyckescorner* is a "hybrid" because it is as interested, or more, in the

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its main character, Bart, nearly always upstaged whatever wisdom a given episode offered. The show does not derive its energy from reinforcing the centrality of the family but rather from Bart's adventures and Homer's stupidity. Nevertheless, if you read a script for the episode about Bart's soul, you might think that *The Simpsons* was a religiously devotional, if entertaining, sitcom. In practice, viewers would probably remember Bart's switching of the hymns for rock ballads in church over the banal concluding message.

[245] Denney, "Staging," 257-8.

[246] Clopper, "Mankind and its Audience," 352.

[247] Murakami, *Moral Play,* 40. For more on the ties between linguistic fluidity and social mobility, see Frank Whigham, *Ambition and privilege: the social tropes of Elizabethan courtesy theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 22-23.

[248] There are remarkably few articles on the play, so it's worth mentioning one of the earliest articles related to the play's date. E.T. Schell, "Youth or Hyckescorner: Which came first?" *Philological Quarterly* 45 (1966), 468-74.

contemporary politics of London than in the spiritual instruction of its characters. As such, the clothing in the play, rather than dramatizing a moral change, emphasizes a change of political allegiance. The plot is familiar if slightly modified.[249] The central character, Pity, befriends Contemplation and Perseverance before falling prey to the influence of Freewill, Imagination, and Hickescorner. After trying to stop a fight between two of his newfound compatriots, Pity is left in the stocks by the three villains, and is later freed by Contemplation and Perseverance. For the rest of the play, the two saviors attempt to convince Freewill and Imagination to repent of their evil ways. After they succeed, the play ends with a prayer.

While the play is one of the least discussed moralities, it is one of two moralities (the other is *Everyman*) mentioned in Thomas Percy's 1766 *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry.* Percy was looking for non-classical roots of Elizabethan drama, and he saw *Hickescorner* as an early forerunner of Elizabethan comedy.[250] Ironically, the attempt to establish truly English roots for Shakespeare led Potter to attribute more merit to Hyckescorner than nearly every critic to follow. For Potter, *Hyckescorner* is satire masquerading as a morality play, and his analysis essentially ends with that dismissal.[251] Bevington and Mackenzie are less disparaging, likening the spirit of the play to that of

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[249] *Hyckescorner* has been classified by some contemporary critics as a moral interlude rather than a morality play, but those terms get confusing because what are now called morality plays were called "interludes" in the Renaissance. See Eleanor Rycroft, "Morality, theatricality, and masculinity in "The interlude of Youth" and "Hick Scorner," in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama.* 465-7; and Bevington *From Mankind to Marlowe*, 9. It is unknown exactly to what degree a 16th-century Englishman would have distinguished an "interlude" from a "moral play", and the ambivalence in terminology coupled with the similarities in structure make modern distinctions seem overly fine.
[250] Thomas Percy and Henry B. Wheatley, *Reliques of ancient English poetry, consisting of old heroic ballads, songs, and other pieces of our earlier poets, together with some few of later date*(New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 118-123.
[251] Potte, *English Morality Plays*, 31.

Mankind, in that both were "written to amuse as well as to chasten."[252] But even in those

observations, there is unease with the play because it does not follow more traditional

structures, and does not identify a representative figure in the way earlier moralities had.

I'm convinced many critics ignored this very early printed drama in part because they did

not know what to do with it.

 Hickescorner is different from its generic predecessors in a few key ways. First, it

abandons the rural pitch for a more urban setting. The play continually references London

practices, landmarks, and the city name itself. When Hyckescorner enters, he claims

responsibility for the sinking of a dozen ships, many of which actually did sink in and

around London in the years leading up to the play's composition. There are also dozens

of references to Newgate, linking especially Freewill with a particular side of the city.

Both Greg Walker and Ian Lancashire argue that the play might have been performed for

the Duke of Suffolk, Henry VIII's close advisor, at a bankside location not far from

where the Globe would be located some 50 years later.[253] The setting is important in part

because it marks the earliest printed city-comedy in English, and in part because the

specific audience allows us to explain the topical allusions more clearly.

 Secondly, it does not dramatize the rehabilitation of the main character so much

as the rehabilitation of the antagonists. We are initially led to believe that this is Pity's

story. He is innocent, well meaning, and powerless—very much the way Mankind is

portrayed in other moralities. However, Pity does not fall so much as he gets physically

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[252] W. Roy Mackenzie, *The English moralities from the point of view of allegory* (New York: Gordian Press, 1966), 39.

[253] See Ian Lancashire, *Two Tudor interludes: the Interlude of Youth, Hick Scorner* (Manchester [England]: Manchester University Press, 1980), 33-34; Greg Walker, *Plays of persuasion: drama and politics at the court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 22.

overpowered, and his redemption is physical—he is let out of the stocks—rather than spiritual. Strangely enough, we do not see Pity again after he is released from the stocks about halfway into the play. Bevington chalks this up to the limitations of a four-man performance: if you need two reformers (Contemplation and Perseverance) to save two sinners (Freewill and Imagination), and you only have four actors, then some of the characters will be absent in the final scene. But that only explains why four characters would be there, not why *those* four were chosen. Pity is not included at the end because his character's journey is over, whereas the two "vices" will learn and grow for the next 400 lines. In fact, even though they fill the role of Vices by enticing and then abandoning the central protagonist, I cannot really refer to Freewill or Imagination as vices because they are neither altogether malicious nor immutable. Their arc is more developed and sustained because the play is simply more interested in resisting the effects of Hyckescorner's influence than it is in dramatizing a universal human experience.

The dynamic portrayals of the villains push the genre by fracturing the typical development of a single protagonist into three different journeys for three different figures. At its most simple, the play takes the convention of static vices and turns them into fully-fledged characters. Even Percy noticed that "the characters here feel less like universalized abstractions" than they do stock characters: "that we need only substitute other names for his personages, and we have real characters and living manners."[254] When we first meet Freewill, he assures us that he "may chose whether I do good or yll,/

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[254] Percy, *Reliques*, 95.

But for all that, I wyll do as me lyst."[255] The moral ambivalence immediately marks him

as an ally to be won (or lost), and he will change allegiances throughout the play.

Imagination follows a similar path. Both are energetic, frenetic, and unmistakably

young.[256] Freewill, like Skelton's Riot, resembles the stock London gallant in that he is a

gambler who is both obsessed with and unable to keep track of money. Early on, he tries

to convince his other two cronies to "begyle some praty wenche/to gette me monaye at a

pynche."[257] The explicitly material nature of the scheme perhaps reflects the reputation of

Charles Brandon, the Duke of Suffolk, whom this play was either played for or about.

Gunn's biography of Suffolk makes the observation that the Duke suffered consistent

financial problems and made a name for himself courting older widows or stripping his

young wards of their lands.[258] Freewill has spent more time in Newgate than Suffolk ever

had to, and is considerably less politically connected, but the contemporary references to

a well-known person would have been hard to ignore.

Imagination is the other side of the gallant: a sex-driven troublemaker who enters

in the stocks after having slept with a "fayre wenche" and been caught in the morning. He

is bleary, and has a fuzzy memory of the previous night. He will remain incorrigible right

up until his conversion, when he imagines it would be easier to be "nose tyde/In a

wenches ars somewhere/Rather than I wolde stande in that grete fere,/For to go up to

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[255] *Hyckescorner,* 160-161.
[256] The play is particularly interested in targeting and gaining the support of the young men in the audience. As discussed above, Imagination and Freewill are unmistakably young men whose conversion would therefore serve as a model for other such gallants. There is also the overhanded quip just before Hyckescorner enters when Freewill asks "Ye, but where is Hyckescorner now?" Imagination says, "Some of these yonge men hath hydde hym in theyr bosomes, I warraunt you." (296-7).
[257] *Hyckescorner*, 408-9.
[258] S. J. Gunn, *Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, c. 1484-1545* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1988), 27-28.

heven."[259] Likewise, just before joining with Contemplation, Freewill spends nearly 50 lines describing his experiences at Newgate, his time in the stocks, and even the power of his reputation to garner bargains. These divergent experiences provide a multiplicity of representations rather than conflating all experiences into a universalized figure.[260]

But if we're being so generous, why not save the titular character, Hyckescorner? We do not see him again after the three villains leave Pity in the stocks, which happens only about halfway into the play. Since he does not enter until 300 lines into the play, he is only onstage for about one-fifth of the performance. This conspicuous absence troubled Bevington and Mackenzie, both of whom blamed the omission on the apparent inattentiveness of the author.[261] Barring any authorial mistake, I think we don't see Hyckescorner again because unlike Freewill and Imagination, he is irredeemable. But that does not really explain how something like scorn is inherently worse than other pernicious impulses, and it does not explain why that character would bear the play's name.

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[259] *Hyckescorner,* 978-981. My suspicion is that lines like these made the play especially difficult for earlier critics to interpret as a morality. Mackenzie in particular felt the need to suppress the coarsity of the play in favor of highlighting what he saw as the allegorical message.

[260] For as much as the play breaks the mold here, we should be careful not to lean on the "individualism" of the play too heavily. As I explain below and others (see Rycroft, "Morality," 468-70) have noted, the plays works by connecting the potential for political upheaval and the misguided antics of the king with the reform of two characters. Their reconciliation at the end may represent Londoner's renewed allegiance in the face of moral change. Freewill and Imagination may be more defined than other protagonists in morality plays, but they still are meant to provide a model for others. Instead of this play adopting individualism, we could more accurately say it qualifies the universalizing impulse of earlier moralities. Freewill and Imagination are not all men; they're 16th century Londoners.

[261] See Mackenzie, *English Moralities,* 42; Bevington, *Mankind to Marlowe*, 139.

I think the key here is to realize that Hyckescorner is really Hick-Scorner, that is to say, Richard-Scorner.[262] In 1514, when the play was most likely written, Richard de la Pole, the last hope for a Yorkist monarch, was in Brittany gathering thousands of soldiers to his cause. De la Pole had fled England in 1501 after his alleged conspiracy against Henry Tudor was discovered. He then traveled throughout Europe searching for political support, finding a sympathetic ear in Louis XII. Louis outfitted Richard with over 12,000 soldiers, far more than Henry VII needed to invade England some 30 years prior. It remains unclear if De la Pole posed a real threat to Henry VIII or was being used by Louis to discourage Henry from invading France that summer. There were apparently hopes that De la Pole would be helped by Scottish forces, but those came to nothing as well. In any event, Henry was threatened enough by the prospect of another claimant that he negotiated a peace treaty with Louis. But even with that treaty in hand, rumors of De la Pole's invasion persisted until 1524, despite numerous attempts on Henry's part to have the former assassinated.[263] It's no mistake then that Hyckescorner only enters after having sailed from abroad, bearing with him some "fyve thousande" foreign vices who will soon infect London.[264]

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[262] This paragraph is largely indebted to Lancashire's work, see in particular pages 239-42. The play was printed in several different spellings: *Hycke Scorner*, *Hick Scorner* and *Dick Scorner* in the 16th century alone.

[263] We have records of spies being interrogated on this topic at least up until 1522, suggesting that even as the threat abated, Henry felt the need to keep tabs on the last White Rose. See G. R. Elton, "Anglo-French relations in 1522: A Scottish Prisoner of War and his interrogation,"*The English Historical Revie* LXXVIII (1963): 310-316.

[264] The fullest account of these events is in J. S. Brewer and James Gairdner, *The reign of Henry VIII from his accession to the death of Wolsey* (London: J. Murray, 1884). For more up to date analysis on De la Pole's actions and their relation to the Duke of Albany, see Alison Hanham, "Edmund de la Pole, defector," *Renaissance Studies.* 2 (1988): 239-250; M A. Hicks, *The Wars of the Roses* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

Read this way, the play becomes less about vice and virtue than about anxieties surrounding political dissidents and the need to repair the political body in order to move forward. Hyckescorner must be resisted not just because he encourages poor behavior but because he destabilizes the state (sinks the ships in London's harbor), upends justice (puts Pity, an innocent man, in the stocks), and encourages foreign meddling in English affairs. Unlike *Castle* or *Mankind* where Mankind converts after he dies and is left destitute by his folly, Imagination and Freewill must be converted rather than punished in order to shore up hegemonic political support.

How then does this politically charged morality handle clothing? There are a number of references to clothing throughout the play. Pity for instance, complains that the "wedes", that is contemporary fashions, have "overgroweth the corne," and that while rich men have "clothe ynoughe in our clothes...charyte many me lothes."[265] But those references feel boilerplate in the context of 15th and 16th century reformists. If we wanted, we could connect the accusations of excessive ornamentation at the expense of the poor to one anecdote related to Suffolk. Once, at a ceremony, Suffolk donned an immensely valuable gown costing about £200. Although the gown was supposed to be donated to the Garter King of Arms after the ceremony, Suffolk managed to swap the actual gown with a much cheaper one, and seems to have bribed the royal herald to keep quiet.[266] But Pity's language is too vague for that kind of connection, and the story may not have been well known enough to reverberate with the audience.

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[265] *Hyckescorner,* 547-555.
[266] Gunn, *Charles Brandon*, 20-21.

The more explicit references to clothing come towards the end when Freewill and Imagination receive new garments for repenting their pasts. In many ways, we might see this moment as akin to earlier moralities, where the repentant sinner was given a new costume to signify their redemption. But *Hickescorner* places us in a specific political moment in an emphatically material, urban London, and these conversions do not parallel those of earlier morality plays. In *Castle,* Mankind only repents on his deathbed, and in *Mankind,* only after having died. Freewill does not repent for love of God but because he fears punishment from the "Kynge." Imagination is especially resistant to accepting Christ and listening to Perseverance. In the end, he only repents out of a loyalty to Freewill. In other words, while they are converted, the long expositions on the nature of mercy are constrained. This is as much of a political conversion as it is a spiritual one. In this kind of a scene at the end of a distinctly secular play, the acting troupe may have used coats that carried more contemporary political contexts (rather than relying on the plain white robes of clerical imagery) in order to reinforce the play's political message. Perhaps Freewill and Imagination bore the White Rose of Lancaster while under Hyckescorner's influence, and only exchanged that White Rose for the Tudor Rose at the end. Or more pointedly, perhaps they wore blue and yellow (the livery colors of the De la Poles) before exchanging them for Henry's white and green. In either case, the clothing would operate much as it does in *Mankind*, delineating identity through political allegiance, and linking that political camp (in this case, the Tudors) with the restoration of hegemonic norms and religious authority. During the tense summer of 1514, when

London braced for yet another invasion, *Hyckescorner* may have served to entertain its audience while reinforcing Tudor allegiance.

Again, what frustrated Bevington and Mackenzie was their insistence on emphasizing *Hyckescorner's* particular moral message. They were uncertain how to read a play that followed a morality's structure without offering some universalizing figure or any textual exposition on theology, and I think the sheer volume of contemporary references made finding the exact allegorical message harder to discern. The play really only makes sense in light of its connections to the De La Pole and Suffolk, which again speaks to the flexibility of the morality genre.

Conclusion

What we've seen in this chapter is a set of three plays that use a structure of fall and redemption in order to communicate three different political messages. In the process, all three also made heavy use of clothing imagery, but in each case, those costumes carried complicated messages about culture, economy, and fashion. The overall impression is that even as morality plays sought to describe life in the most abstract terms, clothing kept these plays firmly in the realm of the material, aligning ostensibly spiritual concerns with fashion statements. I'd like to close by making five observations:

1) The secondary material is clouded with its emphasis on the theological, and therefore often overlooks the social and political commentary that each of these three plays provides. If medieval criticism was dominated by men for much of its history, then we can also say that it was dominated by those who took a Christian theology for granted. An early example of this is Mackenzie's *English Moralities.* In one section on

Hyckescorner, Mackenzie says, "Leaving out of account the realistic embellishments, which have nothing to do with the main plot, we can interpret the allegory thus..." (43). For him, and many other commentators, the individual details (political satire, humor, characterization) that define the individual plays are less important (indeed, they are limited to "embellishments") than the broad momentum of the allegory (in this case, free will is only reined in by contemplation of God's mercy). I think this is a bad approach to morality plays and allegory in general, in part because the continuity of basic Boethian values is so consistent that it makes the process of elucidating the theological messages of individual plays tedious. More importantly, critical reliance on the spiritual rather than the theatrical is equivalent to those who read for the Concept and ignore the objects of perception. The large cast and extensive staging of *Castle of Perseverance* sets it apart from *Mankind*, so we should focus our critical energies on understanding the relationship between the staging and the text. Likewise, the vices' antics in *Mankind* give the play its life, and we should focus on the particularities of their schemes and how they might have played out on stage.

The other problem with focusing on the allegorical message is that it flattens the historical progress of the genre. We've seen how the plays got slimmer and more professional over time. We've also seen how specific theological points of contention get fewer and fewer lines over time (*Hyckescorner* for instance, does not even dramatize the act of contrition in Imagination), and that later plays spend longer on character development and comedic relief. I do not mean to suggest that the writers or audience became less devout during the 15th century. But I do think as the century developed,

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dramatists became more and more willing to use concrete imagery, tell specific

narratives, use coarse humor, and engage in topical political debates. Part of this has to do

with the mode of production: perhaps *Mankind* and *Hyckescorner* could afford to be

more concrete because they were meant for indoor venues that reflected social hierarchy,

whereas *Castle* was meant for a whole parish to see (and even perform in). However,

those different modes were the result of East Anglia's growing wealth, which allowed it

to sponsor more and different kinds of drama. With more plays came more competition.

The growing concreteness then did not reflect some kind of secularity, but an increasing

awareness of the need to please particular audiences whose spiritual and material

concerns differed from region to region.

2) Scholars often ascribe agency to the Elizabethan playwrights while they read

medieval drama as pro forma, but that interpretation is shortsighted. Much of popular

Elizabethan drama follows the same five-act structure, and most celebrate the authority of

legitimate monarchs while punishing class jumpers. That formal and ideological

similarity has not led most critics to see the entire genre as having a "unified purpose,"

even though precious few Elizabethan plays explicitly question the existence of God, the

power of kings, or the centrality of iambic pentameter. Although several formal and

ideological similarities link the morality plays, we should avoid conflating them for the

same reasons we avoid conflating Ben Jonson with Thomas Kyd: two authors working

within a strict genre can still create different effects, employ different spectacles, and

communicate different ideas. Genres are better at informing expectations than

determining outcomes. Instead of thinking of morality plays as essentially the same, then,

we should think of them as a convenient frame through which playwrights could tackle various social tensions while cleaving to hegemonic norms. In this way, authors could specifically target powerful individuals whose behavior they disapproved of (as *Mankind* does by targeting particular land distributors) under the guise of moral reform. For any of the publicly accused, pushing back against the play's statements may have been perceived as arguing with the unimpeachable Mercy or Pity.

More specifically, in *Mankind* and *Hyckescorner*, we saw how the middle third of both plays was both the most rambunctious and the least conventional. Both plays accomplished a lot of their idiosyncratic agenda after the introductory speeches and before the final reconciliations. In other words, they used the morality form to bookend their ideological interventions, and that reliance on convention gave them cover while the authors pursued their literary or political ends. That way a production of *Hyckescorner* could emphasize its political valences through costume if the audience was favorable or downplay them (with less explosive clothing) as needed. Or a production of *Mankind* could vary the Vices' antics to target particular individuals or cut their names from the script entirely.

3) Although the authors of the moralities are often assumed to be clergymen, that argument became less and less plausible as we moved from *Castle* to *Hyckescorner.* We know little about how medieval theater was actually performed, but we do know that much of it was prohibited from being performed on church grounds. Clopper argues that the rise of institutions of guilds led to a parallel rise in people finding entertainment and

instruction outside the church.[267] Thus, the audience members were seeking spiritual guidance from civic, rather than clerical, authorities, which could explain how plays were expelled from the chapel.

We might plausibly argue that if the moralities were written by clergy, we should expect more institutional support. Lacking that support, we might conclude that the later moralities (perhaps not *Castle*) were written by laymen, or as Chambers would have it, the marketplace.[268] But that relies on altogether too much speculation and too little direct evidence. A better model for theorizing the play's creation was put forward by Kathleen Ashley, who argued that medieval drama was "heteroglossic", in that it was produced by a number of different authorities whose collective input created the singular scripts.[269] Ashley's argument stems from an examination of the cycles which became popular around the time of *Mankind's* composition. Because a lot of medieval drama served the needs of the church, the city where it was produced, and guild that produced it, Ashley argues that each production comprised many voices. I'd like to apply that model to this genre. Perhaps we cannot ultimately determine who wrote the plays, but they represent a tug-of-war between secular and clerical ideas about the significance between clothing and morality, status, and politics.[270] Even though much of the morality drama of the period

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[267] See Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, play, and game: English festive culture in the medieval and early modern period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 2-4; also Rycroft, "Morality," 466-7.
[268] E. K. Chambers, *The mediaeval stage* ([London]: Oxford University Press, 1967).
[269] See Kathleen Ashley, "Sponsorship, reflexivity and resistance: cultural readings of the York cycle plays," in *The performance of Middle English culture: essays on Chaucer and the drama in honor of Martin Stevens* (Cambridge [England]: D.S. Brewer, 1998). Kate Normington echoes Ashley's theory. See Normington, *Medieval English Drama*, 71-5.
[270] This is speculative, but of the three plays covered here, *Hyckescorner* is most likely not the product of a priest. Its focus is too political, its theology too perfunctory, and its humor altogether too crude. If we take Lancashire's argument seriously and see it as meant specifically for Suffolk, then it's reasonable to assume a company Suffolk sponsored was responsible for it. Also, *Hyckescorner's* earliest manuscript was not

drew from medieval sermons, we can see how even the most devout plays appropriated those conventions for their own ends. *Castle's* greed-focused staging was the product of its regional economy and new-found wealth. *Mankind* echoed commonplace concerns about fashion while focusing on very particular secular concerns about the displacement of peasants through the consolidation of land holdings. *Hyckescorner's* focus on the follies of youth and the drunken debauchery of London men probably echoed the Church's concerns, but the play channeled that concern and focused it around a particular political rival, linking the hooligans' behavior to the Lancastrian threat. We can see how these moralities encompassed a heteroglossic, textual debate over the function and meaning of various signs, including clothing.

That debate further serves to fracture the church's monopoly on moral behavior. In *Castle,* we saw that the benevolent figures looked like clergymen, and the central castle was both a retreat from the world and a physical building, reminiscent of a church. In *Mankind,* the authority figure Mercy is still unmistakably a clergyman, but his stilted rhetoric and evisceration in the play do not make for a flattering portrayal. Moreover, *Mankind's* political message of returning to traditional feudal labor practices does not include the church as a necessary pathway to redemption. *Hyckescorner* continues this trend by having Free Will and Imagination convince each other to change, rather than

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owned by a monk. *Mankind* too is a good candidate for lay authorship, especially if it was performed by a professional troupe rather than within a local parish. Again, this is speculation, but a good bet for the city where *Mankind* was written is Bury St. Edmonds, which is mentioned early on by name, and was also the hometown of two of the plays early owners. Bury had a thriving cloth industry and, at least in the latter half of the 15th century, rich guilds that could have put something like *Mankind* together. For more on this, see John Coldeway, "Some Economic Aspects of Late Medieval Drama," in *Contexts for early English drama* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

requiring the leadership of the clergy. Both later plays, in other words, emphasize political self-determination.

4) The plays in this chapter relied on and reinforced the primacy of external appearance in terms of identification. Nevertheless, the common structures belied wildly divergent understandings of clothing and its potentialities. In all three plays, costume constantly maintained material and metaphorical valences, but each play saw clothing's potential significance change dramatically. In *Castle of Perseverance,* we saw how clothing oscillated between signifying allegiance with the Good or Bad Angel in Mankind's life, but also how it could signify the material good that is the product of being rich. Though the play sought to negotiate the boundaries between secular and divine meanings, the ostensible thrust of the play could not control the way sumptuary laws had conflated identity with consumption. However, the author of *Mankind* assumed and was comfortable with the very multiplicity of meanings that *Castle* shuns, and used that flexibility to link allegorically immoral clothing with those yeomen who were complicit in the engrossment which the play condemns. Whereas *Castle* shied away from particular economic concerns in favor of appealing to universal paradigms, *Mankind* used the imagery and conventions of moral plays to force the audience to align themselves with the traditional feudalism that Titivillus and the Vices threatened. *Hyckescorner* took this process even further, linking the condition of one's robes with the allegiance with one's king, emphasizing the centrality of the monarch that characterizes a lot of Tudor drama, and, again, stretching the function of clothing in drama. If, as I postulated above, Perseverance gave Freewill and Imagination robes with Tudor colors, then the play

emphasized not the moral imperative to avoid fashionable clothes, but instead the need to distinguish between types of fashionable clothes. Moreover, *Hyckescorner* uniquely gives its characters the chance to change their clothing and identity while alive and affirms the same self-fashioning that is the bane of the earlier two plays. In other words, it presents us with a protagonist who can change his identity and clothes at will, and is nevertheless affirmed by religious authorities.

5) At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned how East Anglian drama was made possible by the region's new found wealth. To be more specific, starting in the late 14th century, there was a substantial transfer of wealth from the Midlands to East Anglia and London. This was the product of changes in land use, from arable farming to sheep pastures, and in land ownership, as villeinage disappeared. But by far the largest impact came from the cloth industry, which rapidly expanded, surpassing "raw wool as the major export product."[271] The economic boom caused by the increased trade enabled the concrete expression of the region's intense piety, specifically in the form of a building and arts program that reached its zenith in the late 15th century, around the time that both *Mankind* and *Hyckescorner* were written.[272] In the same period, we also have reports from foreign visitors who commented on the elaborate dress of the English they met in the Southeast. Alan Macfarlane tracked dozens of letters from visiting merchants from the late 15th century to the late 16th, and their reactions were consistently admiring: the

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[271] For an explanation of this phenomenon in terms of subsidy returns, see Coldeway, "Economic Aspects," 81-83.
[272] Scherb specifically discusses the building program that the wealth enabled at 24-28.

English were seen as broadly rich and elaborately dressed.[273] Given this context, it makes sense that the art of the period was also more explicitly material in its references and more specifically concerned with style. However, we should further note that if indeed plays like *Mankind* were meant for rural audiences, their reliance on specific cuts of fashion demonstrate how deeply fashion had penetrated. The sumptuary laws were mostly written for the knightly and bourgeois classes, but *Mankind* shows us that by the end of the 15th century, sheep herders apparently *also* knew a lot about fashion and its political valences.

We saw a similar tension in *Piers Plowman* and *Margery Kempe* in Chapter 1. As cultures and economies changed, the meaning of individual styles and fashion as a whole followed suit. This process disrupted traditional norms, so medieval writers used allegorical drama as a testing ground for signs. However, the audiences of those written works were very different from the intended audiences of these moral plays. By tracking the genre as it developed in the 15th and 16th centuries, we can see how all levels of society were concerned about the look of redemption, and the constant societal changes made sure it remained a controversial and fraught topic, even within a formally similar dramatic template.

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[273] Alan Macfarlane, *The origins of English individualism: the family, property, and social transition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 165-188.

Chapter 3: Skelton's Conservatism and the Look of Magnificence

In this chapter, I will juxtapose Skelton's early (1498) allegorical depiction of court life, *The Bowge of Courte,*[274] against his later drama *Magnyfycence,* written in 1519 under a different king in a very different England. The two poems employ very similar thematic elements, but use different rules and different assumptions about clothing's ability to mean. Essentially, this chapter is focused on examining how the rules of allegory in two of Skelton's poems function, and how they change due to time, royal behavior, and material development. It's not just that *Bowge of Court* and *Magnyfycence* use different plots or engage different social problems: it's that they rely on fundamentally different assumptions about how fashion systems work and who is involved.

1. A Medieval ape and a Renaissance Man

As opposed to that of the other texts I have perused so far, the authorship of John Skelton's works is not up for debate, and we know a great deal about his life.[275] Since he first entered court in 1488, Skelton exhibited a penchant for old nobility, old scholasticism, and old Latin. Indeed, much of Skelton's identity and works were wrapped

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[274] The title is ambiguous, but "bowge" probably refers to the rations provided at court. However, bowge could also refer to the French *bouche,* mouth. Thus the title would translate as the Mouths of Court, that is, the speakers.
[275] We know little of Langland's life, the scribal history of *Margery Kempe* is fraught at best, and the morality plays are anonymous.

up in a fierce conservatism in the face of Humanism and new Tudor practices. Our first

reference to him though comes from Caxton in 1490, who praises his Latin translations.

He was critical of the Humanists' interest in Greek, critical of Lollardy, and unmoved by

Tudor propaganda. He also found time to enter the Grammarians War from 1519-21 on

the side of Robert Whittington, whose traditional pedagogical techniques were under

fire.[276] Skelton was engaged in textual conversations for the whole of his career, and the

vast majority of his writings mock new types of rhetoric or politics while emphasizing a

reliance on traditional, that is to say, medieval, models of knowledge. On top of that, his

writing and scholarship display such a deep knowledge of Medieval texts that critics

sometimes refer to Skelton as a "medieval" writer.[277]

Despite the reliance on medieval forbearers however, there is an iconoclastic

arrogance about Skelton's poetry that reeks of self-congratulation and the kind of

individualism that is associated with later, Elizabethan poets. For instance, Skelton's

early court poetry, such as *Dolorous Dethe* and *Agaynst the Scottes* show a willingness to

cast himself as the *orator regius,* the mouthpiece of the monarch, even though his own

formal position was much less secure.[278] Also, the only poem of his published during his

lifetime, *The Garland of Laurel,* narrates a story in which Skelton himself is

congratulated by Chaucer and Lydgate for his poetry, and then welcomed into the Court

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[276] The Grammarians War hinged on Latin pedagogy, and pitted William Horman against Robert Whittington. The former insisted that post-Classical developments in Latin were "barbarous", and the latter assumed Latin was a living language, and thus taught grammar through everyday colloquialisms. See A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 227; and L. J. Lloyd, "John Skelton and the New Learning," *The Modern Language Review* 24, no. 4 (1929): 445-46.

[277] For example, see Nan Cooke Carpenter, *John Skelton* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), 49 or Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance,* 230-240.

[278] See Jane Griffiths, *John Skelton and poetic authority: defining the liberty to speak* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 25.

of Fame.[279] In other words, he evidently makes "the claim, partly tongue-in-cheek no doubt, to be the great English poet."[280] As I will discuss below, *The Bowge of Court* also presents Skelton as a voice of unique reason in a courtly arena of dissimulation. To boot, he mentions his title as Laureate in most of his works despite the fact that that title came from Oxford, not Westminster. In *Self-Crowned Laureates,* Richard Helgerson argues that poets like Spenser and Jonson (whom he distinguishes from other poets by giving them the moniker: "laureates") defined themselves as "something of great constancy at the center of their work." They saw poetry as a high calling, their own writing as immensely important, and their responsibility to the state enormous.[281] While Helgerson conceives of this category of public poet as a product of Elizabethan society, it's hard not to see Skelton as making the same self-fashioning gestures and aspiring to the same heights.

Unfortunately, Skelton did not achieve the posthumous poetic fame he may have wanted; in fact, even Elizabethan poets saw his versification as amateurish. However, in the middle part of the 16th century, his work became attached to the Protestant reform movement. His 1522 *Collyn Clout* and *Why Come Ye Nat to Court?* were anti-clerical in tone, and his *Speke Parrot* gave him a reputation as a rebel while it attempted to garner

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[279] There is some disagreement on the degree of sincerity here. Walker calls *The Garland,* an unmitigated "glorification of the dreamer Skelton's career and talents" whereas Fish sees the poem as "one long peal of laughter at the conventions it pretends to follow." See Greg Walker, *John Skelton and the politics of the 1520s* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 56; and Stanley Eugene Fish and John Skelton, *John Skelton's poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 229. My own read is that Skelton was perfectly willing to celebrate his accomplishments throughout his career. If this lone book is ironic, then its irony is intended to highlight Skelton's unique talents.

[280] Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, politics, and national identity: Reformation to Renaissance* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 36.

[281] See Richard Helgerson, *Self-crowned laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the literary system* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 189.

the favor of the London bourgeois. Jane Griffiths charts how this combination of a popular figure taking on the clergy took on new meanings in the years following Skelton's death when reformers used Skeltonics in wide-ranging attacks on the Catholic Church itself, such as *Ymage of ypocresy* (1534), *Vox Populi vox dei* (1540), and John Huntington's *Genealogye of Heresye* (1540).[282] Griffiths goes on to demonstrate how the "view of Skelton as a rebel and Reformer dominates his afterlife." So even though some of the Elizabethan "laureates" saw Skelton's work as more entertaining than instructive, he was read by mid-century poets as a Proto-Protestant priest who anticipated some of the criticisms of the Church that later reformers would make.[283] In this sense, Skelton was a "poetical prophet" whose writings pointed toward England's bright future.[284]

So, on the one hand we have a vainglorious curmudgeon who insists on the primacy of medieval authorities and Latin precepts. On the other, we have a Cicero loving, Church critiquing, self-fashioning, Elizabethan-style laureate. Skelton is known for being (as AC Spearing calls him) the "greatest identifiable English poet to have been born in the 15th century" and is therefore often positioned either as medieval, early modern or transitional.[285] His fiery personality, curmudgeonly medieval instincts, protestant-style critiques, and proximity to power (he was Prince Henry's tutor before the latter became Henry VIII) have made Skelton into the missing link between the Middle

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[282] For more on this, see Griffiths, *John Skelton*, 160-165.

[283] In a similar vein, Hadfield makes the argument that Skelton provided the voice that would define the English nation in the Elizabethan era. See Hadfield, *Literature Politics*, 26-32. John King also discusses Skelton's "plain" style of the people. See John N. King, *English Reformation literature: the Tudor origins of the Protestant tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3.

[284] The quotation comes from John Bale, who is quoted in King, *English Reformation*, 255. Bale was an anti-Catholic reformer himself, and he praised Skelton's critiques of the clergy along with his "violation of clerical celibacy."

[285] Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 225.

Ages and the English Renaissance. But if he is a transitional figure, what is he transitioning between exactly?

Before answering that question, it's important to establish that 1) terms like "medieval" or "early modern" would have been meaningless to Skelton himself, and 2) those labels have a tendency to group "medieval" literature into some monolith that normally either means tortuously long theology or Chaucer. This sort of thinking creates sentences like this: "Skelton's attitude is more, not less, medieval than Chaucer's,"[286] which carry with them the sense that Chaucer is a better poet because of his enlightened attitude, and Skelton is hampered by the opposite. Of course, Spearing develops that conceit and explains some of the similarities and differences between Chaucer and Skelton, but the very existence of a claim like that, however justified, emphasizes how much what it means to be "medieval poem" is the product of an overdetermined taxonomy whose categories comfort more than they describe.[287]

For the purposes of this chapter, and this dissertation as well, I will use the Middle Ages and the English Renaissance (or the Early Modern period) to describe temporal periods rather than cultural or literary phenomena. In general, when I use the term "the Middle Ages," I am describing a period that ends in 1485 with the accession of Henry VII and the beginning of the Tudor dynasty, and when I use "the English

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[286] Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 229.
[287] For instance, Skelton opposed the publication of Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum Omne,* a authoritative Greek edition of the New Testament, in 1516, insisting on maintaining the continuity of the Vulgate. Is this a Medieval or Early Modern attitude? Certainly, the Bible was officially translated and sanctioned not just into Greek but English less than 100 years after Skelton's death, but large tracts of the Old Testament were in the vernacular in the 900's thanks to King Alfred and, in the late Middle Ages, thanks to Wycliffe. In other words, the authority of the Vulgate is an old question that predates and also outlasts Skelton. We might do better to call him conservative on the issue. Or put another way, if Skelton is Medieval with respect to the Vulgate, what is Wycliffe? Or Alfred? Or Bede?

Renaissance" or "Early Modern," I mean the years that follow up to about the French Revolution.[288] I am sticking with a temporal definition primarily as a way of disarming the Medieval-Renaissance debate that seeks to either confirm Tudor propaganda by describing the Middle Ages as decadent and exhausted,[289] or the revisionism that attacks the Reformation by praising the cohesion and virtue of the Medieval world.[290]

Obviously, there are many reasons that using 1485 as the hinge point could be considered arbitrary. Henry Tudor did not enjoy the full support of the country immediately after the Battle of Bosworth Field, and he was plagued by internal dissent and Yorkist plots for most of his reign. That lack of solidarity at home hindered his ability to be anything other than an observer in continental politics as well. In other words, his very presence was not nearly as transformative as he might have hoped, and it is hard to imagine that the majority of Englishman at the time saw themselves as living in some new age.[291] If anything, Henry's son's approach to the monarchy was more ambitious, centralizing, and domineering.[292] From a more cultural standpoint, many of the traditional hallmarks of the English Early Modern period, such as the interest in classical learning, did not actually originate in Tudor England. Interest in Classical learning was never really lost, even though some texts were. Likewise, as the previous chapter showed, "medieval" drama continued well into the 16th century and beyond.

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[288] The most enthusiastic support for this year comes from Maurice Keen. See Maurice Keen, *England in the later Middle Ages: a political history* (London: Methuen, 1973), 513.

[289] A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

[290] See J.J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

[291] For more on Henry VII's compromised security and its political effects, see S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 69-75. See also Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 224-227.

[292] G. R. Elton, *The Tudor revolution in government; administrative changes in the reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge [England]: University Press, 1962).

In this sense, I am viewing the *European* Renaissance as something that, if it did indeed happen, happened in Italy and was sporadically adopted over time in different parts of Europe and England. Spearing's definition of the Italian Renaissance is that it raised the general dignity of man, heightened the importance and interpretation of poetry, and assumed a historical perspective that people were now living in an enlightened age.[293] By the end of the 16th century, we can see some English poets making all three gestures, but while 16th century Elizabethan England is different than 14th century Ricardian England, the intermediate transitions between the two periods were so localized that drawing any red line is bound to overly determined. As such, I am content with an admittedly arbitrary date because 1) I cannot escape that arbitrariness and 2) I want to call attention to it. That is to say, I want to highlight the absurdity of seeking canyons between historical eras. When scholars construct names for different periods, they inevitably end up smuggling in implications of historical progress: even the stilted term "Early Modern" suggests that Elizabethan England was closer to modernity than Ricardian, and therefore closer to *us*. By highlighting that critical tendency, I hope to disarm it, which will better allow us to engage with longer, messier, broader processes that brought about those changes, rather than the political upheavals that contributed to but cannot be said to have caused them. So, instead of seeing Skelton as some sort of precursor to a century's worth of literature he could not imagine, I prefer to frame his writings in terms of their immediate political situation as well as Skelton's own ideological background. His life was full of more turmoil than most, but he is also

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[293] Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 9-15.

transitional in the way all poets are transitional: they negotiate their past and education

with their present and perceived future.

2. The *Bowge of Court* and the Triumph of Costume:

As I discussed in Chapter 1, allegory is often associated with a high degree of

convention that encumber the verse. Skelton's satirical allegory, *The Bowge of Courte,* is

no exception in that critics have been quick to pick out all sorts of allegorical conventions

buried within the lines, either with respect to its autumn setting (often associated with

confusion[294]), its central conceit of a ship of fools (taken from Brant's 1494

Narrenschiff), or its treatment of Fortune (akin to Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess).*[295]

There is little doubt that the poem engages with medieval conventions and other dream

visions (Skelton had previously demonstrated a strong affinity for Chaucer's *House of

Fame)*. As I will show, those medieval intersections are important for understanding

Skelton's generic intervention.

Broadly, the argument in this section is that despite the confusion of the poem,

clothing expresses the identity of the various allegorical figures remarkably well. Our

narrator Drede is pretty good at spotting the lining of characters' doublets and reading the

inscriptions on concealed daggers. In other words, clothing is the only reliable signifier in

the poem, whereas character's words, oaths, and songs are all subject to rapid reversal.

Even the final sections, when the other courtiers decide to gang up on Drede, open up the

possibility that this new threat may itself be another ploy to either win Drede's affection

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[294] See Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the mediaeval sciences* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960), 211.
[295] See John Scattergood, ed. *John Skelton, the complete English poems* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1983), 396.

or undercut some other figure. We don't know why they are doing any of this—the court's motivations (just like its ruler) remain opaque—but we do know who they are by their clothing.

Secondly, despite the clear references to both contemporary and medieval poems, Skelton's allegorical approaches differ significantly from his predecessors. In fact, his whole approach in *Bowge* flies in the face of most medieval works in the same genre. Some of his tactics hearken back to earlier medieval works in that the frame is a dream vision and Fortune is portrayed ambivalently (as she often was). However, the faith in the power of a refined language that so propelled *Piers Plowman* is absent here—there is no gradual clarification of meaning. Moreover, while the definitive clothing in the poem will remind readers of 15th century morality play costumes, the momentum of the poem does not bring us closer to either a spiritual or worldly moral. As such, the poem can help us understand Skelton's relationship to other English poets while also highlighting what makes him so unique.

The poem itself is a dream vision in which the narrator, Drede, encounters a ship bearing the same name as the poem and seeks to win over its "awnner", Dame Sauce-Pere. Throughout the short poem, Drede meets several of the allegorical courtiers (Favell, Suspycyon, and Ryotte among others) who ostensibly treat him well while scheming behind his back. Confused by the tension between the courtiers' words and their clothes, and overwhelmed with the sense that his new acquaintances bear him ill will, Drede chooses to leap off the boat rather than to continue to pursue Dame Sauce-Pere's favor.

As CS Lewis has compelling stated, it is about the "bewilderment, and finally the terror of a man" who is "out of [his] depth."[296]

Early on, Skelton tells us that "Luna, full of mutabylyte," is smiling "halfe in scorne/At our foly and our unstedfastness."[297] There is a remarkable amount of scholarship on the astronomical implications of these lines that attempts to either identify the narrator's frame of mind or the date of composition.[298] But they overlook what is most obvious: that this poem will express scorn for the mutability of court life. Perhaps Luna's smile suggests that the nightmare we are about to read is at least in part humorous, but in either case, Skelton informs us early on about the object of his satire. This also tells the reader to be on the lookout for shifting signifiers, as they will be what concerns Skelton the most. As we will see in the poem, much of the tension comes from the discrepancies between what the allegorical characters tell Drede and what they are wearing, between words and appearance. However, the clothing—what we might otherwise expect to be rapidly changing—is the most stable and easily recognized part of the poem. It's also the most conventional. In the next few paragraphs, I will walk us through some of the opening exchanges in the poem, taking careful attention to see how clothing functions to both characterize and bring order to the voluminous dissimulation that pervades the court.

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[296] C. S. Lewis, *English literature in the sixteenth century, excluding drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 134.
[297] *Bowge 3-6*. All quotations from *The Bowge of Court* come from Scattergood *Complete Poems*. They will be cited with a title and line number.
[298] For example, see Helen Stearns Sale, "The Date of Skelton's Bowge of Court," *Modern Language Notes.* 52 (1937): 572-574; Melvin J. Tucker, *Setting in Skelton's Bowge of Courte: a speculation* (Boulder, Col.: University of Colorado, 1970), or John Skelton and Robert S. Kinsman, *Poems [of] John Skelton* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 138.

Drede's first impression of the ship is not wonder or awe but confusion. "There was moche noyse," he tells us, and because the narrator has "none aquentaunce"[299], he is disoriented and unsure how to proceed. The noise and the lack of a trusted friend overwhelms the narrator—not the spectacle of the ship or the clothing of its owner. This initial impression will prove accurate, as the flurry of lies the narrator will soon encounter will bring him back to this sense of isolation and bewilderment. In fact, indiscernible *noyse* might well serve as a subtitle to this work.

The first character who is described is Dame Saunce-Pere (Lady Peerless) whose clothing is predictably ornate. What's of note here is that the Dame herself is not described so much as the "traves" (screen) of silk which she sat behind, and the fine golden throne she sat on. We do not see her so much as we see her possessions, and they speak loudly and clearly for her: she is desirable but unapproachable; she offers reward and risk. To confirm this, her elaborately decorated throne tells Drede to "Garder le fortune que est maluelz et bone,"[300] which is both elaborated on in lines 111-17 and reminiscent of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess.* So far at least, the appearance of Lady Peerless is conventional and therefore easily understood. There is no particular irony in her description, nor is there much mystery in what we're supposed to take from her entrance. In a poem about a narrator being unable to navigate a complex and unreliable court, the Lady at least is a stable, if complex, signifier. Her servant makes it clear that

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[299] *Bowge,* 45-6.
[300] The line appears intentionally ambiguous. "Garder" could mean "preserve" or "beware of," but the double entendre fits with the dual nature of the Lady herself: she is dangerous as well as alluring.

the Lady controls Fortune, and Fortune drives the ship. That is to say, she is the monarch of this court as well as the personification of Fortune itself, in that Drede's access to Fortune, like the other courtiers, is dependent on the crown. She is eminently enigmatic, but Drede neither scorns Fortune herself, nor does he jump off the ship because of any intrigue she starts. The one authority figure in the poem is not as responsible for Drede's problems as the scheming, corrupt courtiers.

In the first chapter I argued that in expanding Mede's possibility of meanings while keeping her dress the same, Langland's verse undercut the ability of the provocative costume to signify. In *Bowge,* Lady Peerless is similarly expansive in what she can mean to individuals. Skelton tells us that "Whome she lovest, of all plesyre is ryche/Whyles she laughest and hath lust for the playe./Whome she hateth she casteth in the dyche."[301] However, by keeping the reader apart from the Lady, Skelton maintains the integrity of Peerless's costume while also distinguishing her from the other characters we will meet. Figures like Favell and Suspycyon will be described in detail, and there will be moments where Drede thinks he understands who they are or what they want, but Lady Peerless is never approached in that way. Part of the reason that we do not see what she is wearing is that in this allegory, clothing gives away what words might otherwise conceal. By denying us a look at even her clothing, Skelton emphasizes how little direct access Drede (and the reader) have to Fortune.

Drede's first mention of his shipmates comes after he receives "favoure" from Lady Peerless and the ship has set sail. Here Drede tells us that Favell was "full of

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[301] *Bowge*, 113-115.

flatery,/Wyth fables false," that "Suspecte...dayly/Misdempte eche man", and that "Harvy Hafter" is a trickster. We then learn that Drede was hated by and isolated from all of them. At this point, the narrator *knows* the other courtiers before he really speaks to them. As much as he will be overwhelmed by their words, he understands who they all are at first glance, and is only *later* led astray by their protestations of loyalty. There is the sense that if Drede had held onto that early impression, he would have been less susceptible to the courtiers' seductive lies.[302]

The first shipmate we get to know more is Favell, the name often given to flatterers.[303] And indeed, Favell does what we might expect him to, ironically complimenting Drede's cunning, virtue, and favor with Lady Peerless. Even though Drede knows he is speaking to Favell and is aware of what Favell represents, he is still taken in by the kind words and thanks the courtier for his "gentylness".[304] Here we can start to see how Skelton allows these allegorical figures to develop beyond the mere constraints of their title. Favell not only compliments, but specifically exploits Drede's insecurities. Earlier in the poem, Drede expressed anxiety over his inability to match wits with "the great auctoryte/of poets olde," and Favell smartly opens by praising the narrator's cunning. The lines about Lady Peerless's favor address the rather cold reception Drede received from her earlier, and Favell's promise to be on his "syde,"

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[302] It is true that Dede overhears some of the conversations about him between other courtiers. Other times, such as when Dyssymulacyon and Dysdayne speak, he is unable to say anything other than they spoke together secretely. In either case, his passivity in the face of their plotting and his willingness to trust them show how desperate Drede is for an ally.

[303] Scattergood's edition includes a note pointing us to "*Piers Plowman B* II, 6, 41 and Hoccleve's *Minor Poems III* 209-88." Skelton's use here seems merely conventional here, in that the name is derived from Old French ("Lying"). However, it should also remind us of his deep familiarity with and complex relationship to medieval allegory.

[304] *Bowge,* 176.

speaks to Drede's explicit and oft repeated loneliness. The flatterer is so deft (and of course humorous) with his words and so incorrigible in his approach that it's hard to not find him endearing. It also makes Drede's initial credulity plausible because Favell is himself so cunning in his approach. Flattery is more than a flurry of compliments; his efficacy depends on an understanding of his audience and a weakness in the listener. Again, Drede had every reason to distrust Favell but gives in anyway.

That is, until Drede describes his clothing. Favell has a "cloke" lined with "doubtfull doublenes."[305] The tension between the clothing and the protestations of faith lead Drede to doubt Favell's words, though the reader doubted them from the beginning. Again, the clothes remind Drede who Favell is, whereas his words only deceive. This is the first instance of the text training how we read the rest of the poem: whenever the narrator is in any way unsure of what to think, the clothes reveal a reality that words obscure. What's more, for such a newcomer to court, Drede is remarkably good at reading clothing, and the way he identifies what is *lining* Favell's clothing suggests that even as he is unfamiliar with navigating courtly rhetoric, he is familiar with materials and what they suggest. There is a comfort with and knowledge of clothing that contrasts deeply with Drede's understanding of courtly decorum.

It's also not a coincidence that Suspycyon appears next. In fact, if anything it echoes the narrator's emotional development. Confronted with mixed messages, Drede surreptitiously follows Favell and eavesdrops on his conversation. The text tells us that "Suspycyon, me thoughte, mette hym at a brayde," but Drede's own actions show us that

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[305] Ibid., 177-8.

suspicion is not merely a force at court but also a part of himself. Later on in the poem, the meter changes to accommodate Henry Haster's flowing, impromptu songs. We can see how Skelton's poetic intervention adapts his verse to the changes in the plot, which in turn replicates the experience of being a newcomer at court. Langland gave us Will, a neutral fish out of water whose character was at best undeveloped. This allowed us to observe the figures he met along the way with a certain amount of objectivity—we were never in anyone's head. But Skelton links his allegorical alter ego with the subjectivity of the poem, forcing us to focus on the interiority of the experience, not just the corruption at large.[306]

In either case, Suspycyon is suspicious, and looks it. Drede details the courtier's "croked loke", with a "hede full of gelousy" and quaking "hondes."[307] Again, while perhaps Drede is unwilling to explicitly state his view on Sucpycyon, the bodily description is both conventional and parallel with the figure's character. What makes this particular exchange interesting (and it will be echoed in the Henry Haster encounter) is Suspycyon's repeated request for a "favoure" from Drede, that is, for Drede to trust him exclusively. Favell asked for something similar, and indeed most of the other courtiers will as well. Their significant differences aren't in their desire for support at the expense of their peers or their willingness to exploit Drede's isolation, but how they get it and how they look.

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[306] For more on this, see Greg Walker, *Writing under tyranny: English literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 431-2.
[307] *Bowge,* 191-3. For more on the conventionality of this description, see Morton W. Bloomfield, *The seven deadly sins; an introduction to the history of a religious concept, with special reference to medieval English literature* ([East Lansing]: Michigan State College Press, 1952), 172 and 195. Scattergood has a note comparing the depiction of Envy to Suspycyon. See *Piers Plowman,* B, V, 78-84.

And this is how the poem goes for the first half. The figures all attempt to win

Drede's favor by swearing their own exclusive loyalty and putting down the figure that

appeared most recently. Suspycyon puts down Favell, and likewise Henry Haster

undercuts Suspycyon's influence with his charm. Their clothing and appearance all echo

their own definitive characteristics, even as their techniques often blur. As discussed in

detail above, Favell leans on Drede's insecurities about his own cunning, loneliness, and

ambiguous status with "oure Lady" to win him over. After asking for a verse to sing,

Henry Haster will do nearly the same thing, emphasizing Drede's "connynge wayes".[308]

The last part of the pattern is Drede's explicit or implicit acceptance of their request,

which follows most of the encounters.[309] Again, there is no stated alarm: Drede is carried

from conversation to conversation without much in the way of agency or choice. He

listens and gives the figures what they want, which only creates tension, because we

know from their clothing that they cannot be trusted.

While most of these allegorical descriptions lack materiality (the lining of

doubtfull doublenes for example), Ryotte's clothing is a noted exception. Both

Scattergood and Kinsman parse the robes in detail.[310] The latter likens Ryotte here to

Langland's Coveytise (B, V. 195), but this is less than convincing, as the similarities

between the two are suggestive rather than specific. Scattergood does a better job tying

the details of Ryotte's outfit to those of the gallaunt in "Huff! A Gallaunt," showing how

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[308]*Bowge,* 261

[309] The pattern is complicated and ultimately broken by Disdayne, who plots with Haster to "pycke a quarell and fall oute with hym."(285-6). Disdayne's behavior is hardly surprising though , given the "indignacyon" lined into his hood and the scorn-wrought robe, and the antagonistic plot is also met with passivity by Drede. Even when characters are confronting him about details he knows are wrong, he remains silent and timid.

[310] Scattergood, *Complete Poems,* 398 and Kinsman, *Poems of John Skelton,* 140.

Ryotte's lack of money, short garments, torn hose, dagger, and purse all echo those same details in the anonymous Middle English poem.[311] Ryotte's torn hose "at the kne" also recalls a nearly identical insult from Skelton's own *Collyn Clout,* in which he castigates lords for giving up their status by groveling on their knees in front of Wolsey: "Lordes must crouche and knele,/And breke theyr hose at the kne,/As dayly men may se."[312] Regardless of the exact meaning here, Ryotte's clothing is not lined with some sort of vice, and he does not carry a conspicuously inscribed dagger. His definitive details are much more material and echo those used to describe actual individuals in the real court. However, Ryotte's uniquely realistic outfit remains flat in terms of its significance. He may not represent a vice proper, but he is not a well-rounded individual, and every last one of the details from his short gowne to his checked cote speaks to a caricature lacking in dignity and funds whose sole interests are drinking, whoring, and gambling.

Materialities and Character

The material details that Skelton injects add concreteness to the verse, but like the other figures, those details remain undeveloped and conventional. We might therefore conclude that Skelton—unlike Langland or Kempe—was not particularly interested in examining allegory's function and was only using the mode in a cursory manner because it was popular.[313] No doubt the figures' speeches, formally set apart from the narration by line breaks and speaker names, are more convincing (and therefore horrifying) than the

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[311] Rossell Hope Robbins, *Historical poems of the XIVth and XVth centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 138.

[312] *Collyn Clout* 628-30.

[313] Brant's *Narrenschiff* was published just a few years earlier. Its influence on Skelton is obvious (with the courtiers all on a ship and their clothing overtly symbolic), but also it was perhaps the most popular poem in all of Europe for decades. For a young poet looking to make a name for himself, he could have done worse than write a dream vision.

perhaps hackneyed, traditional descriptions of their clothing.[314] However, I think the

shallow nature of the costume coupled with its static accuracy do two important things

for the poem.

First, and perhaps most obviously, by leaving the figures flat, Skelton suggests a

pervading tendency of courtiers to be shallow both in terms of interests and attitude.

Their particular tactics may differ, but they all simply want favor at court. Whatever else

they may claim to desire and enjoy, their main motivation is the same favor which Drede

finds so inaccessible. There are no noble motives, philosophical principles, or religious

beliefs: there is just the pursuit of Favor. As such, not only are the figures threatening in a

very basic sense, they are also doomed in their own right. Even if they successfully

forced Drede out of contention, they are left to deal with each other, and they have been

more than suspicious of each other from the start. Drede's timely exit does not change the

game so much as allow the selfish scramble for power to continue. However, by pulling

Drede out of that terrible game, the poem insulates him from this judgment. Drede's true

character and fate are unknown, but he is definitely not one of *them*.

Second, the heavy handed, revealing clothing adds another wrinkle to court life

beyond mere backstabbing. Spearing compares the atmosphere of *Bowge* "an appallingly

long, appallingly noisy cocktail party, full of shallow, disagreeable, often vulgar people,

all of whom know each other and many of whom know more about oneself than they

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[314] Spearing's essay on the poem (starting on page 261) expresses some of this sentiment at 262-4.
Likewise, Peter Green emphasizes Skelton's ability to capture the realities of court: "No poet has ever
caught this horrible atmosphere with greater skill: the filed tongues, the soft gabble of scandal, the nods and
hints and smooth insinuations…" For Green, Spearing, and most other critics, the speeches are where the
poem comes alive. See Peter Green, *John Skelton* ([London]: Published for the British Council by
Longmans, 1960), 15-17.

ought, and of whom the most intrusively friendly are the least sincere and most

dangerous."[315] Everyone is aware of everyone else's business and character. Drede

provides remarkably perceptive observations about hidden daggers and hood lining, and

he is able to spot vices at a distance. From their conversations, it seems as though the

other courtiers see Drede for what he is as well, which is perhaps why they feel confident

ganging up on him.

What Drede cannot always tell, and the other characters repeatedly fret over, is

what others have *said* either about themselves, about Drede, or about others. Nearly every

dialogue in the poem includes recorded speech, where characters recall or invent previous

conversations, using their influence to foster doubt in Drede. When Favell enters, he

claims to have overheard Peerless speaking of Drede favorably. Suspycyon enters next,

and he recalls what Favell pledged before accusing the latter of being a liar. Henry Haster

follows, and he supposedly remembers the "royall chere" Drede inspires before claiming

that he never repeats himself after doing exactly that three times in the previous

stanza.[316]As Jane Griffiths has explained, "Their inventive, irresponsible speech recalls

that of the vice figures in earlier morality plays; yet there it serves primarily as a

shorthand form of characterization, whereas in Skelton's works it is the driving force

behind the vices' plots."[317] The words themselves drive the plot, the scheming, the

dissimulation, and the anxiety in this court, creating suspicion where there was little, and

building anger where there was no cause. In fact, Dysdayne explicitly invents a "quarrell"

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[315] Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 263.
[316] *Bowge,* 158, 200, 249, respectively.
[317] Griffiths, *John Skelton*, 57.

with Drede by pretending to recall something Drede had said the night before (remember, he just arrived, so the very premise is ridiculous). The reader recognizes the lie easily, but the lie nevertheless produces a reality—that is, they end up quarrelling—in the poem that Drede cannot escape. Words therefore have incredible power, but they, with few exceptions in the poem, obscure the truth in the service of gaining some small amount of courtly favor. Indeed, the problem for Drede is not just that some characters are deceptive, but that by the end of the poem, he can trust no one's words, and therefore has no way to uncover or even express some objective "truth."

This is where Skelton's allegory begins to break away from the morality plays that must have in part inspired this satire.[318] In the next stanza, Skelton remembers "great auctoryte/of poetes oldes" who, he tells us, could "toucha a troughte[truth] and cloke it subtylly." The "cloke" reads like a reference to allegory or dream visions—the type that Skelton will soon emulate. In constructing these subtle cloaks, the old authorities could express or teach "some of moralyte nobly."[319] I examined the way allegory seeks to clarify the meaning of words in Chapter 1. In Langland, even though Will does not ultimately find Do-Well, the different sections often work to question and refine the use of specific terms. In the 12th and 13th century, the stakes of dream visions were even higher, in that they were one of the few places where God's plan could be revealed and the harmony between body and soul restored.[320] Later morality plays, such as *Everyman,* gradually produce greater understanding of salvation and how to attain it. However, in

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[318] Many commentators on the poem have compared *Bowge of Court* to 15th century morality allegories, namely Griffiths (58), Spearing (264), and Winser (8).
[319] *Bowge,* 9-14.
[320] See Kathryn L. Lynch, *The high medieval dream vision: poetry, philosophy, and literary form* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1988) whose whole book is dedicated to this very idea.

Bowge, Drede never comes closer to any understanding of Favor or courtly maneuvering: "There may well be layers beyond layers of meaning, wheels within courtly wheels, but there is not the least hope that either Drede or we could ever expect to understand them."[321] This sort of existential frustration flips the traditional allegorical path: Skelton is not cloaking some noble moral so much as he is expressing deep skepticism in the power of words to express a reliable moral at all. To clarify, Skelton's target is both rhetoric and the courtiers that use it. On this ship, appearance and illusion are all we have to rely on. This in itself is still an important lesson from a tutor to his pupil, but the cynicism of the revelation is not what we might have expected if we were familiar with earlier dream visions, and its remarkably secular scope insists that there are some spaces—namely the court—where divine wisdom does not prevail.

We know from the *Garlande of Laurel* that Skelton was familiar with Chaucer's *House of Fame,* but as most critics date the composition of the former to around 1514, we don't know if he was familiar with the Chaucerian allegory before he wrote *Bowge.* However, the similarities are uncanny: note the naivety of the narrators, the ambivalence in allegory's authority,[322] and most importantly, the deep skepticism in the power of words to signify anything not illusory. At the end of *House of Fame*, the narrator encounters the spinning, whirling House of Rumor. "Geffrey"'s first impression is the "gret noyse" of the "gygges", "chirkynges", and other sound effects that the narrator tells

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[321] Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 264.
[322] For more on this ambivalence in Chaucer, see Lisa Kiser, "Eschatological Poetics In Chaucer's House Of Fame,"*Modern Language Quarterly* 49 (1988).

us would have been audible in Rome.[323] The narrator decides to enter the House in hopes of learning "som good thereon," but instead he is horrified and shocked by the ease with which untruths are echoed by everyone, and the unbearable union between "fals" and "soth" that defines the episode. The deafening noise and the ubiquity of dissimulation echo the courtly atmosphere in *Bowge* pretty closely, suggesting that Skelton was at least inspired by the epistemological dread in found in Chaucer's allegory.

In the article cited above, Griffith leans on this theme in Skelton, saying that the *Bowge's* view of language implicitly undercuts Skelton's authority as a tutor and a poet. In other words, the target of the courtly satire extends beyond the court. "Drede's dilemma thus allows Skelton to articulate concerns about the poet's ability to fulfil his educational role and, by extension, about the nature of his authority."[324] I have a number of problems with this argument, and want to go into them in detail so as to crystallize what this poem is doing overall and, more specifically, with clothing. First, while it certainly does not make the poet-narrator out to be a strong fit for the courtly atmosphere, the poem is careful to insulate Drede from the rest of the courtiers. Drede is suspicious at times, suggesting that Suspycyon had impacted his view of others, but he is not overly complementing, disdainful, or deceitful. In other words, by and large, he does not absorb the vices around him, and even if he shares their goal of Peerless's favor, he does not participate in their scheming. Moreover, he is an outsider from the beginning—the other courtiers hate him immediately—and by the end of the poem, that status remains

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[323] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The House of Fame,* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Dean Benson (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), 1928-1944.
[324] Griffiths, *John Skelton*, 59.

unchanged. Lastly, he is never a full participant in this allegorical system because his clothes remain undescribed. For every other figure, their appearance reflects their identity, but because Drede's clothing is a mystery, so is his relationship to the court, to the pattern of the verse, to the other figures, and to the allegory itself. He is an interloper, and therefore his language is not as suspect as that of the others. Although Drede may not be able to confidently gain courtly favor, we actually believe his descriptions and his version of events. He may be ignorant of and overwhelmed by the machinations of court, but his *words* are the only trustworthy ones to be found on that ship. If Drede is not compromised, then neither is Skelton's authority.

Another hinge of Griffith's argument is that Skelton undercuts the authority of past poets by equivocating between their techniques and the courtiers,' thus threatening the viability of allegory to communicate at all. So, the argument goes, Skelton uses the same terms, "craftely", "coverte", "cloke" and "subtylly," to describe the poets of old as he does to describe the noxious vices at court. Just as they used words to create realities that had no basis in truth, so the poetic authorities of old may not have had the unrestrained access to truth that so girded their works. And if they had little authority, than what can our modest Skelton hope to achieve?[325] Part of my problem with this reading is that in his poetry, Skelton is rarely modest about his own insights (this is the man who is constantly reminding us that he is *the* Poet Laureate, after all) or anxious

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[325] One answer to this is that Drede is not Skelton, just as "Geffrey" is not Chaucer, and equating their anxieties is risky at best, especially because Skelton is very earnestly donning a character to play a narrator here. Drede's inability to discern the layers of allegory may be a ploy to generate an ominous feeling in the reader or a sensation of confusion for the fish-out-of-water. In either case, Drede's limitations can hardly be placed on Skelton himself.

about his own opinions.[326] Skelton may be pushing against old authorities, but only as a way to make room for his own unique form of verse and rhetoric. Moreover, the final stanza of the poem reminds us that we are supposed to learn something from this, and that that lesson is wrapped up in our own ability to interpret this dense narrative:

> I wolde therwith no man were myscontente;
>
> Besechynge you that shall it see or rede,
>
> In every poynte to be indyfferente,
>
> Syth all in substaunce of slumbrynge doth procede.
>
> I wyll not saye it is mater in dede,
>
> But yet oftyme suche dremes be founde trewe.
>
> Now constrewe ye what is the resydewe.[327]

Skelton is telling us that there is something "trewe" in this "dreme" after all, should we have to patience to find it and "constrewe" it. This type of epistemology goes back as far as Macrobius, whose *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* declared that the secrets of Nature revealed to dreamers in visions were "veiled in enigmatic shapes" in order to conceal them from all but the most discerning, the most deserving individuals.[328] Likewise, Skelton's coyness about his exact message is meant to encourage his reader to find it. This ending then does not express particular anxiety about authority or its potential to edify its audience. Skelton's truths may be less divine in nature than his

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[326] Skelton will go on to echo many of Bowge's implicit warnings in *Speculum Principis,* which also encourages his tutor to "Pursue flatterers with hatred," among other aphorisms.
[327] *Bowge,* 533–39.
[328] Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobiu, William Harris Stahl, and Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 86-7. See also Lynch, *Dream Vision*, 48-50.

literary predecessors, but he has the advantage of being the only reliable voice in the Tudor court.

Rather than questioning allegory's ability to educate, *Bowge* gestures back to earlier dream visions with nostalgia using its traditional depictions of vices. The stable costumes are abstractions that were used to help maintain order and offer wisdom, and indeed Drede's initial recognition of them speaks to his pre-court understanding. Unfortunately, the rhetoric and deceptions at the Tudor court break down Drede's ability to see through vice, and therefore mitigates the educational ability of once meaningful texts. We can therefore see how the clothing not only represents the definitive characteristics of the courtiers, but also the linguistic and philosophic values of the past. The established images of vices juxtaposed against the fraudulent language of the ship then ends up juxtaposing different types of knowledge: the unreliable, unsubstantiated noyse of the current court versus the categories of vices of literary tradition. In that sense, the text is nostalgic for the stabilities in language that once captured, or at least attempted to capture, noble morals. He is worried that overly fabricated language will banish the sincere pursuit of philosophical understanding. Again, we might read Skelton as using the clothing ironically in order to highlight pre-Tudor techniques as meaningless in the Tudor world, but they provide the potential for order in a ship ruled by chaos. *Bowge* then is not a fundamental attack on poetic authority so much as one on the mutability of the court which has corrupted the truths the poem so yearns for, and further threatens to distract and corrupt newcomers to the arena: namely, Henry VII's young son.

Before I move on to *Magnyfycence,* I'd like to spend a few moments talking about the historical context of Bowge in relation to Skelton's career overall. There is significant disagreement over *The Bowge of Courte's* date of composition. Helen Stearns Sale has demonstrated that the poem was already in print in 1500, and argues that it was first printed in 1499. However, because she finds the influences from Brant's so overwhelming, Skelton must have composed it after 1494—more likely after 1497, when the *Narrenschiff* was translated out of its original German into Latin, a language Skelton knew well. Further, Sale connects the poem's material to Skelton's first appearance in court in 1498 when he first became Prince Henry's tutor, concluding that the poem was written in the same year as Skelton arrived in London.[329] Using a method he had previously applied to the *Garland of Laurel,*[330] Melvin J. Tucker argues that the astronomical phenomena described in the opening stanza only happened in 1480 and 1499, and because 1499 is "too late" for the poem to have been composed and published in the same year, he leans toward 1480, making the poem the work of a 17-year-old Skelton.[331] I think the cynicism of the verse, the clear echoing of Brant's *Narrenschiff, and* Skelton's documented introduction to the court in 1498 are decisive, and importantly connected to the court of Henry VII.

Unlike his son, Henry VII was not an ostentatious dresser: "portraits of the King show him wearing plain and unflamboyant clothes in the style that had prevailed for over

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[329] Sale, "The Date,"572-574.
[330] Owen Gingerich and Melvin J. Tucker, "The Astronomical Dating of Skelton's "Garland of Laurel," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 32 (1969): 207-220.
[331] Tucker, *Setting in Skelton,* 168-175.

a century, with centre-fastening doublet reaching below the knees, and a fur-lined gown, whose heavy folds swept along the ground."[332] The stable, conservative appearance echoed patterns going back over 100 years, and importantly spoke to established traditions more than to new fashions. In detailing the records related to Henry VII's Wardrobe, Anne Sutton notes that Henry's wardrobe was even less elaborate than his predecessors: "There is certainly magnificence in some of the fabrics but the variety and quantity of Edward IV's clothes has gone." Later, she goes on to describe Henry's penchant for scarlets, which could be seen as somewhat ostentatious given the price of the fabric. However, the scarlet which Henry ordered was mostly used for lining, and was therefore less about fashion than about health and warmth. Fairholt agrees, explaining that "Intent on the acquisition of wealth and power, and naturally of a reserved and crafty disposition, Henry VII.'s court was at no period either a gay or a brilliant one; nor do we find this monarch displaying anything gorgeous in personal decoration in the portraits still remaining of him."[333] In other words, although Henry VII styled himself according to his state, his style was less ostentatious than his predecessors, with the general impression of being "settled", "humble", and "sober"[334]

Again, *Bowge's* explicit target is the "mutabylyte" that he sees all around him, and the static nature of the dress in the poem insulates it from Skelton's critique.

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[332] Sutton explains that red was seen as "good for the health" and scarlet the finest of all woollen [sic] cloths." Jane Ashelford and Andreas Einsiedel, *The art of dress: clothes and society, 1500-1914* (London: National Trust, 1996), 16.

[333] F. W. Fairholt and Harold Arthur Lee-Dillon, *Costume in England; a history of dress to the end of the eighteenth century* (Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1968), 219.

[334] All of Sutton's quotations are taken from Anne F. Sutton, "Order and Fashion in Clothes: The King, His Household, and the City of London at the End of the Fifteenth Century," *Textile History.* 22 (1991): 253-276, especially 262-5.

Moreover, we will see in *Magnyfycence* that Skelton is perfectly willing to use allegory to comment on contemporary fashion. That he does not critique clothing in *Bowge* suggests that he was not particularly concerned with the state of fashion or its effect on courtly learning. I've demonstrated how *Bowge* expresses concern over the obfuscation of truth. If late 15th century costume—so often accused of cloaking darker realities in other times—worried him, Skelton could easily have included it in his satire. That omission again highlights exactly what worried him about the first Tudor court, and exactly what did not. Between the two of them, J.A. Guy and Greg Walker have outlined the institutional changes brought about by the Tudor dynasty. In particular, both focus on how "Tudor notions of good kingship...concerned the need to surround the king with reliable counsellors who, analogous to the senators of ancient Rome, could speak boldly for the common good and curb the prince's natural tendencies toward self interest."[335] Early Modern writers were very concerned about maintaining the integrity of court culture and its responsibility to curb tyranny. A corrupt counselor, seeking only Favor for himself (as opposed to Favor that might allow him to speak truth to power) was, according to one servant to Thomas Cromwell, the worst kind of "abomination."[336] We can see then how *The Bowge of Court* absorbs the anxieties of its age while taking aim at a threatening but also heavily critiqued facet of society.[337] It does not focus particularly on the mutability of clothes because they are not as fundamental an issue. As we will see,

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[335]See Walker, *Writing under Tyranny*, 8 (and also 7-20) as well as J. A. Guy, *The Tudor monarchy* (London: Arnold, 1997), 78-109.

[336] G. R. Elton, *Reform and renewal: Thomas Cromwell and the common weal* (Cambridge [England]: University Press, 1973), 41-2.

[337] Again, this formulation of Skelton's work ought to make us hesitate to call his attitude "medieval." Obviously he is nostalgic to a certain extent, but he is also nostalgic for Juvenal, whose poetry he directly references in *Why Come Ye Nat to Courte?*

the dramatic changes in fashion and princely performance of Henry VIII will make clothing a target for Skelton's allegorical drama, *Magnyfycence.*

3: *Magnyfycence*: The Devil is in the Details

The following section will make the claim that *Magnyfycence,* apart from advocating different ideas about court life and culture, responds to changes in fashion norms by shifting the way its allegorical clothing functions. Whereas clothing spoke unequivocally in *Bowge,* the clothing in *Magnyfycence* is complicated and at times difficult to read. Flawed clothing is still thematically linked with flawed character, but here the flaws in the clothing are often covered or hard to spot. More than a way for Skelton to communicate a character's true nature, clothing is actively used to *disguise* problematic characters as often as it works to *reveal*. A number of critics have focused on the function of clothing in the play, and my intervention is to compare Skelton's descriptive techniques across two different royal households, showing how Henry VIII's penchant for expensive, sumptuous dress and the courtly atmosphere in general shifted the way Skelton approached the mode's conventions as a whole. I have noted above how allegory is always already infused with material concerns, however lofty or spiritual its content may be. What's especially tricky about this play is how the very topic concerns the material performance of an abstract identity (as opposed to a notional performance of an abstract identity). The conceptual focus is explicitly on the object of perception. Magnyfycence's robes change dramatically in a play that is, in many ways, about what robes Henry VIII should wear. So it's even harder to distinguish between metaphoric

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concerns and material ones, and even more surprising how few critics have connected trends in fashion to Skelton's costumes.

In many ways, *Magnyfycence* is the allegory which Maureen Quilligan should have led with.[338] Of all the works discussed thus far, *Magnyfycence* is the most explicit about its focus on properly defining words, and the word that matters most to the play is also its title. It begins with a debate between Felycyte, Lyberte, and Measure about who should define Magnyfycence's use of wealth (effectively, which of the three virtues should Magnyfycence favor), and the play does not drop the debate until the final lines. Even when the vices of Foly, Fansy, and Courtly Abusyon (amongst others) warp the conversation around their own selfish ends, the debate over Magnyfycence's identity remains the sole focus. Towards the end of the play, after Magnyfycence has fallen into despair and been saved by Good Hope, Adversyte reminds us that Magnyficence's central problem was that "he knewe not hymselfe, his harte was so hye."[339] This is important, because although Adversyte provides a litany of other flaws, he categorizes them all as the outgrowth of a lack of self-knowledge. Magnyfycence's problem was that he didn't know what his name really meant: Magnyfycence's (and by extension, Henry VIII) problem was that he had not yet seen this play. But by the time the play concludes, a clearer picture of what Magnyfycence is (that is, how a king can properly perform his estate and maintain social order without bankrupting himself) has emerged.

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[338] Back in Chapter 1, I described Maureen Quilligan's theory on allegorical function, and how all allegories tend to focus on refining the definitions of words so as to produce a better language.
[339] *Magnyfycence,* 1888.

Now, something like accounting may seem like a trivial lesson given the play's 3-part-morality- play frame, and indeed, *Magnyfycence's* materialist focus is unique in its genre. However, Maria Hayward has pointed out how during much of the Early Modern period, that which constituted magnificent behavior was difficult to define. Obviously, not bankrupting the treasury was important, but kings had estates to maintain, and a large part of performing one's estate was appearing in rich clothes which set the king apart and helped maintain social order. This led to ambiguity in terms of what was appropriately ornate and what was over-the-top. Hayward notes that "luxurious" (often equated with lust) and "magnificent" (taken to be an Aristotelian virtue and therefore acceptable) dress would have been difficult to distinguish clearly as they would have both been "expensive and sumptuous." What made something "magnificent" and "luxurious" was therefore subjective and a moral or philosophical problem.[340] Given the subjectivity involved and the stakes of the definition, Skelton's topic was both appropriate for theatrical exploration and topical.

Interestingly, while one text is a play and the other is a poem, Leigh Winser has argued that we should also read *Bowge* as a drama, emphasizing the language around *disguising* and masking that permeate the text: "Increasing use of hoods and heightened obfuscation of the knaves faces strongly hint that their roles are the roles in a drama designed for players who would double in them."[341] One of the poem's final lines makes the multiple possibilities of experiencing the text explicit: "I wolde therewith no man

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[340] Maria Hayward, "Luxury or Magnificence? Dress at the Court of Henry VIII," *Costume* 30 (2013): 37-46.
[341] Leigh Winser, "The Bowge of Courte: Drama Doubling as Dream," *English Literary Renaissance* 6 (1976): 8.

were myscontente;/Besechynge you that shall it see or rede."[342] *Bowge* is normally

treated as a poem, but, for Griffin, the prolonged speeches and elaborate costume

potential make it a wonderful candidate for a *Disguysing* (of which none exist from the

time of Henry Tudor) or a Morality Play. Likewise, *Magnyfycence* is normally treated as

a play, but was printed in 1533. *Bowge* to *Magnyfycence* were then potentially both read

and seen.

Juxtaposing the two poems/dramas side also makes sense because of a number of

overlapping characters and overlapping themes. *Magnyfycence* is a court drama featuring

a princely main character named Magnyfycence whose court and rule are corrupted by

figures such as Fancy (pretending to be Largesse), Counterfet Countenaunce, Cloked

Colusyon, and Crafty Conveyaunce. The play follows him from his early stages of just

rule where he still maintains positive virtues like Lyberte and Felycyte, to his corruption

and attempted suicide, and finally to his redemption at the hands of Redresse,

Cyrcumspeccyon, and Perseveraunce. Like *Bowge,* this is a courtly drama which is

focused entirely on princely virtues and vices rather than common ones—this is not an

allegory which can speak to every man so much as it can serve to educate a ruler. Also

like *Bowge (*perhaps to an even greater degree*), Magnyfycence* is highly politicized and

topical. The play has been convincingly dated to 1519, and most scholars liken the vices

such as Cloked Colusyon and Crafty Conveyaunce to Henry VIII's infamous

"minions"(young advisers who formed much of his Privy Chamber). They infamously

threatened his personal finances and were eventually driven from court by older, more

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[342] *Bowge,* 533-4. Emphasis mine.

experienced, and less frivolous "auncient knightes." In fact, the play is even more precise

than that, featuring two brothers, Fancy and Foly, who are often read to represent Henry's

favorites Carew and Bryan.[343]

Lastly, in *Magnyfycence,* Skelton deploys many of the characterizing tropes he

used in *Bowge*. Halfway into the play, we find out that Fancy can only find a "bockyll" in

his purse, when there had been "20 marks" in it prior.[344] Ryotte complains of the same

problem in nearly the same way: "Now wolde to God thou wolde leye money downe!/

Lorde, how that I wolde caste it full rounde! Ay, in my pouche a buckell I have found."[345]

There are another half dozen or so lines echoed or alluded to in *Magnyfycence* that seem

to have their origin in *Bowge*, although they are broken up across the play. The most

sustained parallels can be found between Ryotte's clothing and Courtly Abusyon's. In

Bowge, the former is dressed as a stereotypical "gallande", featuring a revealing gowne,

hose broken at the knee, dagger, and patched clothing. When Courtly Abusyon describes

his clothing, we get a similar picture of a well-dressed courtier who enjoys gambling—in

fact, Scattergood's notes make a similar claim.[346]

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[343] See Scattergood, "Dressing the Part," 233. Plenty has been written on Henry's 'minions'. Scattergood, in his essay on the play, (John Scattergood, "Dressing the Part in *Magnyfycence:* Allegory and Costume." In *Tudor Theater: Allegory in the Theatre,* ed. Andre Lascombes (Tours Round Table on Tudor Drama: vol. 5, 2000), 55-75.) quotes Halle's *Chronicle* describing the destructive, French habits the minions had picked up abroad: "During this tyme remained in the frenche courte Nicholas Carem, Fraunces Brian, and diuerse other of the young gentleman of Englande and thei with the frenche kyng roade daily disgysed through Paris, throwyng Egges, stones and other foolishe trifles at the people, which light demanoure of a kyng was much discommended and gested at."
[344] *Magnyfycence,* 1108.
[345] *Bowge*, 395-7.
[346] John Scattergood, *John Skelton: the career of an early Tudor poet* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014) 440.

New Materialities in a New Court

Even in that similarity is difference, and I think the ties between Ryotte and

Abusyon are a useful place to begin thinking about the ways *Magnyfycence* absorbs the

changing material culture into its dramatic momentum. Abusyon is still a "gallaunt", but

he has a longer gowne than Ryotte and dons less beaten up robes, so there is the

suggestion that he is less self-destructive and maintains a higher status. This "gallaunt" is

less trivialized and more established—less of a joke than a power player. We can find

further evidence later in Abusyon's speech when he describes his leggings: "My hose

strayte tyde;/My buskyn wyde,/ryche to beholde/Gletterynge in golde."[347] From a purely

visual perspective, Abusyon's leggings are more richly decorated than Ryotte's and have

the advantage of not being ripped at the knees. But the details here are important, because

Abusyon's golden leggings were not merely sumptuous: they were illegal. Hayward's

article mentions one very particular sumptuary law put in place by Henry in 1511: "no

person of what estate condition or degree that he be use in his apparel any cloth of gold of

purple color or silk of purple colour but only the king, the Queen, the king's mother, the

king's children, and the king's brothers and sisters."[348] Those golden hose were only

supposed to be worn by the king or his family, and Abusyon is obviously not included in

that group. In this way, Skelton draws our attention to a particularly inflammatory

costume choice which Abusyon apparently wears with abandon. Not only is he tricking

the prince into making poor administrative choices, he's watering down the differences in

estates by wearing colors meant for royalty alone. Magnyfycence's neglect of this

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[347] *Magnyfycence,* 852-5.
[348] Hayward, "Luxury," 38.

problem only worsens the offence. The detail of the leggings also works to historicize Abusyon's flaws. Scattergood helpfully quotes Hall's account of Henry's minions along with the impression they left on the court:

> Thei perceived that certain young men in his priue chamber not regardyng his estate nor degree, were so familier and homely with hym, and plaied suche light touches with hym that thei forgat hemselfes: whiche thynges although the kyng of his gentle nature suffred and not rebuked nor reproued it: yet the kynges counsail thought it not mete to be suffred for the kynges honor, and therefore thei altogether came to the kyng, besching hym al these enormities and lightnes to redresse.[349]

Played before a court that had experienced that kind of tension, it would have been nearly impossible to miss the connection between Abusyon and the minions, and therefore nearly impossible to mistake the nature of Abusyon's offense.

Abusyon's overstep is important, and would have been seen as such, but it is also adds an important element to Skelton's project. We might think that the time and lines Skelton takes to make this play topical and not just about "magnificence" are tangential or are meant to further the satire—like letting the door hit the minions on their way out. But this kind of over familiarity and the breakdown of traditional distinctions between ranks keeps popping up in the play. Characters continuously discuss the vices acting out of "kynde." And just before the bottom drops out and Magnyfycence is forced into poverty, Clokyd Colusyon suggests the prince "chose ii, iii of suche as you love

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[349] Scattergood, *Career*, 234, quoting Halle, fol. Lxviij recto (MMm ii recto).

best,/And let all your fansyes upon them rest. Spare for no cost to gyve them pounde and peny./Better to make iii ryche than for to make many."[350] Now, the idea of choosing two or three favorites to shower money and clothes on would have sounded familiar to the 1519 court. However, the problem with the advice isn't simply that it would be exclusionary or expensive: the expense is important, but the bigger problem is the raising up of undeserving courtiers out of their "kynde." Magnyfycence's misguided response makes this aspect clear when he takes Colusyon's advice and makes Clokyd Colusyon and Largesse "supervysour" of his Lyberte. Not only is the king playing favorites, he's also giving away the reigns of power to others.

This is the final mistake which drives the kingdom into ruin and Magnyfycence into poverty. I think Skelton emphasizes this class jumping in order to highlight what magnificence as a virtue is all about: maintaining social hierarchy in order to better maintain society. One major problem with costume as identity is that, *if mismanaged*, fashion can easily unravel the hierarchy that provides order, causing social roles to blur and authority to weaken. That's why the audience sees Magnyfycence stripped of his royal robes *before* they see Adversyte or Poverte: his majesty had already withered before they show up. And that's why the vices honestly mistake him for someone else after his robes are gone: without his robes, Magnyfycence is *no longer* a prince, and allowing others to become too king-like in appearance and behavior caused a confusion of status which in turn led to other problems like poverty and disease.[351] The driving

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[350] *Magnyfycence,* 1769-1772.
[351] We can see an intermediate moment in the middle of the play when the prince begins to call attention to himself and to his costume. In the beginning of the play, (ln 162-3) Magnyfycence enters without drawing attention to himself explicitly, but he nevertheless dominates the scene through sheer presence. Ruler's

factor, again, is that Magnyfycence did not know himself—that is, he did not fully embody his estate. The extreme consequences of his actions in the play raise the stakes of costume management, equating the strict enforcement of sumptuary law with good governance.

Complicated Patterns

More than its historical parallel however, the added detail of Abusyon's leggings speaks to the way clothing is functioning in this allegorical court. The audience might naturally recognize Magnyfycence's shortcoming for allowing this offence (just as Henry was criticized and later forced to remove his minions), but the prince could only do so if he read clothing not in categories (i.e. "the gallaunt") but in detail. Like readers, he must spot the specific aspects of the clothing which offend while allowing the benign ones. Abusyon's opening speech, in which he describes his outfit in detail, is 50 lines long, and the golden leggings are the only illegal detail. Having found offending garments, he must interpret their meaning and then react accordingly. This is a harder and much more precise process than Drede's simple task in *Bowge,* where the characters' whole outfits screamed one idea at a time. It's undoubtedly true that there are times where Magnyfycence missed obvious visual cues. Early on, Fancy passes himself off as Largesse despite his smaller physical stature, and even the vices have trouble believing the prince's mistake.[352] Later, when we meet Poverte and Good Hope, we learn that the former is dressed in "beggers baggys" and is crippled, and the latter is perhaps dressed as

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costumes speak for themselves. As he becomes more beholden to Foly's influence, he feels the need to draw attention to himself (lines 1457-1514) and make ridiculously bold claims about himself. We can already see him failing to embody his state--not just in his pride--but in his insecurity. He does not trust his costume to be enough.

[352] *Magnfycence ln* 522-3.

a physician (in order to better treat the prince as a "pacyent".[353] From these examples, we could gather the blunt message that rulers should take note of clothing because it is linked with character, but clothing is not always so obvious. Fansy, Counterfet Coutenaunce, and Crafty Conveyaunce are all dressed simply as gallants.[354] That kind of clothing is harder to read: we might think that they are dressed as ostentatiously as Abusyon, or that their outfits merely suggest the fashion choices made by their historical counterparts. The former explanation is unlikely, as Abusyon's outfit is the reason for a very long monologue: similar costumes would belie that speech's significance and make for a less than dramatic entrance. If their dress is more mundane, then how is the king supposed to read it? Is all contemporary fashion evidence of bad faith?

If so, then what are we to make of Welthfull Felicite, who is mocked by Lyberte for elaborate "stockys"?[355] Felicite is not a vice in this play. If anything, he represents some of the sober advisers Henry refused at the start of his reign, but if his costume (I should say that Skelton is unclear on the details of the costume—the only hint we get is Lyberte's joke) if anything like that of the vices, then Skelton has muddied the water. There are times, perhaps, when clothing will give the game away, but it is not always reliable here. Put a different way, Griffiths is right that "In *Magnyfycence*, then, as in *The Bowge of Court*, the vices' practice gives free rein to anxieties over the ability of words to reconstitute rather than reflect reality. Yet, where the allegorical breakdown in *The Bowge* leads to a poetic impasse, *Magnyfycence* counters it with an alternative model of

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[353] Ibid. 2036, and 2349-60. See Scattergood, "Dressing the Part," 58-9 for more details.
[354] *Magnfycence,* 511.
[355] *Magnfycence,* 30-31.

interpretation and understanding."[356] One thing I would add is that in the latter work, Skelton conflates visual trickery with verbal trickery: insisting that clothes were complicit in the deceptions at court now in a way they hadn't been before. A passive observer could not expect courtiers to wear identities publicly, and a monarch had to be extremely discerning in terms of detailed aspects related to costume.

We have covered how, as in *Bowge,* this play equates clothing with character, and emphasizes the connection between appearance and reality. Unlike *Bowge,* however, clothing in this allegorical world can change, and everyone is drawn into its gravitational field. As discussed above, in *Bowge,* Lady Peerless remains untouched by the courtly mechanisms that so overwhelm Drede. We know this partly because of her few lines, and partly because of her appearance. Skelton denies her a costume and does not allow her to take part in the fashion system. In distancing her from the influences of court, he neutralizes the threat to her rule. Drede is not so lucky, and neither is Magnyfycence. In the 1519 play, Magnyfycence is not only given a costume but also has it taken away. He is drawn into the system, and the materiality and greed which pervade the court corrupts his own rule all too easily. This inclusion of the prince in the material cycle demonstrates the problematic intimacy of the minions while showing how greed could disrupt traditional relationships, even those related to the monarch. As Lawrence Manley explains, a lot of social invective of the early 16th century was concerned with the role of greed in breaking down traditional values in favor of the "arbitrary, transactional

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[356] Griffiths, *John Skelton*, 72.

standards of the marketplace."[357] Manley is interested in the way the growth of markets

displaced established social order, effecting who traded with whom, and whose economic

needs were most influential. In *Bowge,* Lady Peerless is outside of the clothing game, and

thus immune to the effects of the marketplace. In *Magnyfycence,* the prince is all too

involved, which threatens his relationships to his advisors as well as his own authority.

Skelton in 1519 is worried about the impact of the material world on the monarch in a

way that he is not in 1498. Why?

4. Privy Chambers and Fluted Gowns

One explanation might be found in David Starkey's *The English Court.* Starkey

is particularly interested on the effect of the Privy Chamber in Henry VII's reign and how

it impacted the court's access to the king and the king's sense of isolation. The Privy

Chamber existed prior to Henry VII's accession, but he was the first to separate that

chamber, forbid anyone outside the Privy Chamber to enter, and to give them their own

staff: "The contrast between the old and new departments was great. The staff of the

Chamber numbered hundreds and, at its upper levels, was socially distinguished, with

knights and esquires, and a peer, the Lord Chamberlain, at its head. The Privy chamber,

on the other hand, was tiny...and it was humble." Although the most intimate body

service had once been the responsibility of knights and esquires, in 1495 Henry VII

replaced those high ranking gentleman with yeoman and other grooms of lower social

status.[358] The effect of Henry's reforms was isolation in his private chambers from men

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[357] Lawrence Manley, *Literature and culture in early modern London* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 92.

[358] See David Grummitt, "Household, politics and political morality in the reign of Henry VII," *Historical Research* 82 (2009): 393-411.

of influence, which insulated the "king physically from the court nobility and so morally from the constant, insidious pressure they could ordinarily bring to bear." Thus, Starkey explains, "Henry needed councilors only as the agents of his will, not as advisers: the 'secrets' of his high policy were his alone, to be shared with none."[359] This sounds an awful lot like Lady Peerless, who is "physically and morally" separated from those on the ship, and speaks most intimately with a serving woman: someone who would have fit in the Privy Chamber.

Starkey goes on to discuss how Henry VIII reversed many of his father's policies with respect to 'keeping distance.' For one, when Henry VII had put on royal spectacles, he often avoided participating and was mostly a "remote" observer. By contrast, his son sometimes fought *incognito* in tournaments, winning praise while crying "God save the king.' ...The taboo on royal participation thus broken, even at some cost, Henry was unstoppable and became the star of a dazzling sequence of tournaments and revels that made England the Hollywood of Europe and Henry the *jeune premier* of Christendom."[360] This new style of participatory kingship won friends but naturally dissolved barriers between the king and his favorites. Around 1515, Henry started relying on the minions more for advice and companionship, inviting them into the Privy Chamber, paving the way for excesses in fashion, the ostracization of his more experienced advisers, and some poor decisions in accounting. We've already covered how *Magnyfycence* portrays the effect of these minions, but I think it's important to

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[359] David Starkey, *The English court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London: Longman, 1987), 73-5. See also Greg Walker, *Persuasive fictions: faction, faith, and political culture in the reign of Henry VIII* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1996), 35-53.
[360] Starky, *English Court,* 95.

realize that poor advisers are not the only thing that has changed. Magnyfycence the character *participated* in this play from the beginning, opening himself up to the influence of everyone—not just the vices— and signaling a change in royal stature. We may assume that the prince was just fine before the vices (or minions) appeared, but in fact, Magnyfycence never understood his true nature until the very end, and it was only by falling into despair, adversity, and poverty that he could learn the value of good bookkeeping.

If Starkey is right on the effects of structural changes related to the Privy chamber, the early 16th century changes in fashion and the material expression of identity also would have impacted ideas about magnificence and royalty. Angus Patterson's book details some of the specific ways fashion and armor changed in the period. For instance, the late 15th century saw the advent of the codpiece (something Henry VIII employed extensively), and as the 16th century continued, armor became heavier, more sumptuous, and more expensive. "Gone was sinuous, willowy grace, as burly overblown armors proclaiming a powerful upper body took over. Pinched waistlines, broad hips, square shoulders and straight necklines characterized armor in parallel with both men's and women's clothing." Patterson also describes the rise of puffed and slashed clothing as "huge, billowing folds, revealing expensive interlinings in contrasting colors."[361] Fairholt's older take on the clothing of Henry's court provides further details, offering descriptions of portraits and astonishing amounts of detail. Take for example:

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[361] Angus Patterson, *Fashion and armour in Renaissance Europe: proud lookes and brave attire* (London: V & A Pub, 2009), 23-38.

The Earl is entirely arrayed in scarlet, of different depths of tint, and wears

a short doublet, open in front, displaying his shirt, which is white,

ornamented with black embroidery, as also are the rufiles. It is fastened

round his waist by a girdle, to which his dagger, in a richly gilt case, is

appended. His jerkin is made preposterously broad at the shoulders, and

very wide in the sleeves, which are gathered, and puffed and slashed in the

first fashion[362]

Again, the impossibly wide shoulders and puffed clothing pervaded the period. Both

Patterson and Fairholt emphasize Henry's particular interest in keeping up with these

latest trends: his made-to-measure armor fluctuated as style and his waistline dictated.

But what's troubling about Henry's passion for being up to date was that others' clothing

dictated his own. Patterson notes that Henry was particularly taken by the ornate dress of

the 'Landsknecht' (Swiss and German mercenaries renowned for brutality) whom he

employed in France.

As previously noted, many contemporaries complained of the minions' familiarity

with the king, but perhaps here Skelton suggests that Henry debased *himself* by taking on

the patterns of his inferiors. That is, instead of laying the blame on the minions, Skelton

lays it at Henry's feet. For as much as Henry's clothing was richer and more varied than

those of his court, copying the contemporary styles made him look like a lot of others,

again, winning him friends but costing him status. What we see in the play is Redresse

giving a gown to Magnyfycence at the end that is unique compared to other gaudily and

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[362] Fairholt, *Costume*, 219-40.

fashionably dressed figures on stage. Skelton cares less about the specific details of what such a coat needs to be, and although he makes sure we realize *how* important this gown is and to what it extent it must stand out, he does not specify how the gown is supposed to be cut. Skelton would not pretend to suggest Henry don the billowing clothing of the period or something else, but he is certain that the clothing Henry wears must be of an altogether different *kynde.* To be magnificent, the king must stand out in ways that do not simply involve cost or particular articles of clothing: kings need stylistic distinctions— not just an outlaw of gold cloth.

This is not to say that Skelton is rejecting Henry VIII's style of authority in favor of his father's or another model. One detail that most critics seem to miss is that along with Foly and Fancy, Measure and Lyberte are also absent (or at least not necessarily on stage) from the ending. They are replaced by Cyrcuspeccyon, Redresse, and Perseveraunce who echo many of Measure's and Lyberte's aspects, but include an awareness of changing economic and political circumstances. But beyond the differences between the figures, we should recognize that in excluding those early virtues (representatives for the older advisors who were left over from his father's reign) from the ending, Skelton suggests Henry must move on to new virtues and new models of kingship. This is not a play about the need for Henry VIII to *return* to his father's advisors or governing style: it very clearly embraces the present king and tries to give direction with respect to the new courtly discourse and the new political norms.

5. Moral Allegory vs. Moralists

What's interesting about anti-fashion diatribes is that across centuries their tune rarely changes. For every 14th century complaint about the focus on elaborate clothing over the development of the soul, there is a virtually word for word sermon on the same topic in the 16th. See for instance, William Harrison's 1577 *Description of England,* in which he laments: "For my part, I can tell better how to inveigh against this enormity than describe any certainty of our attire; such is our mutability...Oh how much cost is bestowed nowadays on our bodies and how little upon our souls."[363] Harrison's complaint about contemporary fashion is not that far off of Hoccleve's, which condemns fashion for being both useless and overly costly, despite a 150 year gap.[364] If we go back further into the 15th century, we find invectives against clothing for mocking Christ's body:

> Opene thou hast thy side,
>
> Spayers longe and wide,
>
> For veinglorye and pride,...
>
> My body with scourges smerte
>
> Beswongen all aboute.[365]

Virtually the same complaints can be found even in the 14th century:

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[363] William Harrison and Georges Edelen, *The description of England: the classic contemporary account of Tudor social life* (Washington, D.C.: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1994), 144-5. Around the turn of the 16th century, Barclay was making similar protestations. See Patterson, 37.

[364] The relevant passage is quoted in chapter 1 and is from Thomas Hoccleve and Charles R. Blyth, *The regiment of princes* (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medievel Institute Publications, 1999), ln 421-553.

[365] Reginald Thorne Davies, *Medieval English lyrics, a critical anthology* ([Evanston, Ill.]: Northwestern University Press, 1964), ln 18-26. Quoted by John Scattergood, *Reading the past: essays on medieval and renaissance literature* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 1996), 250.

ffor if such coste and outrage in clothis were nought synne, God wolde

nought so sharpliche ispoke there ayenst, as he ded in the gospel, of the

riche man that was clothed in purpur and bys. He is a grete fole and more

witles than a child tht hath wit and pryde of his clothinge or apparaile of

his body.[366]

In all of these examples, excessive spending on clothing is a function of pride, and comes

at an expense of focus on the soul. From such similarity across centuries, we might

conclude that, forasmuch as individual styles may have changed, discourse or rules

around fashion had not. So what's helpful about Skelton's work is that it provides insight

into some nuanced changes that the social critics were less precise in describing. Put

another way, one thing this chapter has shown is that allegory is capable of being much

more materially responsive than moral diatribes or sermons. Earlier in Skelton's career,

he encountered a stiffer, more removed monarch with a less sumptuous dress. The

allegorical world he created matched not just the noxious courtiers he encountered as a

young man but also the material systems of signification that Henry VII encouraged. As

his career developed and Henry VII died, Skelton's allegory shifted to account for more

refined attitudes towards fashion and the participatory nature of the monarch. In both

cases, the courtly allegory Skelton wrote paralleled political changes in terms of how

clothing worked, how observers were supposed to read that clothing, and what lush

costumed expressions signified.

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[366]BL MS Harley 45, fol. 1636 quoted by Owst, *Literature and pulpit,* 411.

Therefore, although the texts demonstrate Skelton's mastery of Latin, classical training, and adherence to well-trodden figures like Fortune, they are unquestionably tied to very particular political situations and acutely respond to shifting norms. If anything, they show how much things change rather than how much they stay the same. I noted the 3-part-morality-play structure of *Magnyfycence* above. It certainly would have been familiar to the audience, as it had dominated the genre for nearly a century. But the onlookers may have been disturbed by the normally religious genre being used to promote best practices in budgeting. In fact, this discomfort in Skelton's appropriation of the form extends beyond his contemporaries. Harris's book (like Ramsay's edition of the play[367]) is devoted to making the case that the play (as well as Skelton's oeuvre) is ultimately interested in moral concerns—not material. All Harris can say is that Skelton's "modifications of the inherited genre are bold" before insisting that Skelton's work falls within Artistotelian boundaries. [368] Like a lot of critics, he has trouble accepting the necessary conclusions to his own observations: that Skelton fundamentally remade the morality play to suit his own time and perspective. Allegory is fundamentally a tug-of-war between inherited traditions and individual variations, and when we look closely, familiar characters whose legacies stretch back hundreds of years are much less familiar than we thought. Even for a grizzled conservative like Skelton, the old rules of allegory give way to the new realities of material culture.

Moral Drama in Transition

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[367] John Skelton and Robert Lee Ramsay, *Magnyfycence: a moral play* (London: Published for the Early English Text Society by the Oxford University Press, 1958).
[368] William O. Harris, *Skelton's Magnyfycence and the cardinal virtue* tradition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 1-12.

Skelton's work is a problem for literary historians who are committed to maintaining a progress narrative of English literature. For instance, in order to support the argument that Protestant drama pushed allegory towards the secular and material realm, John Watkins highlights John Bale's 1538 allegorical play, *King Johan,* as a shift away from medieval hermeneutics. I am going to quote at length, and I want to focus on the ways that Watkins claims *King Johan* changes allegory:

> Throughout *King Johan*, the older moral allegory yields to a historical allegory in which characters and episodes in the fiction correspond to specific people and events in history. In making Sedition the common enemy of King Johan and Imperial Majesty, Bale does not blur John's and Henry VIII's reigns into a transhistorical narrative of kingship. He distinguishes them instead as the first and last phases of a specific historical struggle.[369]

Watkins claims that Protestant writers used medieval literature to justify and find roots for the Reformation. In so doing, they articulated a vision of the Middle Ages as one of moral decline, and stigmatized "medieval" allegorical techniques as part of that historiographical project. Watkins is using Bale as part of a larger argument that essentially claims that this rejection of medieval writing helped push allegorical theater into a new direction, which in turn revolutionized the aesthetics of the second half of the 16th century. In other words, he highlights the Reformation as a causal agent to show how allegory changed, and, in the process, reinforces a sense of progress toward the

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[369] Watkins, "Medieval Theater," 1999.

secular that the Reformation accelerated. Even though Watkins would never claim the Reformation directly caused this shift in literary emphasis, his reliance on Bale and other Protestant writers suggests that Protestantism cleared the path for mimetic literature. In the quoted binary between "moral" and "historical" allegory, one can still detect the faint influence of a progress narrative, where the Reformation revived drab old allegory and allowed for more realistic theater to thrive. He ends his essay on allegorical theatre thus: "As the universal yielded to the particular, an aesthetic developed that associated abstraction not with truth but with dramaturgical naïveté. By the later sixteenth century, allegorical plays were more likely to figure in the repertoire of schoolboys and amateurs than in the professional and commercial theatre of Marlowe and Shakespeare."[370] This formulation makes the progress narrative explicit, in that the Reformation not only cleared the way for historical allegory, but also enabled the likes of Shakespeare.[371]

Skelton is a problem here because clearly *Bowge* and *Magnyfycence* both predate *King Johan,* and they also both allegorize particular, topical anxieties rather than putting forward some universal lens. When Watkins says that the moral allegory yielded to the historical in the wake of the Reformation, he discounts Skelton's two overtly-political allegories. He further discounts the ways in which earlier works like *Mankind* and *Hyckescorner* wove the particular into the universal in order to speak to historical moments. While I would agree that the Reformation changed the way theater operated dramatically, Protestants did not invent the allegory of the particular. Neither, for that

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[370] I'm setting up Watkins as a normative foil here in that he is cited often. For instance, Helen Cooney's 2001 essay on Skelton uses Watkins' historical framing to reconceive of Skelton as someone caught between mimetic and allegorical literature.
[371] I might add that Watkins' phrasing there, of the universal yielding to the particular, hints at the aesthetics of the Romantics.

matter, did the Tudors. In that sense, my arguments in chapters two and three work in tandem to better describe how the literary trends that would dominate in Early Modern England have their roots deep in the Middle Ages. This might suggest that the Early Modernization of England began before 1485, but instead I argue that it breaks down the periodic distinction between "moral" and "historical" allegory, and it further complicates Skelton's position as "transitional" between the medieval and Early Modern. Would we say the same thing of the author of *Mankind*? If not, do we prioritize Skelton's life and work because they happen to fall between traditional fields of expertise, or because his own literary advances fit with a prefabricated pro-Tudor narrative?

One last point I'd like to make is that this chapter should discourage critics from reading Skelton as if he were aware of the path literature would take in the 16th century and beyond.[372] Helen Cooney has described *The Bowge of Court* as a work of crisis, whereby Skelton was caught between the allegorical mode of the past and the mimetic mode of the future. The basic idea is that as the Middle Ages waned, so did the popularity of allegory, and that the Early Modern period was paralleled with the rise of the humanists, who preferred plain speech over the highly wrought allegories. Skelton was writing at this transition point, and his allegory, so Cooney claims, remained skeptical of allegory's continued relevance in the face of the oncoming mimetic turn.[373] Obviously, Skelton's ability to conceive of the future is questionable in that

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[372] Fish, for instance, calls Skelton the first "poet of the English Renaissance," and Green refers to Skelton's work as the "last wholly authentic utterance of the Middle Ages." See Fish, *John Skelton*, 249 and Green, *John Skelton*, 39.
[373] See Helen Cooney, "Skelton's *Bowge of Court* and the Crisis of Allegory in Late-Medieval England," in *Nation, court, and culture: new essays on fifteenth-century English poetry,* ed. Helen Cooney (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 2001).

Magnyfycence and *Bowge* offer such different ideas about monarchies. Skelton didn't know and couldn't anticipate how different Henry VIII would be from his father. Likewise, we should not expect him to have foreseen some inevitable emphasis on secular materiality.

More broadly, as discussed above, Skelton's work was not exactly read as he would have intended. During his life, he set himself up as the enemy of humanists and of Protestants, the *orator regius,* and, later, the spokesperson of the English people. And yet, after his death in 1529, Skelton's work was praised and appropriated by the Protestant authors such as John Bale, who saw his work as prescient. Imitations of satires like *Why Come Ye Nat to Courte* continued to be produced until the 1560's, finding their way into the Skelton canon in the way that imitations of the Canterbury Tales had found their way into Chaucer's.[374] By 1568, Skelton's work was out of print, and his style, which had been imitated for decades, fell out of favor in lieu of a rising interest in "neoclassical standards of decorum."[375] His posthumous reception was so unpredictable that it is hard to think he saw himself as on the verge of some literary precipice. When scholars write the winding, tortuous path that we know English history and literature took in the 16th century onto Skelton, and they imagine that he somehow understood his role, they allegorize the flesh-and-blood Skelton into a depersonalized figure whose immediate historical moment is subordinated to his place on a larger literary continuum. Skelton did not and could not have known where poetry would go after his death.

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[374] For more on this, see Hadfield, *Literature Politics*, 41-45.
[375] King, *Reformation Literature*, 219.

This also speaks to how we describe transitions between literary styles and historical periods. The path that history takes seems more inevitable on reflection, but for those living through those transitional moments, the end is murky if not completely obscured. That is why we should work to decouple literary and cultural processes from specific political changes: while allegorical drama does get progressively more concrete and historical at the Middle Ages end and the Early Modern period begins, the process both precedes the Tudor victories that defined the Early Modern and extends beyond them.

Chapter 4: Britomart and the Gravity of Time[376]

Of all of the authors discussed so far, Edmund Spenser was probably the most self-consciously nostalgic. Whereas the author of *Mankind* pined for a return to feudal roles and John Skelton yearned for allegorical certainties, Spenser fashioned his poetry around the aesthetics of what he considered to be a bygone era. By the time Spenser entered the literary stage, it was common to think that England had awoken from some dark slumber and was now in a better place than it had been before, both in terms of political stability and in terms of intellectual production.[377] Even if the term "the Middle Ages" was not in print yet, what Spearing calls the "psychological Renaissance" was definitely at work.[378] This historical consciousness affected the way Spenser built his stanzas, chose his archaic vocabulary, and appropriated romantic traditions. In fact, one of his chief pseudonyms, Colin Clout, came from a fellow laureate, John Skelton. Even as Skelton's literary heritage waned in the final decades of the Elizabethan era and his

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[376] All quotations from Spenser come from Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene,* ed. A. C. Hamilton et al.(Harlow: Longman, 2013). When citing Spenser directly, I will list the Book in roman numerals, then the canto, stanza, and line, all separated by periods

[377] For examples of this kind of thinking, see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of nationhood: the Elizabethan writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 14-25. Helgerson also quotes Roy Strong thusly, "For the Elizabethans, all history led up to them."

[378] This sense of historical distinction and the dawn of a new age is emphasized by Spearing as one of the hallmarks of the Early Modern period. See Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance*, 11-15, and 224-230. Petrarch, along with other Italians, was writing about a darkness being dispelled and the start of a new age as early as 1343. But, even though we see hints of that in Surrey, that kind of rhetoric does not attain intellectual dominance in England until the late 16th century. King and Hadfield argue that Italophiles and their Petrarchan conception of history do not triumph really until the 1580's. See King *Reformation Literature*, 256 and Hadfield, *Literature, Politics*, 49.

works fell out of print, Spenser revived the character in a deliberate attempt to draw roots from his English vernacular heritage.[379]

On the other hand, Spenser's poetry is nothing if not the product of the Early Modern Age, the Reformation, the renewed reliance on classical learning, and the centralization of the Tudor monarchy. A self-made man, Spenser was the son of poor parents, went to Cambridge as a sizar[380], and generally had to work for a living. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he embraced print culture and engaged in shameless self-promotion his whole career. For instance, in 1580, a year after he published *The Shepheardes Calendar*, four letters between Spenser and Harvey were published, ostensibly cementing their sincere relationship. However, the letters did more than that: they demonstrated their authors' cultural finesse, showcased their university education, and provided them a platform to display their literary potential. One year later, *Shepheardes* went into its second edition, and Spenser was appointed to a lucrative civil service position in Dublin.[381] Although his posting in Ireland from 1580-1595 is understood in a variety of ways, it seems to have allowed Spenser to acquire property, wealth, and title. While he was fashioning his political career, he fashioned his poetic

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[379] Spenser discovered Skelton some 30 years after the latter's death thanks in part to his friend and confidante, Gabriel Havey. See Andy Kesson and Emma Smith, *The Elizabethan top ten: defining print popularity in Early Modern England* (Surry, England: Ashgate, 2013), 158. See also Hadfield, *Literature*, 32.

[380] A poorer student who had to perform servant duties for other students or masters in exchange for room and board.

[381] For more on this publication and its self-conscious promotion, see Richard Rambuss, "Spenser's Life and Career," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser,* ed. Andrew Hadfield (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 20-21.

career in the Virgilian model, starting with modest poems and subjects,[382] and eventually

working up to a *magnum opus.*

So perhaps it is best to approach Spenser as a poet of paradox. He remains one of

the four so-called fathers of English Literature (along with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and

Milton[383]) despite the fact that he spent much of his life outside of England, and once

admitted that Ireland was home.[384] He is a poet of sumptuous beauty, grandeur, and

immense imagination.[385] However, his writings on Ireland and his political role therein

have, in the eyes of many, made him a poet of empire, oppression, and puritanism.[386]

Most crucially for my purposes, his oeuvre looks like one long attempt to gain the favor

of the queen, but towards the end of his career, his views on Elizabeth and the Tudor

monarchy became more ambivalent.[387]

That tension between enthusiastic support and explicit disappointment is well

displayed in the figure of Britomart, the chaste female Knight of Books III, IV, and V of

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[382] *The Shepheardes Calendar* remains an early example of the kind of neoclassical pastoral poetry that would come into vogue.

[383] Spenser's traditional niche among those four has been the father of English *literature*, as opposed to English poetry. See for instance, David Hill Radcliffe, *Edmund Spenser, a reception history* (Columbia, SC, USA: Camden House, 1996), 2-5.

[384] See Andrew Hadfield, *The Cambridge companion to Spenser* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.

[385] See for instance, Daniel Wise, *Edmund Spenser*. Home College Series, No. 18 (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883); R. W. Church, *Spenser* (New York: J.W. Lovell, 1881).

[386] See for instance, Alastair Fowler, "Spenser and War," in *War, Literature and the Arts in Sixteenth-Century Europe,* ed. J.R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Basingstoke: Macmillian, 1989). Although they offer different solutions, C.S. Lewis and W.B. Yeats saw this paradox of beauty and oppression as central to understanding the tension that Spenser's poetry constructs. See W. B. Yeats, *Essays and introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 356-83 and C. S. Lewis, *The allegory of love: a study in medieval tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 349.

[387] For more on republicanism in Early Modern England and Spenser's relation to it, see Patrick Collinson, "The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I," in *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987); Patrick, Collinson, "The Elizabethan Exclusion Crisis and the Elizabethan Polity," in *This England: essays on the English nation and Commonwealth in the sixteenth century,* ed. Patrick Collinson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); and A. Hadfield, "Was Spenser a Republican?" *English.* 47 (1998): 169-182.

Spenser's *Faerie Queene.* Spenser wrote this magnum opus in the 1580's and 90's,

beginning it in earnest soon after he arrived in Ireland. One of his goals was to reflect the

Queen's Two Bodies: her identity as a public monarch and her identity as a private

woman. As Spenser explains, Gloriana in the poem is a reflection of Elizabeth the Queen,

and Belphoebe a reflection of Elizabeth the "virtuous and beautifull Lady."[388] Britomart

is another one of those reflections, but she is neither wholly private nor wholly public,

and she struggles to negotiate that balance within the text.[389]

In *The Letter to Ralegh*, published in 1590 along with the first three Books,

Spenser laid out a plan to write a total of twenty-four books, but only if he "finde it to be

wel accepted" by his readers.[390] Even though he never fulfilled this original vision,[391]

Spenser did find the poem well accepted. In fact, Elizabeth awarded him a life pension of

£50 a year in 1591, and while we do not know the exact reason, the most plausible

explanation is that she liked, or at least was persuaded to appreciate, the poem.[392] Despite

the success of the first edition, Books IV, V, and VI (published in 1596) are much darker,

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[388] Hamilton, *Spenser*, 716.

[389] For a thorough examination of Britiomart's private and public bodies, see Julia M. Walker, *Medusa's mirrors: Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and the metamorphosis of the female self* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 95-7.

[390] Hadfield thinks a pageant Spenser saw in his first year in Ireland on St. George's Day may have inspired the poet to begin book one. See Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: a life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 178, 234-8. The quotation is from the *Letter,* cited on page 234.

[391] Despite the ridiculous length of such a work, it is unclear in Spenser actually ever gave up, even as his vision for the poem changed dramatically in the 1590's. Sonnets 33 and 80 in the *Amoretti* (published in 1595) insist that he is still planning on finishing at least one twelve-book cycle. Cited in Daniel Vitkus, "The unfulfilled form of the Faerie Queene: Spenser's frustrated fore-conceit,"*Renaissance and Reformation.* 35 (2012): 95.

[392] Hadfield considers other possibilities for such a pension and concludes that the poem itself (along with its political message) is the most likely reason Elizabeth decided to be so generous. Moreover, Hadfield details how after the *Faerie Queene* was published, Spenser's other works were read widely and seriously (235-270).

more cynical, and more pessimistic than the original three.[393] The general scholarly

explanation is that the 1590 edition was written in the wake of the victory over the

Spanish Armada, at a time of high hopes and aspiration. In the years that followed, the

Tyrone Rebellion (which began in Ireland in 1594 and eventually led to the destruction of

Spenser's home in 1598), famine, plague, and economic stagnation dashed the optimism

that characterized the end of the 1580's. The political and social problems eroded the

popularity of the queen, as well as Spenser's estimation of her rule.

This chapter takes the position that the Britomart of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is

best understood as two distinct characters: the female Knight who bests Guyon and saves

Amoret in Book III, and the submissive warrior who defeats Radigund and acquiesces to

Artegall in Books IV-V. On the one hand, the Britomart of Book III represents an

idealized view of fashion and self-presentation that suggests gender is an external

performance that can be donned or removed at will. There is the sense that a woman can

be both a lover and a warrior—Venus and Mars. On the other, the Britomart of Books IV-

V gives up her authority to Artegall, admitting that all women should inevitably do so.

The former is a model of the feminine in line with the most enthusiastic Elizabethan

supporters. Britomart's later figuration is an expression of disappointment in the politics

of the 1590's, and a surrender to anatomy (and the regressive expectations that go hand in

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[393] For more on Spenser's cynicism, see Richard A. McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Politics of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 197–269; Gary Waller, *Edmund Spenser: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1994),136–88; and Vitkus, "Unfulfulled Form," 91-3.

hand).[394] My main intervention then is to map the contemporary commonplaces of fashion and cosmetics with respect to the Queen onto this literary divide to see how material self-performance and the limitations therein are reflected by Spenser's poetry. In Book III, Britomart's armor provides her both the look and the martial prowess of a man, but her fighting ability is dependent on her access to that armor.

1. The Pros and Cons of Cosmetics

Attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, the *The Rainbow Portrait* (c. 1600) is one of the most famous images of Queen Elizabeth.[395] By then, the queen was in her late 60s, but in the painting her face is bright and wrinkle free, her hair is explosive, her fashion is cutting edge, and her bosom is nearly completely exposed. She appears to be a desirable, available maiden, covered in pearls. She looks ageless, capable, and perhaps—given the fanned ruff which was more often reserved for young women—even still fertile. The serpent on her sleeve, "with a jeweled heart in its mouth and a celestial sphere above its head, denotes wisdom, or prudence, ruling the passions."[396] The dozens of eyelids embroidered into her mantle and robe suggest vigilant surveillance and an abundance of information.[397] In other words, the portrait is of a desirable, beautiful queen

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[394] Britomart was supposed to give birth to the line of kings and queens that would lead to Elizabeth herself, but to the extent that she represented Elizabeth, that character trait became more incredulous as Elizabeth aged.

[395] The painting is anonymous, but it is commonly attributed to Gheeraerts. Exactly who commissioned it is nevertheless unknown. See Mary C. Erler, "Sir John Davies and the Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elizabeth," *Modern Philology* 84, no. 4(1987): 359-71; Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: the competition for representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 103-4; Alison Weir, *The life of Elizabeth I.* (New York: Ballantine, 1998), 243.

[396] Elizabeth W. Pomeroy, *Reading the portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1989), 71.

[397] Anna Riehl, "Shine like an Angel with thy starry crown": Queen Elizabeth the Angelic." in *Queens & power in medieval and early modern England,* eds. Carole Levin and R.O. Bucholz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 176. Also see Louis A. Montrose, "Idols of the Queen: Policy, Gender, and the

whose authority is complete. In many ways, the portrait encapsulates Elizabeth's attempts

to construct her public image. The Queen faced a number of challenges at the beginning

of her reign, both in respect to domestic discord and to the misogynistic atmosphere at

court.[398] Thus, she and her advisors exerted tyrannical control of her image through wigs,

fashion, and portraiture. She also famously employed an extensive amount of cosmetics,

which had become popular in courtly circles in the early 16th century. For a country on

the verge of an uncertain future—Elizabeth would be dead by 1603—Gheeraert's

portrait was a well-timed, fictitious salve.

When Elizabeth first ascended to the throne, we know that the use of cosmetics

was common at court because she was praised for not having needed or used them. In his

biography of Elizabeth, David Starkey cites praise from Bishop John Aylmer, who

observed that the young queen preferred simple, "virtuous" dress, and that the other

courtly ladies ought to be "ashamed to be dressed and painted like peacocks."[399] We also

know from the translation and sales of works such as *The Secrets of Alexis of Piemont*

(translated into English 1558) that as the century progressed, more and more people were

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Picturing of Elizabeth I," *Representations.* 68 (1999): 108-161, which compares the robe to a picture of Intelligence.

[398] John Knox was the most famously critic of female rule, although his *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous regiment of women* was directed at Mary: "To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire above any realme, nation, or citie, is repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reveled will and approved ordinance, and finalie it is the subversion of good order, of all equitie and justice." John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous regiment of women* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972) 9. Regardless of Knox's intent, and despite his extreme phrasing, his views aligned with many less explicitly stated anxieties surrounding a woman's ability to rule. The concerns were many: could a woman lead an army? Could an (inferior) woman be God's anointed ruler? How would power shift if and when the Queen married? For more on this, see Beryl Hughes, "Success in a man's world: The reign of elizabeth I of England," *Women's Studies Journal* 1, (2) (1985): 35-45.
[399] David Starkey, *Elizabeth: the struggle for the throne* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 86.

using cosmetics and dyes.[400] Moreover, the 17th century provides us a number of pro-cosmetic texts, suggesting that the practice became widely acceptable over time. In the same period, Farah Karim-Cooper even documents the growing practice of men painting their faces.[401]

At some point after her throne was more established, the queen began to use the techniques she eschewed as a teen, and her efforts went significantly beyond foundation and blush. Norris quotes a 1602 letter from Father Rivers, a Jesuit priest, describing the lengths the aging queen took to fabricate her youthful image:

> [The Queen] is still, thanks to God, frolicky and merry, only her face showeth some decay, which to conceal when she cometh in public, she putteth many fine cloths into her mouth to bear out her cheeks.[402]

The makeup complimented her already extravagant sense of fashion. Under Elizabeth's influence—especially in the latter 20 years of her reign—ruffs became higher, farthingales wider, and skirts shorter. And because of her dominating presence, women of means sought to emulate her in every way. Downing cites a letter from Philip Gawdy, a

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[400] *Alexis of Piemont* is a multi-volume work that provides recipes for everything from clothing dyes to face paints to exfoliants. It was originally published in Italian in 1555, and translated into English by William Warde in 1558. While it was enormously popular and continued to be printed into the 18th century, it was most likely a fabrication on the part of Girolamo Ruscelli. See Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 50-54.

[401] Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics,* 57. Karim-Cooper summarizes the popularity of cosmetic's thusly: "Quite simply, women wore them at court, in the city and even in the country. This acceptance is evident in recipe manuals, household guides, and pro-cosmetic arguments, all of which point to the economic viability of cosmetics and the beginnings of a cosmetics industry, and promote the creative agency of women, at least within the domestic sphere." (49)

[402] Herbert Norris, *Tudor costume and fashion* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1997), 598. Coming from a Jesuit, the letter itself can hardly be said to be unbiased. But Rivers shows affection for the queen throughout his letters, and his prose is largely matter of fact. See Henry Foley, *Records of the English province of the Society of Jesus: historic facts illustrative of the labours and sufferings of its members in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London: Burns and Oates, 1877), 23-28.

parliamentarian and esquire to the Body of Elizabeth, who, in 1587, wrote to his sisters reassuring them that their "tuff taffeta gowne with an open wired sleeve" was being worn by the queen, making it the "newest fashion" and therefore the standard to be measured against.[403] These stretched looks accentuated her singularity while drawing attention to her as a political figure. In the queen's hands, costume, cosmetics, and spectacle worked as one to fashion her identity in the public sphere.

However, there was a cost to such extravagance. In Chapter 3, I made the point that even as fashion and culture changed radically from the 14th to the 16th century, anti-fashion critiques remained remarkably the same. Just like those of the Middle Ages, Early Modern moralists were particularly concerned with the amount of time and work put into a woman's appearance. Karim-Cooper cites Rich's *The Excellency of Good Woman* when Rich equates morning rituals to the rigging of a ship:

> There is now one other qualitie that a good woman must in no wise
>
> borrow from a ship and that is too much rigginge, and it is a great deale of
>
> charge and to very little purpose that is bestowed on some ships in super-
>
> fluities in the paintinge of Cage workes like the painting of womens
>
> faces.[404]

The concern with the time put into dress and makeup was, just as in medieval commentaries, that women were devoting more time to their appearance than to their spiritual lives. As cosmetics grew in popularity and influence, anti-cosmetic treatises

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[403] Sarah Jane, Downing, *Fashion in the time of William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Shire, 2014), 16-19.
[404] Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics*, 49. Karim-Cooper includes an extensive collection of similar references and complaints.

tended to fold their complaints about fashion into comments about cosmetics. In John Webster's *A Cure for a Cuckold,* a confused and angry Lessingham damns women and their various disguises, saying: "All that they have is feigned: their teeth, their hair,/Their blushes, nay their conscience too is feigned./Let 'em paint, load themselves with cloth of tissue,/They cannot yet hide woman; that will appear/ And disgrace all."[405] This type of condemnation, which conflates fashion, makeup, and female duplicity, was common in the late 16th and early 17th century, and it was often used to condemn women along with the practice.

Complementing the admonishments to focus on internal (as opposed to external) beauty, many anti-cosmetic diatribes equated the use of cosmetics with prostitution. For instance, Charles Bansley's *Treatise* repeatedly claims that women who paint their faces do so in the "horryshe fashion" and that their insistence on the practice will inevitably bring about their moral and social downfall.[406] Likewise, Juan Luis Vives' *A very Fruteful and pleasant booke called the Instruction of a Christian Woman* makes the connection between cosmetics and sexual perversion, but he spends more time detailing the physical consequences: "All the favoure of the face waxeth olde, and the breath stynketh; and the tethe rusten, and an evyll ayre all the bodie over, bothe by reason of the ceruse, and quicke silver."[407] Vives' concerns were not entirely groundless, in that many of the ingredients in some cosmetics were indeed noxious, and anecdotes circulated in

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[405] 4.2.78-82.

[406] Charles Bansley, *A treatyse, shewing and declaring the pryde and abuse of women now a dayes* ([Imprinted at London]: [In Paules Church yearde, at thee sygne of the Starre. By Thomas Raynalde], sig. Ai v, 1550).

[407] Juan Luis Vives and Richard Hyrde, *A very fruteful and pleasant booke called the instruction of a Christen woman* (London: [Printed by H. Wykes], 1567).

conduct books of women whose faces had been disfigured by their use.[408] Plus, cosmetics were, after all, commonly used by prostitutes to cover syphilis scars. But in general, the diatribes do a better job equating physical and moral poison than they do documenting individual cases of poison by eyeshadow. Moreover, the tendency to connect the painted woman with anyone in makeup suggests a strong anxiety about women who can control how they look. In the same way that holy robes can cover any number of sins, cosmetics can hide or disguise 'true' realities that a woman may otherwise want concealed.

The prevalence and continuity of these attacks aside, it is difficult to determine to what degree their arguments permeated English culture. At least in London, they seem to have had little effect. In 1566, the Royal Exchange was established, offering permanent retail sites for both apothecaries and clothing merchants, among others. Despite the moralist remonstrations, after it was officially opened by Elizabeth in 1571, it quickly grew into a "vast bazaar" where fashionable ladies found both new styles and "new lovers." According to Walter Thornburry's account, by the early 17th century, the carriages in front of the exchange were said to dwarf those in front of churches. A later 1632 account warns that wives at the exchange will "break their husbands backs" in their search for new cosmetics and clothing.[409] The popularity of the exchange, its place in cultural references (Moll Cutpurse, for instance, visits the Exchange in *The Roaring Girl*), and its royal support suggest that fashion and cosmetics were more influential—for

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[408] Lomazzo's *Tracte Containing the Artes of curious Paintinge Carvinge & buildinge,* translated into English in 1598, details both the overlap in ingredients between face and canvas paints and the dangers of applying certain colors to the skin.
[409] Walter Thornbury, *Old and New London, Volume I A Narrative of Its History, Its People, and Its Places* (London : Cassell, Petter, & Galpin, 1873), 494-500. See also Patrick Wallis, "Consumption, Retailing, and Medicine in Early-Modern London," *The Economic History Review.* 61 (1)(2008): 26-53; and Downing, *Fashion*, 12-20.

those who could afford it—than *The Excellency of Good Women* or any other diatribe. Nevertheless, given the pejorative valences of heavy makeup and impossibly ornate clothing on women, there was some risk in using them. In fact, the risk was even greater for Elizabeth, the young virginal queen, whose sexuality inspired rumors lasting decades. Rumors about a monarch's sexual activity were not constrained to female rulers, but attention to Elizabeth's behavior increased when she took the throne and lasted until long after her death. Some thought that Elizabeth's refusal to marry meant she was unable to conceive or even unable to have intercourse. Others insisted that she had had several lovers and, through them, illegitimate children.[410] In that sort of social environment, why go to such lengths to fashion herself if doing so risked being compared to a prostitute?

In *The Face of Queenship,* Anna Riehl offers one answer, arguing that Elizabeth learned from experience that female rulers needed to be beautiful in order to be respected. For instance, Katherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, was dismissed as early as 1515—some 18 years before the marriage would be annulled—for lacking the striking looks of her husband. Decades later, Mary I suffered for her looks as well. Many commentators, English and foreign alike, were disappointed by the Queen's appearance after she reached adulthood. In fact, before her marriage to the Spanish King Philip I, the Spanish ambassadors who visited the English court were remarkably ambivalent about her appearance. Ruy Gomez de Silva, for example, reported back to Spain, saying that Mary was "rather older than we had been told," and that "if she dressed in our fashion she

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[410] Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King : Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 66-75. Levin specifically demonstrates how Elizabeth's two experiences with smallpox led to rumors that the disease was a cover for pregnancy.

would not look so old and flabby."[411] Riehl goes on to cite a number of other contemporaries who were careful to note Mary's good qualities while never claiming that she was beautiful. Mary's mediocre looks may have also contributed to the lack of respect she received, in that, by her own admission, she spent all her time "shouting at her Council."[412] Although her appearance was certainly not the only reason her rule was fraught with conflict, Riehl sees a connection between Mary's inability to cut a striking figure and her inability to produce a successful "paradigm of the Tudor Queen." When Elizabeth ascended to the throne, she may have understood the gendered forces that constrained her older sister and, instead of shying away from scrutiny, embraced the courtly atmosphere that sometimes equated a monarch's authority or right to rule with their appearance.

Another explanation for Elizabeth's decision to use cosmetics may lie in her medical history. She contracted smallpox twice, in 1562 and 1572. Besides being a fatal disease, smallpox was also infamous for scarring its victims, many of whom were left disfigured. Extant letters by or about Elizabeth express worries that the disease will leave pockmarks on her face or assure the letter's recipient that the pockmarks were not noticeable. Riehl cites a letter from 1562 in which Elizabeth admits that the first bout with the disease had left some small "pits" on her face. However, from other Privy Council documents, we know that her face was a good deal more marked than

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[411] Riehl offers a number of contemporary accounts of both Katherine and Mary I. Anna Riehl, *The Face of Queenship: Early Modern Representations of Elizabeth I* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 22-35; "Ruy Gomez de Silve to Francisco de Eraso." July 27, 1554. *CSP Spain,* vol. 13, 2-3.
[412] Hughes, "Success," 39.

Elizabeth's letter described and that she had lost most of her hair.[413] Upon recovery the second time, Elizabeth herself wrote to the Earl of Shrewsbury, saying, "I assure you, if my creadid were not greatar than my shewe, ther is no beholder wold believe that ever I had bin touched with suche a malady."[414] What's remarkable about this sentence is that Elizabeth appears more concerned with reestablishing her beautiful reputation than with assuring the Earl that she was indeed healthy. Perhaps Elizabeth was willing to use cosmetics in order to cover up the pockmarks as a way of both reinforcing her beauty (she was still attempting to marry after all) to the outside world and as a way of distancing herself from the disease. When she fell ill the first time, there was genuine panic among her council: who would her successor be and would a civil war would break out in the meantime? By removing the marks of smallpox, she may have been trying to insist on her own stability.

Even if the exact impetus for her cosmetic use is hard to define, it is clear that Elizabeth was defensive of her sartorial habits. Citing a 1594 report, Sarah-Jane Downing describes the extent to which the Queen was tough when it came to her self-fashioning, "one Sunday (April last) my lorde of London, preachede to the Queens Majestie, and seemede to touche on the vanitie of deckinge the bodie to finely – Her Majestie tolde the Ladies, that if the Bishope helde more discourse on suche matters she wolde fitte him for Heaven."[415] Threats like these demonstrate how, in practice, the implications of cosmetics were as dependent on the status of the wearer as anything else. On a

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[413] See David Loades, *Elizabeth I* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 96.
[414] Leah S. Elizabeth et al., *Elizabeth I: collected works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 323. Cited by Riehl, 53.
[415] Sarah Jane Downing, *Beauty and cosmetics, 1550-1950* (Oxford, UK: Shire, 2012), 16.

housewife, cosmetics were proof of her deceptiveness or infidelity. On the queen, however, when she was wearing her fan-shaped ruffs and surrounded by a dozen maids of honor all in white, face paint represented her unimpeachable authority to construct or deconstruct reality.[416] But more importantly, Elizabeth's menacing reaction to the Bishop's comment betrays how important her "vanity" was to her. Fashion for Elizabeth was not just the style of bodice: fashion was "decking the bodie" for a very particular political purpose. The idea that a queen was always beautiful was already ingrained in the minds of her subjects, but, maintaining that beauty was a cultural requirement, and "she had to nurture and sustain the legend of her beauty rather than let the common perception run its course."[417]

2. **The Contrivances of Pageantry and Portraiture**

Perhaps the most visible way Elizabeth "decked" herself was with pageantry. When she was crowned in 1559, Elizabeth progressed from London to Westminster in a slow, deliberate pageant, the details of which are recorded in Raphael Holinshed's 1580 *Chronicles.* Along the way, Elizabeth waved at, touched, and received flowers from the people. According to Holinshed, the Queen-to-be stopped her chariot several times to hear the commoners speak either about London or to express their good will. The way he describes it, these stops were impromptu, and demonstrated the remarkable care with which Elizabeth approached her rule and her people. But given the elaborate and very planned aspects of her procession, and Holinshed's comparison of her train to a "stage",

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[416] Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics*, 35.
[417] Riehl, *Face of Queenship*, 46.

it seems more likely that if Elizabeth stopped at all, those stops and speeches were also planned in advance.

At Fanchurch, Elizabeth listened to a child "in costlie apparell" read a poem which Holinshed records word-for-word. He notes that Elizabeth was deeply moved by the words and thanked the city and the boy graciously for them. However, it is almost certain that Elizabeth had approved the poem prior to the actual procession. Citing a letter from the Queen to the Revel's Office regarding the procurement of costumes for her coronation, David Bergeron has shown that Elizabeth was an active participant in the planning and scripting of these productions, and that she was genuinely concerned about the meaning of the fabric. The letter itself offers to purchase specifically styled garments for the occasion, showing both an early interest and understanding of public drama, and a willingness to become a patron of her own performance. Given how concerned Elizabeth was about the symbolism of the costumes, and how willing she was to alter or enhance the plans made by the city on her behalf, I would argue that she had a hand in most of the coronation pageantry, even if she didn't write every speech.[418]

After hearing the poem, she proceeded toward Gracious Street, where the city had erected a stage that filled the entire road. Two figures, representing Henry VII and his wife Elizabeth, acted a scene whereby the red and white roses were joined together. Holinshed glosses the play as representative of the unified kingdom that Elizabeth's accession promised. Before reaching Westminster (where she would finally take the

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[418] See David M. Bergeron, "Elizabeth's Coronation Entry (1559): New Manuscript Evidence," *English Literary Renaissance* 8 (1978): 3-8; and John N. King, *Tudor royal iconography: literature and art in an age of religious crisis* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 299.

crown the next day), Elizabeth saw several more pageants on Biblical and English history and was visited by Deborah, the only female judge in the Book of Judges, who reminded the audience that a woman ruled Israel "in nobilitie" for "fortie years."[419] At different times throughout, Elizabeth either feigned confusion as when she asked to have a scene's significance explicated to her, or incredulity, as when she acted surprised when meeting the allegorical figure of Time before identifying herself as Time's Daughter: Truth.[420]

As elaborate as the whole procession was, it was but the first of many: Elizabeth soon turned her Accession Day, November 17th, into a major annual festival. In Strong's words, "Bells rang, bonfires blazed, guns were fired, open house was kept, festival mirth reigned and to the parish churches of England the faithful came to thank God for the reign of their Queen."[421]   These festivals continued for the length of her reign, extending later to cover her birthday, September 7th, as well. It's worth stopping here to recognize that Spenser included references to November 17th both in his letter to Ralegh and in Book II. In the former, he makes a veiled allusion to the annual feast when describing the catalyst for the Faerie Queene's action: "I devise that the Faerie Queene kept her Annuall feast xii dayes; uppon which xii. Severall dates, the occasions of the xiii severall knights, are in this xiii books severally handled and discoursed."[422] Within the poem, Guyon adds further detail to the event, "An yearly solemne feaste she wontes to hold/ The day that

[419] Elizabeth was linked with Deborah several times. See King, *Tudor Royal*, 183, 225-8. However, the comparison was fraught in that many of those who employed Deborah's image were pushing for policies more radical than Elizabeth was comfortable with. Moreover, in the 1558 pageant, Deborah wears a regal crown rather than the imperial closed headpiece. King thinks that suggests Elizabeth, as Deborah, lacks absolute power, and must work with parliament.

[420] Raphael Holinshed et al, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: J. Johnson. V. 4, 1807), 159-164.

[421] Roy C. Strong, *The cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan portraiture and pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 114.

[422] *Letter to Ralegh* quoted in Strong, *Cult*, 117.

first doth lead the yeare around,/ To which all knights of worth and courage bold / Resort to heare of straunge adventures to be told."[423] The feast the knight describes could be taken from any number of Arthurian romances with its emphasis on recounted "straunge adventures." But prayers, poems, and stories were commonly recited throughout the country to mark the 17th.[424] Moreover, however Arthurian (and therefore mythic) Gloriana's "solemne feaste" may have sounded, Elizabeth's actual historical feasts included massive feudal jousts at least as early as 1580 and perhaps as early as 1572.[425] The tilt in 1581 anyway was the first held in Whitehall, and, according to Strong, eclipsed "every other form of court festival."[426] We know that knights showed up in cognito, accompanied by allegorical figures, and that even their servants sometimes appeared in costume.[427] Some accounts suggest there was a good amount of humor in all of this dress—some knights composed nonsense speeches to accompany their outfits deliberately designed to make the queen laugh—but the very expense of each costume betrayed a deep sincerity and investment in the practice. Spenser was in London in the early 1580's, and he must have been struck by the distinctly Arthurian climate of the court along with the presence of allegorical figures in elaborately (almost mythic) armor taking part in a real world event. There is no doubt that Spenser's Faerie Land was inspired by a number of sources, but the closer we examine the Accession Day feasts, the

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[423] II.2.42.6-9.
[424] Strong, *Cult*, 121-125 includes a wonderful selection of these poems, most of which express (unsurprisingly) enthusiastic support for the Queen.
[425] Strong notes that Sir Henry Lee, writing towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, claimed that the Accession Day tilts started with the reign itself, but there is little corroborating evidence until 1581, when the tilts are described in detail. It seems therefore likely that they began informally and grew in pomp and magnitude.
[426] Strong, *Cult*, 133.
[427] A full length account of one tilt in 1584 was recorded by the visiting Lupold von Wedel who describes some servants dressed as "savages" and others dressed as "Irishmen."

more we can see how much the physical atmosphere at court must have inspired his poetic creations.

According to Frances Yates, these pageants attempted to establish several things at once: they built up the "political and theological position of Protestant England," replaced the celebrations around "Popish" saints' days and holidays, identified Elizabeth with paragons of rulers (i.e. Deborah), portrayed her divine favor, and emphasized internal peace and concord.[428] However, the exact effect of these Tilts is a matter of debate. The way Strong tells it, "What started as propaganda became, in time, a reality," by which he means Elizabeth's subjects largely accepted the official message over time.[429] Yates is less decisive, describing the effect of these Tilts as exerting a "potent influence on the Elizabethan imagination," and she spends a lot of time comparing Sidney's *Arcadia* to the Tilts, showing how the romantic literature echoed the actual events of the age closely.[430] While both accounts may be true in part, the continued threat of Mary Stuart ascending to the throne and the repeated threats on Elizabeth's life continued to produce political anxiety throughout the 1570s and 80s.[431] Perhaps the primacy of Elizabethan and Protestant rule that the Tilts helped establish actually increased the acuity of the succession crises.

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[428] Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: the imperial theme in the sixteenth century* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1975), 88-111.

[429] Strong, *Cult*, 115-118. In the same section, Strong explains how the idea for a celebration on November 17th stretched back to a Catholic feast of the patron saint, St. Hugh of Lincoln. He admits that it is impossible to confirm this origin, but the move to transform a Catholic celebration of a religious figure and redirect that spiritual energy toward the crown is remarkably cunning.

[430] Yates, *Astraea*, 88.

[431] For an explanation of the Elizabeth Exclusion Crisis, see Collinson, "Monarchical," 399-411 and Loades, *Elizabeth I*, 160-180.

One consequence of that desperation was the 1584 Bond of Association, drawn up by Francis Walsingham and William Cecil (spymaster and advisor to the Queen, respectively). Despite having been implicated in the 1571 Ridolfi plot to assassinate Elizabeth, Mary Stuart remained alive and in possession of a claim to the throne some thirteen years later. The Bond obfuscated any future plots and ensured the protection of the Queen by requiring its signatories (one of which was Mary herself) to not accept any claimant to the throne "in whose name an attempt had been made on Elizabeth's life." In fact, if that attempt were successful, then the claimant would be "executed as a common criminal."[432] These continued threats and radical responses have led more contemporary scholars, such as Alexandra Walsham, to insist that the patriotic enthusiasm expressed on Accession Day was a mixture of wishful thinking and willing suspension of disbelief.[433]

The Power of Propaganda

Some of the difficulty in assessing the impact of Elizabethan propaganda revolves around access and relevance. That is, who actually saw her processions, her Accession Day appearances, or her most famous portraits? Just as importantly: who needed to see her? Who needed to be convinced? With respect to access, even though her processions did tour around the country, it would have been difficult for the average Englishman to actually see the Queen, either at her procession or at the Tilts. The image of Elizabeth

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[432] Loades, *Elizabeth I*, 224. Collinson, "Monarchical Republic," 413-420. Collinson argues that the Bond was paradoxical. While it ostensibly protected the Queen, it also provided a republican mechanism for retribution against any plotter. That is, if the Queen were killed, another monarch would not immediately replace her, but instead the community of signatories (which soon grew to over 1000) would administer the justice in a monarch's stead. That lack of leadership was not lost on contemporaries.
[433] Alexandra Walsham, "'A Very Deborah?' The Myth of Elizabeth I as a Providential Monarch," in *The Myth of Elizabeth,* ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 143-168.

most Englishmen were familiar with was that of her on coinage. But even commoners would have had access to her image in the form of prints. Early in her reign, John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and the title page of the *Bishop's Bible* bore her portrait. She also appeared on the front of a wider variety of prints in the 1580's and onwards.[434] Access to the larger portraits is harder to quantify. Elizabeth Pomeroy and Roy Strong have documented how the overwhelming demand for pictures of the Queen exceeded the ability to produce quality images, which led to the proliferation of amateur portraits that troubled the Queen and her council.[435] We also know that in the 1580s, Hilliard's miniatures became popular among many courtiers, who bore them on their person like holy metals.[436] However, that practice was limited to the aristocracy, as the miniatures were both expensive and indicative of some form of intimate relationship with the monarch.[437] Pomeroy is convinced that the bigger portraits were designed for widespread consumption, and cites evidence that they were often copied for even wider viewing, but she is unclear about the exact meaning of "widespread." Beyond the portraits and miniatures, whose audience probably only included the elite, and beyond the coins and prints, Elizabeth's image was probably best communicated by her legions of beaurocratic

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[434] Doran, *"Virginity,"* 171-5. Doran notes that while the Bishop's Bible was widely disseminated, in 1574, the Queen's portrait was removed from the title page.

[435] Elizabeth W. Pomeroy, *Reading the portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1989), 16-20; Roy C. Strong, *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 5-12.

[436] Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (London: Longman, 1998), 148.

[437] Patricia Fumerton, ""Secret" Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets," *Representations.* 15 (1986): 57-97.

messengers, from priests to mayors, who spread tales of the Tilts, processions, and speeches on town squares across the country.[438]

With respect to the question of relevance, it is worth trying to better define who was having political conversations that matter. Peter Lake and Steve Pincus have recently argued for the existence of a limited post-reformation "public sphere" in which policy and religious issues were discussed with the intent of swaying either the crown or parliament to act on something it did not want to or to stop it from acting. Lake and Pincus are careful to distinguish this 16th century version of the public sphere from the post-Restoration period, in which the scale and volume of the public sphere were so much greater "as to constitute a different form of political practice."[439] Nevertheless, a public sphere existed in which various policy agendas were discussed, pamphlets were circulated, and appeals to a certain subset of the people were made. Lake also insists that this went both ways: the Crown understood the value of its propaganda and used it to lean on her powerful subjects. Likewise, "opinion was mobilized both in and outside Parliament to persuade [Elizabeth], among other things, to marry, settle the succession, kill Mary Stuart, restrain her Catholic subjects, and reform her church."[440] Sometimes that opinion was mobilized by those closest to Elizabeth herself, namely her Privy Council. Perhaps the best example of this pubic sphere at work was when Elizabeth was

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[438] Susan Doran, "Virginity, Divinity, and Power: the Portraits of Elizabeth I," in *The Myth of Elizabeth* ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 192-3.
[439] Peter Lake and Steve Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), 275. See also Peter Lake, "Public and Popular Politics: The Monarchical Republic of Elizabeth I Defends Itself," in *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England*, ed. by Peter Lake and Steven C. A. Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).
[440] Lake, "Rethinking," 274.

dissuaded from marrying Francis, the Duke of Anjou.[441] The council, including Dudley

and Cecil, insisted that marrying the Frenchman would hurt her reputation and possibly

cost her the throne, and broadsheets and ballads attacking the marriage began to

proliferate.[442] Although these murmurings slowed the process, Elizabeth was not stopped

until she witnessed the overwhelming sorrow her chamber servants expressed when, in

1581, they heard a marriage contract had been arranged. Elizabeth spent that night

listening to their weeping, and canceled the marriage the next day.[443] From this we can

gather that the pamphleteers and the limited public square had the potential to limit

Elizabeth's actions without defining them entirely. She would need to court them if she

wanted to maintain independent decision making.

The Cult of Elizabeth

As the 1570's drifted into the 1580's, hopes of Elizabeth marrying diminished and

gradual acceptance of her unending virginity spread. Around the same time, Elizabeth

began to be associated with the Cult of the Virgin Mary. This phenomenon has been the

basis of years of scholarly debate around the significance of the so-called Cult of

Elizabeth and the sincerity of its members. Helen Hackett has argued, working from

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[441] The problem with Francis was, beyond just the fact that the English leaders hated his French blood, that he was Catholic, and they feared his influence would change England's religious orientation.

[442] One of the pamphleteers, John Stubbs, was tired for libel and lost his right hand. Loades argues Stubbs would have been killed if not for more on this, see Loades, *Elizabeth I*, 205-212; Peter Lake, "Puritanism, (Monarchical) Republicanism, and Monarchy; or John Whitgift, Antipuritanism, and the ``Invention'' of Popularity," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 40 (3)(2010): 463-496; and Susan Doran, "Elizabeth I Gender, Power & Politics," *History Today* 53, no. 5(2003): 29.

[443] As Susan Doran notes, Elizabeth was interested in marriage (and was therefore not ideologically opposed to it as some have claimed), but she was unwilling to marry without the full support of the Privy Council, which she did not enjoy during the courtship of either Dudley or Francis. Indeed, she observes that "for once in her life, Elizabeth was curiously out of tune with public opinion." See Susan Doran, *Queen Elizabeth I* (NewYork: NewYork University Press, 2003), 92; and Susan Doran, *Monarchy and matrimony: the courtships of Elizabeth I* (London: Routledge, 1996).

literature and court entertainments, that the Queen's virginity was said to extend her

health and beauty. Along with the commonplace belief that Elizabeth's divine favor had

been demonstrated by her surviving numerous assassination attempts[444] and the Armada,

some asserted that Time stood still for her, that she "would live forever."[445] Elizabeth and

her advisors used this Marian association in her portraiture, especially in 'mask of youth,'

whereby portrait artists starting in the mid-1580 painted the queen's face based on earlier

patterns rather than how she actually looked.[446] For instance, Nicholas Hilliard's

miniatures of the queen (c. 1600), one of them named "Cynthia, Queen of Love and

Beauty" feature flowing hair, and ageless face, and an uncovered bosom. *The Rainbow

Portrait* discussed above accomplishes many of the same effects. Together, they

emphasize youth and vigor in the 67-year-old monarch which was reinforced by

anecdotes, such as taking off her coat when others shivered in order to demonstrate

virility.[447] Or, in Hackett's formulation, Elizabeth's appearance in pageants and paintings

implied "that her sexual intactness had brought with it resistance to bodily decay."[448]

However, even Hackett walks those claims back, saying that regardless of the

exact language, the claims of her immortality were probably "in effect wishes for the

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[444] These sorts of attempts were specifically used to drum up support for Elizabeth. Carole Levin specifically discusses how the Parry Plot of 1585 was twisted by the Privy Council. See Levin, Carole. 2002. *The reign of Elizabeth I*. New York: Palgrave, 71-2.

[445] For more on the lunar imagery and Cults of the Virgin Mary see Helen Hackett, *Virgin mother, maiden queen: Elizabeth I and the cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 176-187.

[446] Again, I am leaning on Elizabeth's agency here because she seems to have taken a personal interest in so many other parts of her appearance. Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics*, 61. Indeed, Strong tells us that sometime around 1594 that very practice went from convention to law. See Roy C. Strong, *Gloriana: the portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 20. The statute Strong refers to ordered the destruction of "unseemly portraits." John Roche Dasent, ed, *Acts of the Privy Council of England Volume 26, 1596-1597*(London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1902), 96.

[447] Norris, *Tudor Costume*, 598.

[448] Hackett, *Virgin Mother*, 178.

infinity of the Elizabethan era," rather than sincere claims on Elizabeth's physical body.

Indeed, more recent scholarship has also remained skeptical that anyone actually

worshipped Elizabeth, even if the orations they read at Court suggested they did. For one,

it would have been literally idolatrous to do so. Two, as Doran notes, there is no evidence

for "a spontaneous upsurge of adoration as appeared, if only momentarily, at the death of

Princess Diana."[449] Instead, the orchestrated campaign of devotion, flirtation, and Marian

image making that accompanied Elizabeth's final two decades of rule is better understood

as a game[450] encouraged and led by the Queen, but not one of which she was in complete

control.[451] For Elizabeth, the goal was not to become an object of worship; rather, in

order to preserve her image and independent authority in a sea of courtiers vying for

influence, Elizabeth attempted to allegorize herself—to turn her female body into a

manifestation of the state.

A good example of this game played out in 1575, when Elizabeth visited to

Robert Dudley at Kenilworth, during which she witnessed and sponsored a range of

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[449] Doran, "Virginity,"192. Doran's article argues that the portraiture was decentralized, and the individual artists produced royal images within "certain prescribed limits." However, that formulation strikes me as altogether lacking in agency for a queen who was demonstrably popular. Even if there was no official governmental office for disseminating images of the Queen, the Queen admitted her participation in the virginal discourse along with her political motives.

[450] Sydney Anglo sees the entire enterprise as trivial and cynical. That is, the "cultish" behavior was bottom-up rather than top-down: courtiers used divine language around the Queen *merely* to compliment her vanity. Sydney Anglo, *Images of Tudor kingship* (London: Seaby, 1992), 127-8, Anglo cites a poem by Sir Arthur Gorges, in which Gorges employed Tudor imagery along with divine comparisons in the final stanza, but he adds that the poem was originally written for Gorges' wife. In other words, the final stanza appears to have been tacked on in order to--perhaps--take advantage of a courtly opportunity. Anglo concludes that if a cult implies sincere belief, the story of Gorges' poem is one of cynicism, not cultish devotion. However, in this chapter I argue that while the artists and poets--the ones responsible for communicating official royal ideas to the public--must have understood the underlying falsities of their language, there is evidence that plenty of less connected people bought the Elizabethan image.

[451] In this sense, Doran and Montrose are in agreement. See Doran, "Virginity," and Louis Adrian Montrose, *The subject of Elizabeth: authority, gender, and representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 110-113.

entertainments.[452] At the time, the most pressing policy debate centered on whether or not the English would actively support the Protestant rebellion in the Netherlands, something Dudley (and a lot of other radical protestants) supported enthusiastically. Dudley, whom Elizabeth had made an Earl, was also interested in increasing his sphere of influence both in England and on the continent. To that end, he organized a series of entertainments, supposedly unprecedented in terms of length and expense.[453] One of those entertainments was a masque between Iris and Diana that seemed to resurrect the subject of marriage between Elizabeth and Dudley, something Elizabeth did not allow to be performed. Dudley also planned a masque involving his rescue of the Lady of the Lake, the general thrust of which suggested the need for military intervention in the Netherlands with Dudley in command. Elizabeth censored that as well, but George Gascoigne, loyal to Dudley, printed both 1576.

In response to these somewhat offensive entertainments, Elizabeth offered a number of her own, including a rewritten version of the Lady of the Lake allegory, the knighting of a number of Catholic-leaning men, and an application of the Queen's Touch, a highly ritualized healing process that "involved making a spectacle of [Elizabeth's] piety."[454] Thus, in response to Dudley's attempts to influence her personal life and foreign policy, Elizabeth asserted her own independence of his male judgment by

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[452] This paragraph is largely indebted to Susan Frye. See Frye, *Elizabeth I*, 56-96.

[453] The original recording of the entertainments can be found in George Gascoigne, *Gascoigne's Princely pleasures, with the masque, intended to have been presented before Queen Elizabeth, at Kenilworth castle in 1575* (London: J.H. Burr, 1821).

[454] Frye, *Elizabeth I*, 90. For more on the Queen's Touch, see Carole Levin, "Would I Could Give You Help and Succour": Elizabeth I and the Politics of Touch," *Albion.* 21 (1989): 191-205. Levin argues that Elizabeth did not think the process entirely theatrical, and took it very seriously. Regardless of her beliefs on the subject, though, Elizabeth obviously understood its value as propaganda.

appealing to "allegorical, magical, chivalric, religious, and medical" imagery.[455] Of course, even though she triumphed in this battle for status and thus maintained control over part of her own iconography, her inability to stop Gascoigne from publishing his account demonstrates some of the limits of her control. Nevertheless, Frye's larger extrapolation rings true: "Elizabeth [constructed] her active, self-defining virtue in response to essentialist expectations that she marry, have children, or at least defer to military advisers."[456] By insisting on the powers invested in the office, she was able to minimize calls for her to marry while maintaining that England stay out of the Netherlands conflict.[457]

Interestingly, maintaining this royal image weighed on the private woman, and in a 1582 poem, "On Monsieur's Departure," Elizabeth considered the distance between the inward and performed self, saying "I grieve and dare not show my discontent;/I love, and yet am forced to seem to hate…Since from myself another self I turned."[458] The poem laments the tension between her performed self and inward one, but nevertheless affirms the choice to repress her private emotions in favor of projecting her image as Queen. Moreover, the motivation to perform for the court does not seem to originate from vanity, but rather necessity: she must dissimulate in order to protect her reputation.

There are also a number of contemporary interpretations about the Queen's spectacularity which emphasize the connection between her appearance and her power. In

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[455] Frye, *Elizabeth I*, 90.
[456] Ibid., 98.
[457] Elizabeth was actually offered control of the Netherlands in 1576 (in an attempt to get her to commit more forces), but she refused. For more on Elizabeth's approach to the Netherlands Revolt, see R. B. Wernham, *The making of Elizabethan foreign policy, 1558-1603* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1980), 29-40.
[458] Cited in Riehl, *Face of Queenship*, 82.

one case, John Clapham, clerk to William Cecil, noted that Elizabeth would often appear at public spectacles, "to no other end but that the people might the better perceive her ability of body and good disposition…so jealous was she to have her natural defects discovered for diminishing her reputation."[459] Bacon famously quipped that "[Elizabeth] imagined that the people who are much influenced by externals, would be diverted, by the glitter of her jewels, from noticing the decay of her personal attractions."[460] Lastly, citing a series of Venetian dispatches sent weeks before Elizabeth's death, Louis Montrose demonstrates the way Elizabeth explicitly fought to overcome the stigma of her sex. According to those dispatches, she did so in order to preserve England's "stature in European affairs," and her own stature at home. She accomplished these two feats in part by turning herself into a symbol.[461] Despite her physical limitations, "[Elizabeth's] personal vanity was a manifestation of political necessity, of the imperative to preserve her *arcana imperii*" against the relentless pursuit of time.[462]

Problems with Production

In his essay on Elizabethan imagery and pageantry**,** Giamatti makes the observation that "pageant" has had number of different meanings. It can be a "scene acted on a stage" in the spirit of the Mystery Plays that dominated the 15th century or the 1559 procession. *Pageant* can also be a performance meant to deceive or trick,[463] or an

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[459] Ibid., 58.
[460] Cited in Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the queens of England, from the Norman conquest,* (London, New York, and Bombay: G. Bell & Sons, 1893), vol. 4, 717.
[461] Pomeroy highlights both the *Rainbow* and *Ermine* portraits as specifically accomplishing this feat. See Pomeroy, *Portraits*, 57, 72-3.
[462] Montrose, *Subject of Elizabeth*, 232.
[463] The OED cites Wycliffe as the first to use the word this way, when he describes Scots who don the blazon of St. George in order to betray the English in battle, see John Wycliffe and F. D. Matthew, *The*

"empty show, a spectacle without substance or reality."[464] For Giamatti, this tension

between a show that illuminates and a trick that lacks substance drives much of the way

Spenser employs the term, but for the moment, let us stay with pageantry as a tangible

act. Despite Holinshed's enthusiastic coverage of Elizabeth's procession, a modern reader

cannot help but be suspicious. With so much focus on the meticulously detailed plans,

carefully crafted speeches, and expensively bought costumes that one has to wonder if the

crowds believed any of it was as improvised as Holinshed would have us believe. Even

though the Queen's popularity was durable and undeniable, the irony of investing so

much *material* (both in terms of money and man-hours) into these pageants which

supposedly demonstrated *divine* favor must have been recognized by someone involved.

What was the line between an appropriate performance of power and an ostentatious

facade?

However effective her efforts were at producing devotion, they nevertheless

belied their own contrived nature. In "Invisible Bullets," Stephen Greenblatt repeatedly

shows how "ideal images" involve the constant production of their own subversion along

with a "powerful containment of that subversion."[465] In other words, the ability to create

an ideal image essentially admits that that image is itself a creation, that is, a fiction. As I

explained above, artists of Elizabeth in her final 15 years deliberately (and obviously)

used younger forms when painting her face. We also know that some anecdotes of the

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English works of Wyclif: hitherto unprinted Woodbridge, Suffolk [England]: Boydell & Brewer, distributed for the Early English Text Society, 1902), 99.
[464] A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Play of double senses: Spenser's Faerie queene* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 82.
[465] Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets," in *Shakespearean negotiations: the circulation of social energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 41.

queen's remarkably youthful look and behavior lasted into the 1590's. However, the queen, in disseminating those stories or portraits, and the artists in writing or creating them, must have understood just how dependent she was on their contrivances. Just as a makeup artist sees the wrinkles or blemishes that the foundation obscures, the artists presumably knew what their work concealed.[466] The queen's supernaturally youthful face may have made for a powerful image, but it was also a palpable lie. Indeed, there were a few portraits made during the last decade of her life, most notably the 1592 Ditchley portrait, which showed the queen's age, sunken cheeks and tight mouth.[467] As Pomeroy puts it, "One wonders what she thought of the portrait." One also has to wonder how contemporaries thought of it: was it a relief to see a more realistic depiction, or did it further reinforce Elizabeth's inescapable mortality? And if her political authority was linked with her ability to maintain a particular type of image or shape, then the work put into creating that look, as well as her inability to stop the production of less flattering portraits, demonstrated how flimsy that power might be. It may be no mistake that Elizabeth's waning power coincided with her aging beyond what fashion and cosmetics could reliably conceal up close. In the words of Bishop Goodman, in the last decade of her reign, "the people were very generally weary of an old woman's government."[468]

In these two sections, I'm trying to set up two central ideas. 1) Elizabeth and her advisors used fashion, cosmetics, and the broader image of her chastity to promote her

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[466] In discussing the commonplace techniques for portraiture in the Elizabethan era, Pomeroy argues that every portrait was a mix of the artificial and realistic, usually with more of the former than the latter: "the Renaissance artist is creating an illusion, and knows it." Pomeroy, *Portraits*, 42-3.
[467] Ibid., 64.
[468] Cited in Penry Williams, *Court and polity under Elizabeth I* (Manchester: John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 1983), 270.

authority and obscure her human frailty. To this end, they promoted the medieval conceit of the Queen's Two Bodies (her body politic and her transient body)[469] by effacing her personal self "in order that her public overtly constructed self could be used as necessary to solidify her power, increase her popularity, [or] manipulate her court and parliament."[470] Elizabeth was not in complete control of this discourse or game, and courtiers also used it in order to promote their status or gain the Queen's ear. Likewise, the game gave Elizabeth chances to directly assert her authority over her subjects, common and noble alike(including at times, the presumptuous Privy Council[471]), without needlessly embarrassing them. Defining the exact benefit she derived from the performance is difficult, in that she would have been queen even if she didn't wear makeup,[472] but it is certainly true that the queen and her advisors thought she gained politically from it. Moreover, despite disappointing the populace by not producing an heir, the larger practice of her iconography managed to catalyze "the common people's loyalty to the regime and [secured] their submission to those social arrangements which sustained it."[473]

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[469] Levin has a full account of the origin of the Queen's Two Bodies, the way Elizabethan lawyers referred to it, and the degree to which it was accepted. Levin, *Heart and Stomach*, 121-5.

[470] Villeponteaux, "Feminine Authority," 58-9.

[471] See Loades, *Elizabeth I*, 239-42, which discusses how the Privy Council allowed Dudley to set up a governorship in the Netherlands, effectively overcommitting Elizabeth to the conflict in the Netherlands, without her permission.

[472] As Collinson observes about Elizabeth's authority, "Whether this power was predominantly personal, what Max Weber called "charismatic", or was encased in the office itself and so more traditional, we cannot say." Collinson, "Monarchical Republic," 399.

[473] Montrose, *Subject of Elizabeth*, 113.

2) Scholars have focused on a range of topics with respect to Britomart's chastity: her literary inspirations,[474] her idealized sexual behavior,[475] or her idealized androgyny as a vehicle of royal praise.[476] When they have explored the tension between the bifurcated representations of Britomart in the 1590 and 1596 editions, the tendency has been to locate Spenser's frustration in the age or with Elizabethan England as a whole.[477] Even when scholars have historicized Britomart's masculinity, they have rarely made the connection between Elizabeth's self-fashioning and Britomart's armor.[478] Instead, I argue that Spenser's descriptions of Britomart (that is, of Elizabeth) were drawn in part from the performances the Queen and her advisors organized. With real fabric, Elizabeth created a mythical and allegorical identity. That creation bears remarkable resemblance to Spenser's world, suggesting that his ideas and use of fashion were at least partly derived from topical, material concerns.

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[474] Quilligan's take on Britomart emphasizes Spenser's reliance on *The Romance of the Rose* in making gendered appeals to female readers, see Maureen Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser: the politics of reading* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), especially 197-9. See also P. C. Bayley, *Edmund Spenser: prince of poets* (London: Hutchinson, 1971).

[475] See James W. Broaddus, *Spenser's allegory of love: social vision in Books III, IV, and V of The faerie queene* (Madison [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), 23-45 and Thomas P. Roche, *The kindly flame; a study of the third and fourth books of Spenser's Faerie queene* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964). 51-88.

[476] Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: authority, difference, and the epic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[477] See Suzuki, *Metamorphoses*; Helgerson, *Forms*, 55; David L. Miller, "Spenser's Vocation, Spenser's Career," *ELH.* 50 (2)(1983): 197-231; Michael O'Connell, *Mirror and veil: the historical dimension of Spenser's Faerie queene* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 13.

[478] For examples of historicizing Britomart, see Jessica C. Murphy, ""Of the sicke virgin": Britomart, Greensickness, and the Man in the Mirror". *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 25 (2010): 109-127; Donald Stump, "Fashioning Gender: Cross-Dressing in Spenser's Legend of Britomart and Artegall," *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual,* 95-119. Walker's 1998 take on Britomart explored the relationship between woman and icon, between public and private, but did not explore Britomart's armor. Neither did Frye's 1993 take, which explored the construction of Chastity and equated it with Elizabeth's court and power.

3. Venus within Mars within Jove

Book III of the *Faerie Queene* introduces us to a figure of contradictions. Britomart has been described as an example of *discordia concors*[479] and it is not hard to see why. She is a female in male armor. She is both Venus and Mars. She is puzzled but driven, despairing but tireless, blushing but vicious, beautiful but deadly. This complicated construction makes her feel more developed and compelling than the other heroes in Spencer's masterpiece, but it also obscures clean allegorical readings.[480]

She also has a complicated story. The name Britomart is, fittingly, a combination of Briton and martial, but it also comes from *Britomartis,* a virginal Greek goddess of hunting.[481] Like her namesake, she is a martial maid. She is also the titular character of Book III, and her quest takes her galloping through Books IV and V. We meet her before we know her. She first appears anonymously in Book III already armed, and without much effort she unseats Guyon, the hero of Book II, before Arthur manages to make peace between them. It is only later that we learn the nature of her true quest: to find Artegall, the love promised to her by Merlin himself. Unfortunately, she is constantly being distracted by other pressing matters. Over the course of three Books, Britomart defeats Malecasta's champions, narrowly escapes the latter's clutches, saves the damsel Amoret from Busirane's tower, wins Satyrane's tournament, battles Artegall more than once, foils Dolon, and defeats Radigund, another female warrior who had captured and

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[479] Roche, *Kindly Flame*, 54.
[480] Or at least, it obscures clean readings even more.
[481] As Roche points out, the dialogue between Britomart and Glauce in Canto 3 come almost directly from Virgil's *Ciris*, and thus combines two Virgilian female characters: Carme and Britomartis. The former is a lovesick maiden who sows destruction through her lustful actions, and the latter is a dedicated virgin. As Roche makes clear, "[Britomart's] chastity is derived from Britomartis, but it is a chastity that springs from a love as passionate as Carne's." Roche, *Kindly Flame,* 54.

bound Artegall in her castle. While the complexity of her quest matches that of other knights, her characterization, gender construction, and self-awareness set her apart. Also unlike the other knights, she is unmade by her own quest: for in killing Radigund—a reflection of her own character—the female, passionate side of herself that made her so dynamic is also destroyed.[482]

In trying to decipher Britomart's armor, critics have run into a problem. As Judith Anderson explains, unlike Redcrosse's mail, Britomart's costume is both "multivalent and responsive to specific context," that is to say, while Redcrosse's armor at least superficially appears to signify consistently, Britomart's costume's meaning does not remain constant throughout the larger poem.[483] Now, I'd argue that all allegorical symbols work this way (like Hawkin's Coat or Magnyfycence's robe), and that the supposed one-to-one signification of Redcrosse's armor is a product of insufficient critical pressure. The meaning of words and artefacts change as the allegory works to refine their meaning. As a way of uncovering the function and possible effects of clothing or fashion in Spenser's Faery Land, I will examine the liminal moments in the narrative, of Britomart's arming and disarming. Compared to the other knights, Britomart's Saxon armor (excepting the shield) is nondescript and has a rather un-heroic backstory. Further, while the defensive armor intuitively works to symbolize her Chastity and allows her to resist the advances of other men until she finds Artegall, in practice her armor does a lot

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[482]Anderson argues that the Britomart we meet in Book III, IV, and the beginning of Book V is all too realistic, such that she resists allegorization. However, the fight with Radigund and the encounter with Dolon pacify her so much that she loses the vitality we appreciated in her from the beginning: "If she improves as a person, she becomes irrelevant as one." Judith H. Anderson, ""Nor Man It Is": The Knight of Justice in Book V of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*," *PMLA* 85, no. 1 (1970): 65-77.
[483] Judith H. Anderson, "Britomart's Armor in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*: Reopening Cultural Matters of Gender and Figuration," *English Literary Renaissance* 39 (2010): 90.

more than that. Unlike the other chaste women in the poem, Britomart's armor/chastity

allows her to emasculate other men. When paired with her magical, omnipotent spear, she

is able to penetrate the defenses of all men in her path, including the one she is destined

to marry.[484] It also attracts other women (Malecasta), disguises identity, and creates

emphatically hermaphroditic silhouettes (such as when Britomart and Florimell ride on

one horse embracing). Because of the armor's complex signification, I want to focus on

the *act* of arming, which in all cases grants Britomart certain abilities she did not have

before. This section will focus on what these costume changes in Book III mean with

respect to Britomart's gender and her ability to shape the world around her.

Britomart's her first arming in Canto 3. Before arming, while brooding along in

her father's castle, she is a "merely frustrated and enclosed pubescent child,"[485] who

remains "Sad, solemne, sowre, and full of fancies fraile…yet wist she neither how, nor

why,/She wist not, silly Mayd.[486] Britomart is paralyzed by love and remains ignorant of

even the cause of her feelings. Even after she becomes a knight, whenever she is

undressed, she remains at least partly feminized. In Canto 1, after Britomart disarms for

dinner, Malecasta's knights wonder at the "Mayd," who is now "All in her snow-white

smocke, with locks vnbownd."[487] Likewise, in Canto 9 with her helmet off, the guests of

Malbecco stare at her heel-length "golden locks" that are compared to "sunny

beames".[488] Spenser directs the reader and other characters in the scene to focus on this

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[484] The spear is particularly similar to Ariosto's Bradamante, another martial maid whose romantic quest ends when her lover, Ruggiero manages to defeat her in combat, securing their marriage.
[485] Anderson, "Britomart's Armor," 76.
[486] III.3.27.5-8.
[487] III.1.63.6-7.
[488] III.9.20.1-4. For more discussion of Britomart's gender swapping, see Suzuki, *Metamorphoses*, 162-178.

beaming, feminized *woman,* who almost always becomes vulnerable to masculine advances (i.e. Gardante's phallic "arrow keene" or Paridell's wandering eyes) once the mail is out of the picture.

By contrast, with her armor on, Britomart is fearless, deadly, pricking, "warlike", and desired by women (Malecasta).[489] She also frees damsels in distress (Amoret), saves other knights (Redcrosse), and wields an enchanted, phallic spear that allows her to dominate the men—often illustrious heroes in their own right—who stand in her path. It seems that Britomart's behavior, as well as how others view and treat her with respect to gender, is reflective of her clothing. For Spenser, Britomart generally becomes manly when her plate mail is on and womanly when it is off.[490]

When her nurse, Glauce, suggests putting on a disguise as a way of facilitating Britomart's quest for love, she is very explicit about her plan: "Let us in feigned armes our selves disguise/And our weake hands (whom need new strength shall teach/The dreadfull speare and shield to exercize…practize small/Will bring, and shortly make you a mayd Martiall."[491] Simply arming is not sufficient, as Britomart does not yet have to strength to be a knight, but the language makes clear that the armor itself will teach their "weake hands." She must first look like a knight before she can internalize the identity.[492]

After Glauce's rousing speech, Britomart is convinced, but notice Spenser's construction: "she resolu'd…Aduent'rous knighthood on her selfe to don."[493] We are

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[489] III.11.18-19.
[490] Below, I discuss a big exception to this rule, namely, the bedroom scene with Malecasta.
[491] III.3.53.2-9.
[492] Because the change happens immediately, it is difficult to pry apart the exact causal relationship, but it's clear that even after Britomart enters Faerie Land, she still needs the armor to remain "forward."
[493] III.3.57.5-6.

reminded that Britomart is *donning* an identity, and so as to highlight that point, she immediately changes to look the part. Of course, we never see the "practice small"—Spenser includes no montage of images of Britomart wielding her lance awkwardly, dropping it, and eventually becoming more confident. She dons the identity, and is soon on her way.[494] In much of Book III, outward appearance shapes inward growth.

Indeed, the efficacy of clothing in Faerie Land to fashion character (or at least Britomart's character) impresses even our heroine. After her transition (but mentioned earlier in the Book), Britomart lies to Redcrosse about her beginnings: "Faire Sir," she tells the hero of Book I, "I let you weete, that from the howre I taken was from nourses tender pap,/I haue been trained vp in warlike stowre,/to tossen speare and shield…"[495] The reader will learn the ridiculousness of this claim once Britomart's background is fully explained in the following canto, but the false chronology serves Spenser's point. Britomart has Redcrosse believe that she has been training her whole life for this quest, not that she recently had found a helmet and chest plate and decided to ride. Even Britomart thinks her own back story inadequately explains the speed and extremity of her metamorphosis. Our hero is trapped by the conventions of the time period, and seemingly anxious about the malleability of her own gender. So, she constructs a narrative which the men will find more agreeable and conventional (also less embarrassing to Guyon), while downplaying what she has experienced about gender performativity. But even if it works on Guyon, that lie has the opposite effect of deflecting attention away from her origins.

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[494]Stump describes Spenser's Faerie Land, "the way one dresses and behaves has power to "fashion" the inward self. Britomart, after all, needs only [to arm] to transform herself from a lovesick princess into an altogether convincing and formidable knight." Stump, "Fashioing Gender," 115.
[495] III.2.6.1-4

Instead, it asks whether such formation is really possible, or at least *where* such a gendered transformation could take place. Only in Faery Land? If that's the case, then the reader is left wondering what makes Faery Land so different from the real world, because it seems like some of the other characters, like Guyon, don't even quite know the rules. Guyon, we might say, does not believe gender to be so flexible, and thereby introduces doubt into the whole process. The irresistible momentum of Britomart's narrative will carry her beyond Guyon and his second guessing, but her lie leaves a mark. If heroes of Faery Land don't know how their own world works, then to what degree can the reader be certain of his own?[496]

Once Britomart is properly costumed, Glauce—in an oft forgotten choice—puts on armor herself, "that the young Mayd/She might in equal armes accompany/And as her Squire attend her carefully."[497] Unarmed women exist in Faerie Land, but in order to travel beside her maid, Glauce must take up the spear. While ambiguities exist, Glauce never clearly engages in battle. This may be a product of Glauce following a squire's role, in that one of a squire's main jobs was to assist in the arming of their socially superior knight. That role limited the kind of armor squires could wear, but even if their armor was different than their lords', they did sometimes fight, as attested in both history and literature.[498] Why "dight" armor if not to use it?[499] The answer may lie later in the

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[496] Susanne Wofford discusses how the gendered dialectic leads to ambiguity more than clarity. See Susanne Lindgren Wofford, "Gendering Allegory: Spenser's Bold Reader and the Emergence of Character in "The Faerie Queene III," *Criticism.* 30 (1988): 1-21.
[497] III.3.61.3-5.
[498] Chaucer's squire, for instance, does not don the elaborate armor of the knight, but he is nevertheless experienced in battle. In Book 1 *Faerie Queene*, we meet Timias, Arthur's squire, who is probably the most developed of his kind. Throughout four books, he helps Arthur defeat Impotence, Impatience, and (later) the Foster.

same stanza, where Spenser describes their escape "And through back ways, that none might them espy,/Courered with secret cloud of silent night/Themselues they forth conuayd."[500] It seems as though Glauce should be able to travel as Britomart's disguised servant or handmaid, but Spenser's choice to arm the nurse shows a connection between a performance of maleness and the type of quest on which the two women are about to embark. They can only get to Faerie Land if their identities and sex remain concealed—that is to say, if they look like men.

If, as this reading indicates, gender is mapped onto Britomart's costume, then her "performance produces effects without essentializing cause, undermining not masculinity but its exclusive connection to men."[501] Schwartz and others have asserted Britomart's decoupling of masculinity from males. Britomart is neither strong nor courageous until she decides to take up arms, something for which she has no training, but is nevertheless able to master as well as any male in the book. The ease with which clothing and will fashion identity in Britomart, and the ambiguity of gender roles (such as when Britomart saves Amoret in Scudamore's stead) reveals the "precarious foundations on which conventions of identity rest."[502] Spenser almost seems to be channeling Butler, who reminds us, "'Sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve thus materialization through a forcible reiteration of those

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[499] For more on this and historical examples of squires making martial interventions, see Nickel, Helmut. "Arthurian Armings For War And For Love." *Arthuriana* 5, no. 4 (1995): 3-21.
[500] III.3.61.7-9.
[501] Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough love: Amazon encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 151.
[502] Ibid., 160.

norms."[503] Although an application of Butler's theory to a 16th century text may seem anachronistic, we can surely see that Spenser is interested in how norms construct conventional ideas about sex and gender. If nothing else, Britomart and her reliance on clothing show the fluidity of gender and the opportunities a privileged few have to fashion themselves accordingly.

Two Problems

There are two problems with reading the function of Britomart's armor as simple gender swapping, and in the following paragraphs, I'll expound on both. The first problem with saying that Britomart's armor simply makes her masculine is that Britomart's behavior occasionally breaks that model. In Castle Joyous, after being surprised by Malecasta's presence in her chamber, our heroine gets out of bed, draws her sword, and, with the help of Redcrosse, "dismays" Malecasta's guards "with her dreadful strokes" until they are "quite terrified" and flee.[504] This is not purely an exception to the above rule, in that she does all this while *armed* with a sword, but not *armed* as in fully armored. The language of the scene emphasizes the bifurcated image Britomart makes: the guards "saw the warlike Mayd/Al in her snow-white smocke…/Threatening the point of her auenging blaed."[505] There is no question that her state of undress makes her vulnerable to attack, and she is struck by Gardante's arrow at the start of the fight. Spenser tells us that, "against the virgin sheene,/the mortall steele stayd not,"

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[503] Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-2.
[504] III.1.66.4-9.
[505] III.1.63.6-8.

emphasizing the sexual nature of the injury. The wound's location is close to the womb, and may perhaps be an analogue to the male sexual wound to the thigh, such as the one Adonis receives earlier in the Canto from a boar.[506] The moment is also similar to a later episode in Busirane's castle in which she receives another wound on her "snowie chest." In both cases, the language juxtaposes the penetration and purple blood against gleamingly white skin. And in both cases, the injuries enrage Britomart, galvanizing her into ending the fight through sheer ferocity. It is almost as if her vulnerability to penetration enables victory, which again complicates the gendered consequences of the scene. Mary Villeponteaux argues that these wounds compromise Britomart's authority in relation to other male heroes in the poem, but I think that reading ignores the power she derives from the vulnerability.[507] She defeats a group of men without the help of her armor or enchanted lance while nursing an arrow wound in her side, and is described as "warlike" despite her unbound hair. Note also that she does not leave without her attire. After the skirmish, Spenser tells us that Britomart "her bright armes about her body dight" before continuing her noble quest."[508] Despite her martial victory, she cannot leave the grounds unarmed.

If Britomart can perform certain aspects of masculinity while unarmed, can she perform femininity with her visor down? It turns out this is a very difficult question to answer. Several critics have focused on Britomart's initial treatment of Florimell and that *fabliaux* bedroom scene with Malecasta in order to provide an answer. When Florimell

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[506] III. 1.65.4-5; 38.5-6. For a fuller discussion of her wounds, see Suzuki, *Metamorphoses*, 155-59.
[507] See Villeponteaux, "Displacing Feminine Authority," 53–67.
[508] III.3.67.3.

bursts "out of the thickest brush"[509] mere steps ahead of the lascivious Forster, Guyon

and Arthur chase after her "in hope to win thereby/Most goodly meede, the fairest Dame

aliue."[510] Contrastingly, Britomart, "whose constant mind,/Would not so lightly follow

beauties chace,/Ne reckt of Ledies Loue, did stay behind."[511] Roche intends us to read

this section as Spenser's way of "emphasizing the fact that [Britomart] is a woman,"[512]

and that we should not "imagine that Spenser meant us to think ill of Arthur and Guyon"

for leaving. She goes on to say that the scene goes on to differentiate the male knights'

hasty chase from Britomart's "measured pace." The problem is this argument dismisses

the descriptions of Arthur and Guyon as "Full of great enuie and fell gealosy," which

makes them out to be lascivious rather than merely "hasty."[513] If Spenser simply wanted

to distinguish male from female knights, he wouldn't have need to equate two heroes

with the "griesly Foster." Moreover, Timias does not follow Arthur either: he instead

follows the Foster.[514] The dichotomy between the squire and his master reduces the

validity of any essentializing readings. Yes, Britomart is not as moved by "Ladies loue"

as the men, but she is perfectly capable of saving a damsel from the hands of a would-be

rapist, namely Amoret. To say that this scene merely highlights Britomart's sexual

difference reduces too many variables within the scene to a single binary. Britomart is

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[509] III.1.15.1.
[510] III.1.18.7-8.
[511] III.1.19.2-3.
[512] Roche, *Kindly Flame*, 14.
[513] III.1.18.2.
[514] While I do not endorse this reading, Timias has long been read as having a historical analogue in Sir Walter Ralegh. His chasing of the Foster allows him to meet and fall in love with Belphoebe, another reflection of Elizabeth. See Herbert Eveleth Greene, "The Allegory as Employed by Spenser, Bunyan, and Swift," *PMLA* 4, no. 2 (1889): 145-93; H. M. English,"Spenser's Accommodation of Allegory to History in the Story of Timias and Belphoebe," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 59, no. 3 (1960): 417-29.

"constant," and apparently Arthur and Guyon are not. And while that reading contains possible gendered consequences (i.e. that men are somehow more easily distracted), the text is at best ambiguous about if that constancy is a result of biology or if Britomart simply had more important things to do.

The fabliaux scene is even more sexually ambiguous. After Arthur, Guyon, and Timias disappear in search of Florimell or the Foster, Britomart rides on until she encounters Malecasta's knights attacking Redcrosse. After she saves the hero of Book I, she is wooed into staying at Malecasta's castle. Later that night, Malecasta climbs into Britomart's bed, unaware that Britomart was indeed a woman. "Where feeling one close couched by her side,/She lightly lept out of her filed bed,/and to her weapon ran, in mind to gride/The Loathed leachour."[515] While one may be tempted to read Britomart's violent reaction as motivated by the same sex encounter, the text offers no clues as to sexual motives. Our heroine is shocked not by the presence of a woman in her bed, but by "one close couched." She is not willing to strike because the invader is a woman, but because there is a "leachour" in her chambers who threatens her chastity, quest, and very identity. One is reminded of Lancelot's reaction to finding Elayne (and not Guinevere) lying in his bed at morning's first light. Upon recognizing his mistake, Malory's favorite knight drew his sword on an unarmed woman, too. The power differentials in both moments—neither Malecasta nor Elayne are physically threatening—indicates a certain level of shame.

The second big problem with reading the armor as simply making Britomart masculine is that it oversimplifies the role of clothing and disguise. For many other

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[515] III.1.62.1-4.

characters in Faery Land, clothing can be a disguise which covers up some true identity, whereas Britomart's appearance *creates* hers. Throughout Book I, Duessa employs or is said to have used numerous disguises to fool several characters, including Redcrosse. But we get a glimpse of her true self when Fraudubio explains how he saw her "in her proper hew." He tells Redcrosse that she was "A filth foule old woman" and that "ever to haue toucht her, I did deadly rew."[516] We get more details later when Arthur strips her before she flees.[517] In both instances, the removal of clothing leads to some sort of public revelation. Her true nature never changed: clothing merely obscured the ugly identity.[518]

We encounter the same problem with Scudamore, whose inability to break into Busyrane's castle is most dramatically shown by his scattered armor when Britomart first encounters him. He has been unmanned, and the "haberior", "helmet", and "speare" which have been torn off him are the evidence of his defeat and paralyzed state. After all, when Britomart finds him, he is unconscious with his face down on the ground—static. Immediately, readers know he has been defeated all from the state of his costume. After agreeing to help rescue Amoret, Britomart is ready to ride to Busyrane's lair, but Scudamore cannot even arm himself. So, the warrior Mayd "gathered vp [Scudamore's arms] and did about him dress."[519] After also getting him onto his horse, they approach

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[516] I.ii.40.

[517] Her *exact* appearance will change in Book V, when Spenser is much more explicit in connecting her to Mary Queen of Scots.

[518] I'm tempted to bring in False Florimell into this discussion in that her appearance is linked with clothing and is constantly misleading people to believe her capable of true love (like the true Florimell). But unlike Duessa, she does not seem to have as much agency in her own appearance in that she was created as a falsity.

[519] III.11.20.6.

the castle. Here, Scudamore sees the wall of fire and cedes immediately, but our heroine presses on. When Britomart passes through the fire,

> Her ample shield she threw before her face,
>
> And her swords point directing forward right
>
> Assayld the flame, the which eftsoones gaue place,
>
> And did it selfe diuide with equall space
>
> That through she passed; as a thunder bolt
>
> Perceth the yielding ayre[520]

 Scudamore's awkward dressing scene was deliberately set up to echo Britomart's own (with the help of Glauce), and Scudamore's refusal to follow the female knight marks a very particular limitation on armor: armor only can provide "masculine" attributes (such as the will or ability to cross the flames) to certain individuals. Donned armor is not definitive—it cannot alone provide the traits necessary to complete a task. With Duessa and Scudamore then, we see clothing as being unable to independently create identity. And by giving us purposely dressed foils, Spenser highlights how unique Britomart's armor is, or how uniquely able Britomart is to fashion her identity through appearance. But why are the rules different for her?

Armed Advance:

We've seen how the armor is not fully capable of defining gender—Britomart can fight when unarmored, and we can differentiate her behavior from other armed men when her visor is down. We've also seen how identity fashioning works differently for

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[520] III.XI.25.2-3.

Britomart than for anyone else in the first three Books. Her donned appearance changes her more fundamentally than others.'[521] However, Instead of seeing the armor as defining gender or even character, I argue that Britomart's mail provides her the ability to cross liminal barriers. In the Florimell encounter, Britomart is fully armed, and is able to ride away. In Castle Joyous, as noted above, she can fight but she cannot leave until donning her steel. In both cases, the departure signals a continuation of her quest. In fact, throughout much of the text and *only* while she is *armed*, Britomart's questing amounts to a constant forward motion. Sometimes she has a clear destination, as when after donning the armor for the first time, she "forth conuayed, and passed forward right" and refuses to rest until they reach "Faery Lond".[522] In other episodes, the Lady Knight merely rides "forth", as she does in Canto II. We are told that "forth she rode without repose or rest,/Searching all lands and each remotest part".[523] Britomart has no direction except some vague image of Artegall to guide her. She nevertheless rides, and rides, and rides. Even in Canto XI, when she encounters Scudamore and begins the mini-quest which closes the book, she does so by accident while pricking forward chasing a giant. When Britomart takes off her armor, however, she remains static. She is frozen in her father's house, in Castle Joyous, on the seashore during her lament of Canto IV, and in Malbecco's castle. As different as these instances are from one another, when she takes

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[521] The character whose clothing has closest effect is Redcrosse, whose armor enables his martial prowess as well. But while Redcrosse's armor allows him to become a great warrior, his wearing of the armor does not give him the unassailable strength Britomart possesses seemingly from the beginning. Arthur, after all, has to save Redcrosse from the giant in Book 1.
[522] III.3.61-62.
[523] III.4.6.6-7.

off her armor, not only is she feminized, she is also unable to cross spacial boundaries—effectively unable to continue her mission.[524]

Stump provides another way of framing this distinction with the binary of "froward" versus "forward." By "froward", Stump is relying on an older definition of passive, withdrawn, or moving away from. Spenser himself makes this distinction when comparing "froward fortune, and too forward Night."[525] That is to say, fortune eludes the knight, but night comes on too quickly. A good example of "froward" behavior is Britomart's monologue on the seashore, in which she removes her armor before lamenting the difficulties of her quest. In Britomart's "froward" moments, the heroine "complains against destiny and the natural elements in lovelorn soliloquies."[526] One might also include Arthur's lament here, specifically when he rails against fate after falling in love with Florimell and losing her in the night. If passivity and grumbling about fate characterize "frowardness," then both episodes fit. By forward, Stump and Spenser refer to forward motion in pursuit of a goal: a motion toward. For example, Arthur's later resolution to not rest until he finds Florimell, and Britomart's similar determined behavior with respect the Artegall. "Forward" nature includes tireless advancement and the embracing of their respective quests.[527] While Spenser definitely distinguishes

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[524] Just as individual moments of her having armor on are multivalent, these moments of undress carry different meanings. Her disarmed state in Castle Joyous exposes her vulnerability to pressures of courtly love. Her later striptease in front of Paridell obviously parallels her refusal to let her hair down at Melecasta's feast, and shows distinct character development. She is still exposed to lascivious eyes, but this time she casts her own "faire eye"(III.9.23.4) at the other guests, and is not wounded in the process. As Stump explains, this public state of disarmament time shows Britomart is now capable of taking "a new and healthy delight in amorous play."

[525] III.5.7.4.

[526] Stump, "Fashioing Gender," 100.

[527] Stump will use other descriptions of women from other sections of *The Faerie Queene* (such as Elissa from Book 2) to argue that Spenser thinks there is a "'frowardness' in women and a 'forwardness' in men

between "froward" and "forward" characteristics, he does not do so on sexual, but on performative lines. It might be helpful here to compare Britomart's attire to Florimell's, whose "garments all were wrought of beaten gold/And all her steed with tinsell trappings shone."[528] Throughout Book III, Florimell appears exclusively while being pursued or rebuffing male advances. She is chased, while Britomart chases, and even though both are unmistakably chaste, they have a very different way of approaching chastity. Florimell's clothes are coded female, her steed is "milk-white", and she never pursues her own goals or desires. She is virtuous like Britomart, but is nevertheless unable to generate any sort of quest because her of her dress. She remains froward, always running from. In order to be "forward", one must look like a man, and that means wearing steel.

So there is clearly a gendered element to Britomart's costume in that it allows her to tap into a previously male-dominated privilege of willful expression. And there is a gendered element in the forward/froward binary, in that Britomart is froward when disarmed and forward when armed. But for as much as the armor decouples masculinity from martial prowess, its chief function in the narrative is to let Britomart pursue Artegall by entering and traversing Faerie Land.

Moreover, it's clear that Britomart is unique in her ability to fashion herself this way. Glauce can put on armor too, but she does not become the warrior that Britomart does. And, as I discussed above, Scudamore can also put on armor, but that does not allow him to defeat Busyrane. These juxtapositions tells us that Britomart's identity—that

that cannot be altered by clothing or conduct," but I argue that whatever strict rules Stump thinks exists, they do not apply to the Britomart of Book III. Even the moments where Britomart is girlishly nervous can be read as learned—as opposed to innate—responses. In fact, those responses are the very same societal conventions which Britomart exists to deconstruct.
[528] III.1.15.6-7.

is, her lineage—allows her to get more out of her armor than others. She needs that armor for the military powers it grants, but she can do more than others with the same tools. As we learn in III.ix, Britomart is a "noble Briton sprong from Troians bold," whose decendents will include Elizabeth herself. The mixture of classical and royal blood makes her approach to Busyrane's castle more understandable: perhaps another woman could be a *venus armata,* but when Britomart crosses Busyrane's fire, she does so "as a thunder bolt." Only a woman of her line would be able to attack with such Jovian authority. Only a woman destined to rule could refashion herself at will.[529]

To sum up, like so many of Spenser's devices, Britomart's armor is doing a lot of things at once. As a physical defense against (male) penetration, it stands in well enough for Chastity. But her chastity remains distinct from that of other chaste figures, such as Amoret or Florimell, whose virtue does not grant them independence in the way Britomart's armored chastity does. This particular kind of virginal chastity conflicted with other contemporary formulations, which assumed that a "chaste" woman submits to her roles of virginal daughter and then of wife and mother. Thus, this latter conception of the virtue insists that chastity is not virginal, but merely free of improper intercourse.[530] By contrast, Britomart's virginal chastity gave a singular, noble woman the agency to define herself and exert her will in a male dominated plane by concealing her private (female) identity with a public (masculine) one. In other words, the image of the Chaste

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[529] Even Artegall's attempts at disguise, such as when he dons Bragaddochio's armor and when he dresses as a Woman in Radigund's castle, associate him with falsehood and hinder the cause of justice. See Anderson, "No Man it is," 70-72.
[530] Frye, *Elizabeth I*, 114-116.

Knight is what actually allows her to succeed in Faerie Land.[531] I'd like to end this section on Book III by arguing further that the same idea applies to Spenser's conception of Elizabeth.

Weaponized Chastity

As the earlier sections of this chapter described, Elizabeth worked like few other English monarchs to create a very particular image for herself. It was complicated, contradictory, and based as much on legends as reality, but as a front it seems to have worked to maintain political support as least until the 1590's. I do not mean to suggest that Elizabeth's power came simply from her performance of self. Obviously, she derived her authority chiefly from the fact that that she was the daughter of Henry VIII, and that she was indeed, Queen. Similarly, Britomart does not simply derive power from her armor. She needs to actually be chaste underneath for that armor to matter. Other characters who don magical clothing but who lack moral virtue are unable to actually wear the clothing they are given. For instance, False Florimell, along with many other women in the same episode, attempts to don a girdle that signifies female chastity, but the girdle continues to fall off (to the delight of the crowd) because she is not actually chaste. Likewise, Britomart derives her prowess from her lineage. As discussed above, Glauce and Scudamore are upright morally and don armor, but they never attain Britomart's strength. In that sense, the armor is a reflection of her chastity and her Trojan/royal lineage, along with a conscious construction of identity. All of those parts need to work

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[531] Frye also equates Elizabeth's chastity to her success, see Frye, *Elizabeth I*, 107-114.

together: she needs to be actually chaste, actually royal, and actually performing (wearing armor) for the mail to defend her. Otherwise she is vulnerable to male slings and arrows that threaten her quest and her integrity.

We can see this in Elizabeth as well. Even as hopes of her marriage faded, the image of the virginal queen allowed her to emphasize her royal status while deemphasizing her deteriorating physicality. Like Britomart, Elizabeth deliberately (but not independently) donned an image that would both defend and define her. Like Britomart, that image relied on her chastity to both underpin her moral virtue and her divine mission. Like Britomart, Elizabeth's pageantry was designed to provide an independence from male authority. Lastly, like Britomart, Elizabeth's performed identity was both male and female, in that her Two Bodies encompassed a feminine, virginal body and an implicitly masculine office.[532] Importantly, the public identities of both women were coded male (and therefore dangerous and powerful), and the private female.[533] Carole Levin retells a story from 1578 of when Gilbert Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, was walking in the Tilt yards at night and caught a glimpse of Elizabeth in her nightshirt. Later that evening, Elizabeth told Talbot she was ashamed to have been seen that way. Levin observes that without her mask, Elizabeth was an unmistakably vulnerable female body.[534] The connection to Britomart's experience in Castle Joyous, in which she is feminized and wounded by Gardante (Looking), is all too clear.

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[532] See Montrose, *Subject of Elizabeth*, 219.
[533] Elizabeth often highlighted this masculine aspect, referring to herself as the Prince in letters and speeches.
[534] Levin, *Heart and Stomach*, 147.

Britomart may be but one reflection of Elizabeth among many (Una, Gloriana, etc.), but I argue that we should see Britomart's armor as a comment on Elizabeth's crafted public image.[535] The armed (chaste) Britomart is dangerous, overpowering, and effectively impervious to harm. And that allows her to pursue a healthy desire while aiding those she encounters. However fabricated, Britomart's armor in Book III permits its noble wearer to do unqualified good, and is instrumental in leading Britomart to her eventual victory at the end of Book III. Britomart (and therefore Elizabeth) weaponizes her chastity, focusing its power to deflect any signs of weakness or vulnerability. Spenser begins Canto II by claiming there is "iust blame to find" in men who are too "partiall" in their praise—or lack thereof—of armed women. Men in their "enuy" have neglected the exploits of "women wont in warres" out of a desire to maintain their "rules" which they feared might "decay."[536] With that set up and the especially encouraging 1590 ending, Spenser fully aligns himself both with female power and the visible fabrications that make it work.[537] This is not to say that Spenser is encouraging the queen to actually wear armor all the time—however effective it may have been at Tilbury. Instead, I think Spenser is allowing a singular niche for the queen: in her hands, artificial appearance is worth the cost because it creates a better reality.

4. Falling back to Earth.

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[535] It is worth remembering that the Proem to Book III compares Spenser's verse to the *portraiture* of Elizabeth's virtue, not the chastity itself. "That to all Ladies, which haue it profest,/Neede by behold the pourtraict of her hart,/If pourtrayd it might bee by any liuing art." Proem.III.1.7-9. The proem makes seven distinct references to the portraiture of Elizabeth.

[536] III.2.1-2.

[537] Suzuki reminds us that Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Ariosto have begun works with similar sentiments, only to belie their original assertions, but I think Spenser is less cynical. Britomart is a vehicle for contradicting conventional attitudes towards gender through dress. By demonstrating the malleability of gender, Spenser has tried to "recover the fame of women which has been obscured by male invidiousness." See Suzuki, *Metamorphoses*, 153-4.

As I have mentioned above, the Britomart we meet in Books IV and V is very different than the one in Book III. Traditionally, critics have dealt with the distinction in two ways: 1) they try to combine the characters into a cohesive whole by charting her character's development over the books,[538] or 2) they point out Spenser's bitterness over not getting a post in London, and the general lessening of enthusiasm for the Queen.[539] I am going to argue that the efficacy of Britomart's armor to help her escape the gravity of gender is tied to the efficacy of Elizabeth's tailors and cosmeticians to keep her looking immune to time. Throughout Books IV and V, Britomart's armor, like her character, is fundamentally different in function and meaning than it was in Book III. This section will track that change by examining three flashpoints where the gendered effects of Britomart's armor become more of a hindrance than an asset.

Travels with Amoret

For much of Book III, we are content to link Britomart with her performed self, as that performance shapes even her disarmed state. Even without her armor, she is not a froward little girl in Malecasta's castle, after all. We see a similar conflation in Book IV, where Amoret is convinced that Britomart is male and that she might therefore be in some danger. Even our narrator shows confusion at times, giving Britomart male pronouns at times: "His will [Amoret] feard; for him she surely thought/to be a man, such as indeed he seemed."[540] Unfortunately, despite Britomart's honorable behavior, this

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[538] Anderson and Stump definitely take this tack.

[539] For more on this line of reasoning, see Roche, *Kindly*; Maureen Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser: the politics of reading* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Gail E. Cohee, "To Fashion a Noble Person': Spenser's Readers and the Politics of Gender," *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 14 (2000): 83-105.

[540] IV.1.8

confusion around gender causes explicit fear in Amoret until Britomart's eventual

disarming some stanzas later. It's unclear why Britomart kept her true identity a secret,

and it seems like a dipped visor plus a low whisper could have saved Amoret several

hours of dismay.

Britomart finally undresses after having defeated a number of knights outside a

nameless "Castell" in a scene clearly meant to echo the Castle Joyous episode from Book

III. Except this time, she undresses in full view of the whole court—learning from past

experience, perhaps—to mixed reviews. "Some [thought] that *Bellona* in that warlike

wise/To them appear'd, with shield and armour fit; Some that it was a maske of strange

disguise:/ So diuersely each one did sundrie doubts deuise."[541] The audience does not

know what to make of her now that her costume has been removed. The armor that had

helped her best other knights and free Amoret was now a "strange disguise." If we

continue to think of the armor as Queen Elizabeth's constructed image of Chastity, we

can see that the power of that image at court has decayed.

Moreover, unlike in Book III where the removal of the armor inevitably led to

negative consequences, Britomart sans mail is able to connect intimately with Amoret.

Spenser is sexually suggestive in this scene, telling us that Amoret drew Britomart "to her

bed" where "all that night they of their loues did treat."[542] The homoeroticism is barely

veiled, but Anderson is quick to eschew any unchaste valences: "In Spenser's time beds

were valuable commodities; and it was common to share one."[543] Anderson is historically

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[541] IV.1.14.
[542] IV.1.16.1.
[543] Anderson, "Britomart's Armor," 84.

correct of course, and she also rightly highlights the plural "loues", suggesting that the two women spent the night together telling each other of their respective "loues." But the ambiguous construction of the scene ("loues" oscillates between symbol and desire, and Amoret is eventually taken away by Lust) points to a change in Britomart. Without the armor, she and Amoret are able to connect 'woman-to-woman', but the female knight's masculinity (and reluctance to shed her armor) threatens to hinder both couple's (Britomart and Artegall; Amoret and Scudamore) quests to be reunited by creating a third pairing of the two women. The very performance that gives Britomart her strength is becoming an obstacle. Indeed, Britomart's refusal to share her identity with her allies also causes others to think the worst. Later in the same Canto, Duessa convinces Scudamore that Britomart is sleeping with Amoret, nearly causing Amoret's betrothed to kill Glauce. Not only can the disguise mislead those in her presence, but it also generates an image which Britomart cannot control and others can manipulate.

Artegall and Radigund

Britomart and Artegall first meet *in cognito* at the Satyrane's tournament, but their all too convincing costumes prevent any reconciliation. Disguised as the "Saluage Knight," Artegall defeats seven knights singlehandedly, and appears to win the day. However, immediately after his triumph, a second "stranger knight" appears (Britomart), who summarily strikes Artegall on his "Umbriere" so hard that he tumbles back over his horse's tail "aboue a stryde."[544] Seeing that Artegall is out, Cambell, Triamond, and Blandamour attack "him" (here is another instance where the narrator seems to be fooled

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[544] IV.4.43-44.

by Britomart's disguise), but Britomart easily defeats them all. Not only does the victory embarrass Artegall, it also wins Britomart False Florimell for a mate.

The confusion is compounded in the next canto when Artegall, enraged by his loss, and Scudamore decide to lay a trap for Britomart. The irony has the potential for humor, but the brutality of the fight— the narrator compares Artegall's viciousness to a mad dog's—and its sexual valences make the encounter problematic. All of Britomart's battles are sexually charged because the threat of other male's spears to her armor is akin to threats to her chastity. And whenever she has been harmed, Spenser has drawn our attention to the piercing of her white skin, emphasizing the cost of any strike getting past her guard. But this encounter is different, in part because it is an ambush, and carries with it the sense of a rape, and in part because it is two-on-one. Artegall has, after all, conspired with another man to overpower his destined wife. Even though Scudamore goes down easily—their fight only lasts a single stanza—the compounding confusion resulting from Britomart's costume has gone from humorous to dangerous.

The hostility between our two protagonists is only relieved when Artegall manages to shear off some of Britomart's ventail. Realizing Britomart's sex, Artegall pauses and beg forgiveness. When Britomart was similarly exposed in earlier episodes, she immediately was seen as (and therefore became) feminine. In this instance, she insists on maintaining her performance, telling the now penitent Artegall to stand and fight. Suddenly, her violent behavior is at odds with the way she is being read, halting her from obtaining Artegall's love. This is a good example of how seeing the armor as merely her chastity is insufficient. Anderson is right in saying, "By this point in the poem [her

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armor] signals her agency and specifically her will to resist."[545] I would add that while the sexuality of the combat might suggest that this is a scene of wooing, it is not Britomart's *chastity* that is obstructing any sexual union, but rather her insistence on her constructed masculinity. Even when Artegall's face is revealed, Britomart still attempts to bury her feelings for him and raise again her sword. She cannot go through with the fight, and the removal of costume does eventually aid their reconciliation, but the violence of the encounter and the unwillingness of Britomart to cooperate tell us that she has changed. The independence that got her this far has now become a barrier to her fulfilling Merlin's prophecy. Again, the once-useful, gender-bending armor of Book III is becoming an obstacle in Book IV.

The stakes are raised even higher when Britomart is forced to confront Radigund. Radigund is another *venus armata* who takes her name from the Greek *radios,* reckless, and *gune*, woman.[546] However, she also shares a namesake with St. Radegund, a queen of France (c. 519-87), who was chaste, humble, and resistant to male power. When Spenser describes her for the first time, he says that she enters, "halfe like a man."[547] So in both her background and her gendered performance, she is a reflection of Britomart. The connection becomes even more profound and troubling when we learn that Radigund is a Queen herself whose struggle for power puts her figure, like Britomart, right into the 16th century debate over a woman's right to rule. The main difference between the two female warriors, although this becomes less and less noticeable when they fight, is what they

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[545] Anderson, "Britomart's Armor," 90.
[546] Her name may also be derived from the Latin *radere,* to offend. See Carol Owen Rupprecht, "Radigund," in *The Spenser encyclopedia,* ed. A.C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
[547] V.4.36.8.

explicitly want to do with their power. Unlike Britomart, Radigund explicitly seeks to emasculate men she rules over: "First she doth them of warlike armes despoile,/And cloth in womens weedes: And then with threat/Doth them compell to worke, to earn their meat/To spin."[548] The primacy of the clothing change *before* their work recalls Britomart's own conversion, where the disguise preceded the quest. And whereas Britomart's adoption of male costume was both necessary and justified by the text, both Artegall and his knights repeatedly reference the "shame" of being reduced to "squalid weedes." Forcing these men to adopt different gender roles is demonstrably monstrous, but it does not discount the importance of gendered clothing nor its ability to fashion the individual. Instead, the "shame" we keep hearing about suggests both an asymmetrical approach to clothing (women in men's clothing is less problematic than men in women's[549]) and a horrifying demonstration of the radical implications of Britomart's dress. Her ability to shift her identity so completely suggests something rather flimsy about masculinity. Indeed, when Britomart finally finds Artegall in Radigund's dungeon, she is dismayed not just by the dress (which she must have heard about) but by his physicality, which had decayed dramatically. Britomart herself laments his loss of "manly hew" that accompanied the "vncomely weedes" and insists on changing his clothes before anything else. Perhaps that threat to masculinity is why Artegall was so insistent on putting a stop to Radigund's reign in the first place.

If Spenser was hinting at the problematic implications of Britomart's armor before, the actual duel puts all doubts aside. Britomart, without her trusty spear, and

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[548] V.4.315-6.
[549] This kind of asymmetry is not altogether foreign from our own, 21st century norms.

Radigund fight with *curved* swords—whose shape qualifies their phallic potential[550]—and attack each other with unprecedented ferociousness. The swords Spenser tells us they,

> ...ne spared not
>
> Their dainty parts, which nature had created
>
> So faire and tender, without staine or spot
>
> For other vses, then they them translated;
>
> which they now hackt and hewd, as if such vse they hated.[551]

The brutality of this encounter distinguishes it from every other one of Britomart's fights, even the tilts with Artegall, for "both women forget their martial skill and fight to maim and spoil as much as to win."[552] But note four things from this passage: 1) To a certain extent, "dainty parts" here remains ambiguous: Spenser's coyness knows no bounds. However, it could only mean genitals or breasts, and Britomart has already been stabbed in her breast by Busyrane. If her "dainty parts" are spotless here, then Spenser is not referring to the part on Britomart's body that has already been pierced. Having said that, Spenser distinguishes between the *natural* use of their "dainty parts" and their current use. That is to say, he accuses both of forsaking (or translating) their natural, created purpose in order to gain some form of doomed agency. Talus will, after Radigund's death, chase down and execute all of Radigund's subjects, so the potential for either woman to rule any sort of kingdom is moot. 2) Spenser's alexandrine suggests that both

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[550] Anderson, "Britomart's Armor," 93.
[551] V.7.29.5-9.
[552] Anderson, "Britomart's Armor," 93.

women fight as if they *hate* the use of their "dainty parts", that is, at least Britomart fights

as if she is actively resisting the very destiny she had been told about in the very same

canto. 3) Spenser makes little distinction between the two warriors: they both hack and

hew, they both hate themselves and each other, and they both end up spilling quite a bit

of blood (perhaps indicative of a threat to their fertility or virginity). Far from justifying

Radigund's behavior, the conflation of the two combatants signals a breakdown in

Britomart's character.[553] 4) Lastly, consider the odd detail Spenser includes about the

"dainty parts" not having had a "staine or spot" before this encounter. Beyond the strange

intimacy of the comment, it's telling that in the moment where Britomart's character is

undoing herself in a battle that will essentially destroy her own agency, Spenser returns to

the visual language. We are ostensibly supposed to understand him to mean that

Britomart's body was created perfectly before she "translated" it into some foul (that is,

masculine) use. The problem is that this suggests Britomart diverted from her destined

course at some point without specifying where. Is this the fight where she left the path, or

should she have never put the armor on at all?

Whatever the answer, in the fight Britomart's armor reflects her decaying identity,

as it fails to deflect one of Radigund's blows, cutting our heroine "vnto the bone." In

previous fights the armor had held, deflecting even Artegall's blows and keeping

Britomart from harm. This is important, especially if we consider that Britomart and

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[553] Suzuki makes this point as well, arguing that Britomart's wound in the encounter is a mirror image of Radigunds, and that the verb Spenser uses when Britomart finally kills Radigund, "empierce," underscores the similarity of the two female warriors (185).

Radigund are reflections of each other.[554] I've already made the case that the battle itself ends up conflating the two women in their preference for agency over destiny (that is, independence over marriage). Moreover, Spenser has already prepared us to compare the two. Earlier in the Book, our narrator provides a thorough description of Radigund's arms, including a "Camis light of purple silke." Hamilton's notes would have us see this as her "aspirations to sovereignty," referring to Dido's *purpuream vestem* from Virgil's *Aeneid* and the general royal connotation of purple itself.[555] However, while Radigund may aspire to expanding her rule over men, she is already a ruler. Like Britomart, she is a pale reflection of the Queen herself. So when the two finally clash and Britomart is wounded, we can see that the armor, that is, the performance of chastity, can no longer protect Britomart from her own naked ambition. It must be shorn away in order to make room for England's future, that is to say, Artegall.

Britomart's decline and Artegall's rise are exemplified in the closing actions of Book V, which all but reverse the trajectory of Book III. Again, the arming is of particular importance. Spenser gives us a whole stanza where Britomart can only think of Artegall's mail (not even his health or mental state) in which he uses a full 5 synonyms for "armed." When Britomart finally finishes fixing Artegall, she wonders not at his love, but in his "semblance." The scene is reminiscent of Britomart's first arming in that the one helping is explicitly subservient to the one being armed, and that the arming is providing agency to one character (Artegall) while reinforcing the others' subordination.

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[554] For more on this and Radigund's connections to Elizabeth, see Brian Lockey, "'Equitie to measure': The Perils of Imperial Imitation in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies.* 10 (2010): 52-70.
[555] Hamilton, *Spenser*, 539, note 2. Unlike other knights, both times she is injured, Britomart's blood is described as purple, at least in Book III. Artegall's blood is also purple in Book V.

It's key to realize that Artegall does not get back his own armor, but instead he receives some anonymous arms the Amazon had collected from "many a noble Knight." In other words, Artegall is fashioned in the evidence of Radigund's (and therefore all martial women's) agency. He is now free to explore Faerie Land again, but Britomart must remain to re-educate the Amazons on women's proper place. As I said before, without her armor she is incapable of crossing liminal boundaries, and she will never again leave the castle in the poem. Had this been Book III, England's future may have been perceived as Britomart's progeny, eventually leading up to Elizabeth and beyond. However, by 1596, all hope of Elizabeth producing an heir had been lost, so Britomart's ability to produce England's future put her at odds with Elizabeth's biography. Spenser avoids that contradiction by simply removing Britomart from the poem following this fight. We never see the prophesied pregnancy. Instead of looking to Britomart's (or Elizabeth's) progeny, the poem replaces her authority with that of male rulers.

The Venus Armata as a Threat

Spenser wrote two different endings for Book 3. In the 1590 edition of the *Faerie Queene*, Scudamore and Amoret embrace in an image which manages to celebrate both monogamous heterosexuality and flexible gender roles at once. Scudamore "clipt her twixe his armes twaine," and Amoret's body melts into his. "No word they spake, nor earthly thing they felt,/But like two senceles stocks in long embracement dwelt." Their love is so great that the narrator insists they look like a hermaphroditic sculpture.[556] It is, perhaps, the most optimistic image the *Faerie Queene* produces. However, it does not last

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[556] III.12.45-46.

6 years, and in the updated 1596 ending, Spenser replaces that image with a broken relationship (Scudamore never explicitly reunites with Amoret), and replaces chaste Britomart with a sympathetic but erring perversity that must be subsumed into male authority. As stated earlier, Britomart in Book III is not the same character that we meet in Books IV and V; while her armor provides her with similar abilities, she is portrayed in a much less sympathetic light. By contrast, Mary Villepaneux argues that Spenser treats Britomart's prowess with consistent ambivalence. The article tracks veiled references to castration throughout, such as the Phao's phallic Tower in Book III that crumbles when his wife is unfaithful, and Merlin's cave, which seems to subsume the sorcerer in noxious feminine power. Villepaneux's conclusion is that Britomart is portrayed negatively whenever she is characterized as masculine, and that Spenser either did not approve of Elizabeth or did not approve of female rulers.[557] She is right that there is some anxiety to feminine authority writ large, but I see no sustained evidence of that being applied to Britomart in Book III. I see no real resistance to Britomart's quest nor to her authority until Book IV. She is perhaps most threatening to male power at the beginning of Book III when she bests Guyon effortlessly, tossing him to the ground without losing momentum. But the whole episode is humorous more than dire, and if anything, directs our sympathy toward Britomart's mission rather than Guyon's wounded pride. Put another way, if Spenser had only written Book III, it might be possible to find some traces of anxiety, but the general thrust would be positive: as Britomart is strong, so Elizabeth is wise.

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[557] Villeponteaux, "Displacing Feminine Authority," 53-67.

In Books IV and V, Spenser consistently shows how Britomart's power is a possible threat to male sovereignty. She humiliates men, resists Artegall's influence, obstructs Artegall's mission (and therefore Justice), and, in the Radigund duel, seems to disavow her generative role in Merlin's prophecy in order to maintain martial superiority. Moreover, the multiple wounds she sustains from the Amazon's blows suggest her own vulnerability to Radigund's influence: Britomart could become this sort of misanthropic conqueror, too. Even though Britomart brings Radigund under masculine control, she can only ensure Artegall's and England's rise by destroying her own identity. As such, the figure of *venus armata* becomes a threat to the future of the nation as a whole.

From Purple Robes to Yellow Teeth

Rather than seeing her as a coherent character, then, Britomart should be seen as a mirror for Spenser's feelings towards Elizabeth and his understanding of chastity as a virtue and as a performance. Spenser, like so many Elizabethans, accepted and celebrated Elizabeth's chastity, especially in Books I-III in the wake of the Armada's defeat and the hope of a decisive victory over the Spanish. But Spenser's depiction of that same independent chastity is profoundly ambivalent in the 1596 version. What exactly had changed?

The 1590's were tough years, when the queen was noticeably older, and a number of political, social, and cultural forces converged that made it harder for her to maintain her authority and image. For one, the war with Spain dragged on much longer than

expected. Even though Elizabeth was able to withdraw her forces from the continent in 1585, "the most obvious and striking feature of English intervention was the almost total failure of the more ambitious offensive enterprises and plans."[558] Moreover, the length of the conflict (which outlasted Elizabeth herself) put serious economic burdens on England. Wernham estimates that during a period of five years starting in 1589, England committed at least 47,000 troops to France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain, with a cost of over £1,100,000, "equivalent to a good half of her ordinary income during that time."[559] Elizabeth was forced to ask Parliament to raise levies in 1589 and 1593, which was especially difficult in 1593 after a series of "wet summers, ruined harvest, slack overseas trade, and widespread plague."[560] The combination of economic pressure and disappointing results cooled relations between court and people.

Meanwhile, Tyrone's Rebellion, which aimed at expelling the English forces from Ireland, exposed Elizabeth to public criticism of her handling of the conflict. In 1595, the Irish rebels ambushed an English army at Yellow Ford, leaving 1200 dead. Though Tyrone submitted to the crown in early 1596, the rebellion continued to simmer beneath the surface, and by the summer, uprisings were sprouting all over the island. Positioned as he was in Ireland, Spenser had a front-row seat to the rebellion, and his frustration over Elizabeth's inaction is obvious in his 1596 *A View of the Present State of Ireland.*[561] Published in the same year as the Second Edition of *the Faerie Queene, A View* argued

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[558] R. B. Wernham, *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the struggle for Western Europe, 1588-1595* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Clarendon Press, 1984), 559.
[559] Ibid., 563-6.
[560] Ibid., 567.
[561] For more on Spenser's frustration over Irish polity, see Mccabe *Monstrous Regiment*; Christopher Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

for the need to commit a large military force to Ireland such that the country could be, in

Hadfield's summary, "levelled, flattened, and civilized."[562] In the work, Spenser also

attempts to gain the patronage of the Earl of Essex, whose military leadership he thought

might bring resolution to the conflict.[563] Essex and Elizabeth had deep disagreements

over Ireland, and Spenser appeared to be throwing his lot in with the former. Thus, *A*

View shows how far Spenser had come from II.ii, when he spent 27 lines praising the

military prowess of female leaders.

Worse, as Elizabeth aged, she seems to have retained less control over her

subjects than she had in the past. Between 1588 and 1590, Elizabeth's court suffered a

series of deaths that upset the balance of power in her Privy Council and deprived her of

key, lifelong supporters. In the words of John Guy, the vacancies left in the Privy

Council, the wartime decisions the Council often made without her input, and Elizabeth's

more erratic behavior constitute a "second reign," in that she was dramatically less in

control.[564] For example, in 1596, the Earl of Essex, fresh off of a military victory at

Cadiz, published accounts of his heroics, undercutting the role of the lord admiral and

advocating for further military commitments abroad.[565] Elizabeth attempted to ban it

from publication, but manuscripts of his pamphlet nevertheless circulated. The problem

with Essex was that he craved the public spotlight as much as Elizabeth did. Worse, he

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[562] Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: a life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 341.
[563] Ibid., 342-5. Despite the work's popularity (over 20 manuscript copies have been discovered), Elizabeth did not send a large army to Ireland until 1599, after rebels had destroyed Spenser's home.
[564] See J. A. Guy, *The reign of Elizabeth I: court and culture in the last decade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-19.
[565] For more on Essex's machinations, see Paul Hammer, "The Smiling Crocodile: the Earl of Essex and late Elizabethan 'popularity,'" in *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England,* ed. Peter Lake and Steven C. A. Pincus (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 95-115.

was good at attaining it, even outstripping Elizabeth in terms of book dedications.[566] Essex's appeals to popularity were so effective that Elizabeth's government was forced to dismantle his reputation at an address to a "gathering of justices and gentleman" in 1599. As with sumptuary law, the fact that she had to take such measures just to rein in a subordinate showed the degree to which Elizabeth's position had weakened in her later years.

At the same time, what Hackett calls the "Literature of Disillusionment" took hold. Poets like Fulke Greville wrote dramas portraying cold, dying courts full of empty displays of grandeur. In fact, much of his 1598-1600 *Alaham* focuses on the ease with which rulers may mislead people. When the titular character tells us, "Craft in good apparell may deceiue,"[567] the topical valences are all too apparent. And indeed, criticism of the Queen and sex stretched beyond verse. In the same period, we see a rise of humanist writings on Tacitean values, which emphasized honesty and authority, and condemned flattery and dissimulation.[568] And of course, there is Spenser's Second Edition.

In this political environment, Elizabeth worried about being left out of the decision-making process. She had been reported as saying *Mortua sed non sepulta"*[I prefer death to obscurity].[569] In response, Elizabeth doubled down on the imagery of Chastity, shielding herself from the public sphere in order cultivate an aura of

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[566] Guy, *Tudor Monarchy*, 231.
[567] G. Bullough, ed. *Poems and dramas of Fulke Greville: first lord Brooke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945) vol. II, pg. 138-213, I.1.90.
[568] Ibid., 15.
[569] See also Frye, *Elizabeth I*, 98.

"transcendence" and political independence.[570] But judging from firsthand accounts, Montrose argues that the tightening regulations on the Queen's portraiture, such as the 1596 proclamation ordering the confiscation and destruction of "offensive portraits," only exposed the "growing gap between the Queen's Two Bodies." In other words, there was "an increasing disjunction between the political ideal of the Queen's beauty, which was abstract and timeless, and an artistic project of 'natural representation." Perhaps the most damning indictment of Elizabeth's failure to maintain her image comes from an oft-cited letter from a French dignitary, André Hurault, Sieur de Maisse. According to the Ambassador in 1597, the Queen's face "is and appears to be very aged. It is long and thin, and her teeth are very yellow and unequal, compared with what they were formerly, so they say, and on the left side less than on the right. Many of them are missing so that one cannot understand her easily when she speaks quickly."[571] For Montrose, the gap between the Two Bodies was concurrent with and contributed to the erosion of royal support.[572] This was certainly true for some visitors to the court, but it seems safer to claim, both from the literature and the diplomatic accounts, that many (including Spenser) simply became tired of the coutly, flirtatious game.

The dichotomy between the two Britomarts can be mapped onto the relative success of Elizabeth's self-construction. The 1580's saw Elizabeth at the height of both

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[570] Hackett, *Virgin Mother*, 181.
[571] Quoted in John Guy, *Elizabeth I: The forgotten years* (New York: Viking, 2016), 293. Guy includes several other similar quotes starting in 1596. Like many historians, Guy links a lot of Elizabeth's 1590's troubles to an oft repeated litany of political challenges: anxiety over succession, economic troubles, bad harvests, and trouble in Ireland. All of those--particularly her inaction in Ireland (see Mccabe, *Monstrous Regiment*) must have mattered, but Elizabeth also faced many similar challenges in the 80's (nevermind the Armada), but faced significantly less grumbling.
[572] Montrose, *Subject of Elizabeth*, 221-2.

her political power and her pageantry. Hackett describes how in the many letters to Elizabeth seeking her favor, the 1580's shows a distinct rise in "quasi-divine" language. While it may be ultimately impossible to separate the true believers from those who just wanted to curry the Queen's favor, more people employing that kind of rhetoric suggests the ideas' grip on the populace, and we know the Ascension Day tournaments continued to get bigger as well. All this speaks to a very popular Queen who relied on her virginal image to amplify power and political success. The first half of the *Faerie Queene* reflects Elizabeth's success as a self-promoter, it also implicitly supports Elizabeth's active construction of *virginal* Chastity and the independence it granted her.

On the other hand, 1590's saw Elizabeth's power dip and the volume of grumbling grow. When Britomart's forsakes her own armor in Book V, she also suggests a sharp critique of the Queen's elaborate pageantry. Spenser has lost faith in both his warrior maiden and the type of virginal Chastity that Elizabeth had constructed through clothing and pageantry. That kind of imperious, mystical image may have provided some authority in the past, but the armor is no longer impervious (it lets through Radigund's sword) and it is no longer capable of focusing Britomart's energies towards realm saving quests (her many tilts of Book IV and V delay rather than fulfill her destiny). Worse, its existence is selfish; by maintaining the fiction, Britomart both obstructs Artegall's (Justice's) mission and prevents the production of an heir. Likewise, by continuing to assert her relevance, Elizabeth hindered, among other things, resolution in Ireland.

We should remember that Britomart gives up her armor without giving up her chastity. She and Artegall will ostensibly conceive,[573] but where Spenser leaves the narrative, she is disarmed but still a virgin. The logic of the move suggests that Britomart is giving up virginal Chastity (which resists male influence) for the type of Chastity that submits to male rule and sexuality. In forgoing the performance, Britomart also eschews her political power. That this renouncement brings about reconciliation suggests that Elizabeth should give up the courtly game she had fostered for so long. In other words, Spenser has not just soured on female authority, but on the unnatural ruses that he thinks causes it to subsist. He is not suggesting Elizabeth marry—poems like Puttenham's *Partheniades*, which explicitly discuss the joys of marriage and the costs of remaining single—had already been written on the subject decades prior. By 1596, it was 20 years too late anyway. Instead, the Canto's ending suggests that in a more ideal world, a woman would never have had power at all, and that Elizabeth ought to fade into obscurity (as Britomart does) to let the more militaristic elements of her government (Artegall) make the decisions. The very potentialities of self-fashioning which he introduced and celebrated in Book III are gone, replaced by the material limitations of time.

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[573] Like in Book I, where Redcrosse's and Una's marriage is put on hold so that Redcrosse can return to the Fairy Queen, Artegall's and Britomart's union is concluded with a certain amount of ambivalence. The prophecy that they would beget a line of kings remains in doubt.

Conclusion: the Continuity of Change

In the 1983 film *Trading Places,* a snobby investment banker (played by Dan Ackroyd) and a street hustler (Eddie Murphy) are tricked into switching places as part of a wager between two billionaires. When Ackroyd is cut off from his house, clothes, and money, he quickly resorts to petty crime. Likewise, when Murphy is suddenly given a sumptuous apartment and luxurious clothes, he becomes a successful banker overnight. While in the end, the movie affirms the ingenuity and cunning of even the most humbly dressed characters, it nevertheless considers the public's reliance on clothing as a replacement for class, and questions the essence of the identity underneath. Despite being removed from the allegories this dissertation covered by 400 years, the film nevertheless echoes many of the same conceits.

The phrase "the clothes make the man" comes from Polonius, who actually said, "the apparel oft proclaims the man." Most scholars feel comfortable asserting that the Elizabethan age was obsessed with the outward expression of status, and judging from any number of extant wardrobes, they are right. In 1600, Elizabeth's wardrobe listed "99 robes, 102 French gowns, 67 round gowns, 100 loose gowns, 126 kirtles, 96 cloaks, and 26 fans, in addition to her official Coronation, Parliament, Order of the Garter, and

Mourning apparel."[574] When she died, she owned over 3000 dresses.[575] And by all accounts Elizabeth's focus on appearance was reflected by her subjects. Andrew Gurr notes, "The Earl of Leicester [Dudley] paid £543 for seven doublets and two cloaks, at an average cost for each item rather higher than the price Shakespeare paid for a house in Stratford."[576] Outfits costing as much as a house may strike us as ridiculous: Burberry is expensive, but not *that* expensive. But if we think of celebrities as pseudo-aristocrats, then we can see that their desire for public acclaim leads them to spend ridiculous sums as well. At the 2016 Academy Awards, Charlotte Rampling wore an Armani Prive dress reportedly worth $125,000.

I don't mean to suggest that Red Carpet dresses are the same as outfits bought for royal court appearances, nor do I mean to commit too strongly to the connection between celebrities and aristocrats. Nevertheless, some continuity remains both in terms of conspicuous consumption and thematic exploration. There is a tendency, both in popular and scholarly culture, to build canyons between historical eras or between ourselves and the past. This dissertation is attempting to establish continuities between the medieval and Early Modern eras in order to better understand how those cultural moments related to one another.[577]

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[574] Amanda Bailey, ""Monstrous manner": style and the early modern theater," *Criticism.* 43 (2001), 249-284.
[575] Herbert, Norris, *Tudor costume and fashion* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1997), 484.
[576] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean stage, 1574-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance clothing and the materials of memory* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 2000),178-9.
[577] David Aers and Nigel Smith, "English reformations," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies.* 40 (3)(2010): 425-438.

The observation that the Elizabethan age was uniquely interested in appearance is less satisfying when you consider the centuries of moralist tracts complaining about sumptuous fashions, and the allegories that explored those themes. However common it is to say "Apparel was one of the primary means through which [Elizabeth I] realized her authority,"[578] it is harder to show that the focus on appearance was fundamentally different than it had been before.

Allegorists were thinking hard about the intersection between appearance and status long before Elizabeth took the throne, and I have striven to demonstrate the continuity of anxiety around clothing without offering a clear, grand narrative. I can say that some of these texts offered more closure than others. Whereas Langland repeatedly undercuts the answers some of his holiest characters provide and refuses to let Will complete his quest, Spenser is relatively more direct with respect to his ideas about Britomart's ability to rule in Book V. However, there is no obvious progress narrative; it is not true that Early Modern allegories gave greater leeway to self-fashioning. If anything, they located that potential in the elites while punishing would be class-jumpers. Likewise, in Chapter 1, I demonstrated how Langland and Margery Kempe presented the reader with an idea of how clothing could be read, and then showed it being misread continuously. The only people who were able to rely on clothing as a stable signifier were those connected to the church. In Chapter 2, I showed how even though morality plays relied on the theatricality of clothing, they disagreed on its function in the public sphere.

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[578] Bailey, "Religious Poverty," 249. The idea is all over the place, see Norris, *Tudor Costume*; Lawrence Stone, *The crisis of the aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); and Janet Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe unlock'd* (Leeds: Maney, 1988).

They further disagreed over self-fashioning. While *Mankind* excorciated ambitious yeomen for adopting the new East Anglian fashions, *Hyckescorner* allowed a prescribed range of donned political costume. In Chapter 3, I explored how Skelton's ideas about the look of Magnificence—that is, the look of a monarch—were immediately responsive to the costume norms exhibited by two different kings. While the latter play, *Magnyfycence,* appears definitive, its ideological distance from *The Bowge of Court* suggests how much those definitions are subject to change. Lastly, in Chapter 4, I analyzed the different editions of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and showed how the breakdown of Britomart's armor and her submission to Artegall was linked to Spenser's loss of faith in Elizabeth's performed virginal chastity and his frustration with her leadership.

In this sense we end where we began, with an argument over the meaning of a word: chastity. Like Langland, Spenser is concerned not just with the abstract meaning of chastity (virginal vs. purity of unlawful intercourse), but also with how the word was manifested in the public sphere. To what degree does Hawkin's coat unfairly mark him for public humiliation? To what degree does the construction of Elizabeth's virtue redeem her problematic virginity (in that she did not produce an heir) or obstruct the influence of more capable men? Indeed, the enduring popularity of Langland into the 16th century, and the many references to *Piers Plowman* in *The Faerie Queene,*[579] betrays a continuity of approach across centuries of political change. From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, allegorists used clothing to characterize, but in a sea of fashion, neither the Tudor Dynasty nor the Reformation could resolve the questions medieval authors asked.

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[579] For example, Langland's Lady Mede and Spenser's Duessa are both "purfled" (embroidered) with rich array.

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