TEXTS AND TEXTILES: SELF-PRESENTATION AMONG THE ELITE IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND

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In popular histories of the Tudors and Stuarts, it is often said, or implied, of Anne of Denmark that she was a vain and stupid woman, responsible for much of the moral rot at the heart of the Jacobean court, a judgment which is based to a great extent on her interest in dress. *Who's Who in Stuart Britain*, for example, describes her primly as 'high-spirited, frivolous and empty-headed, … she had expensive tastes in clothes and jewels and loved elaborate masques, which added a good deal to the costs of the court and diminished its reputation' (Hill 1988: 6). The idea that thinking about clothes and jewellery is wrong is implicit in such judgments, as is, furthermore, the assumption that thinking about clothes is feminine. Women have been castigated for undue interest in their appearance since the days of Clement of Alexandria. As far as the Queen herself goes, Leeds Barroll has argued that there is more to Anne of Denmark than previous writers have thought, and perhaps for that very reason, does not comment on her wardrobe (2001). Leanda de Lisle similarly adduces evidence for her charm and adroitness, and observes that she was perceived as 'courtly' in a way that her graceless consort was not (2005). But there is a great deal more to the wearing of expensive clothes than female vanity and folly, and there are questions worth asking about textiles and the Jacobean élite.

Textiles and fashion were central to court life, and even, in themselves, a means of communication. They attracted what seems to us a completely disproportionate amount of available resources, infinitely more than the paintings and other more permanent artefacts which are now more familiar to us. It is therefore safe to conclude that they were important, and something which needs to be understood in order to understand late Elizabeth and Jacobean court culture. At the very least, the clothes of the élite are a phenomenon such as tulip-mania, which needs to be accounted for: John Chamberlain, for example, describing the preparations for Queen Anne's funeral, comments, 'the whole charge spoken of is beyond proportion … which proceeds not of plentie, for they are driven to shifts for monie' (McClure 1939: II. 232).

The fact that the spiralling costs, and importance, of luxury fabric at the English court begins under Henry VIII, not Elizabeth, is an indication that it is not

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a development which can straightforwardly be assigned to the sensibility of fashion-loving queens. Henry's clothes, as we can see from portraits, were enormously more luxurious and complex than those of his father, and indeed, than those of his wives. The fact that it was of political importance to him that his court not be outshone by that of his brother monarch François I can be seen from the hugely expensive and pointless, but far from insignificant, posturings of the 'Field of the Cloth of Gold', where 'many carried their mills, forests and meadows on their backs' (Knecht 1982: 80). From the 'Field of the Cloth of Gold' onwards, if not before, the gorgeousness of the English court was perceived by contemporaries as an important part of the maintenance of international credibility, especially before ambassadors and other foreign visitors.

Luxury was the price of entry into the Henrician court. The practicalities of this are displayed most transparently in the 'Lisle Letters'. Anne Bassett, Lady Lisle's daughter, was given the position of Maid of Honour to Jane Seymour, but her mother and stepfather were at that time governing Calais, so 'My Lord Lisle's man', John Hussee, was forced to send a series of letters explaining what was needed: the requirements are thus set out explicitly. On 17 September, 1537, 'the queen's pleasure [is] that Mrs. Anne shall wear out her French apparel, so that your ladyship shall thereby be no loser. Howbeit, she must needs have a bonnet of velvet and a frontlet of the same.' But by 2 October, Jane Seymour had changed her mind: 'Mrs. Anne shall wear no more her French apparel', she must have 'a bonnet or ii, with frontlets and an edge of pearl and a gown of black satin, and another of velvet, and this must be done before the Queen's grace's churching' (cited in Ashelford 1996: 21). Furthermore, Hussee had to break it to Lady Lisle that she had economised unduly on her daughter's linen: the quality was too coarse for her degree, so she would have to have everything new. The economical Lady Lisle must have been tearing her hair as one demand after another came from London, but if Anne was to take her place in the queen's entourage, her parents had to pay up.

Mary Tudor's portraits suggest that her own clothes, in keeping with the style favoured by her Spanish husband Philip II (and perhaps with her Spanish mother's taste, of which almost nothing is known), were discreet and sombre. But the information that before she came to the throne, Elizabeth chose to cut an austere figure among the painted butterflies of the court suggests that Mary too saw the need to maintain the luxurious style of her father in the court as a whole (Perry 1990: 72). Certainly, when Elizabeth became queen, she seemed determined to prove that in this as in other respects, she was her father's daughter. The effect was an escalation of luxury as the reign went on. In 1595, Breuning von Buchenbach, an ambassador from Duke Frederick of Würtemberg, commented that 'at no other court have I ever seen so much splendour and such fine clothes' (von Klarwill 1928: 376). These fine clothes, as the Lisle letters so clearly demonstrate, were not a personal act of self-expression, they were the price of appearance in public life. As

necessities, therefore, they were not always paid for out of surplus or income. Ben Jonson in *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599) says of a would-be courtier, 'twere good you turned four or five hundred acres of your best land into two or three trunks of apparel' (1.2.40–2; Jonson 1600, sig. Ciiv). He neither jested nor exaggerated. When Arthur Throckmorton of Coughton Court, Warks, went to court in 1583, he sold part of his land and borrowed his brother's legacy (on which he paid interest for many years) in order to acquire suitable clothes. He bought cloth of tinsel (interwoven with gold or silver thread), for a cypress silk suit, with silk ribbon for a matching cloak, and paid £6 1s. for eighteen gold buttons to decorate it. He also had a suit of tawny velvet decorated with tawny satin and taffeta, matching silk stockings, a beaver hat, two dozen points, ruffs and bands. His retainers had liveries of purple cloth with crimson and yellow velvet guards (Ashelford 1996: 37). And that is probably the minimum — two suits, one hat — with which a man could appear at court. When Bridget Manners, daughter of the Countess of Rutland, went to court in 1589 as a Maid of Honour, £200 was budgeted for her clothes.

The same pressure towards expenditure on clothes obtained throughout society, despite sumptuary legislation:

> For though the laws against yt are express,
> Each Lady like a Queen herself doth dress,
> A merchaunts wife like to be a barroness (Sir John Harrington, *Epigrames*, 364, cited in Ashelford 1996: 207; see also Hayward 2009).

Thomas Middleton, in *Father Hubburd's Tale* (1604) describes the landlord of a London inn transforming himself into a 'French puppet' with new clothes that 'amounted to above two years rent' (Ashelford 1996: 57). When Simon Forman the astrologer married in 1599, he spent £50 on a new gown, breeches, cloak and cap for himself, and new clothes for his wife, then they sat for their portraits (Ashelford 1996: 31). It is probable that a high proportion of Elizabethan and Jacobean portraits commemorate new clothes — one might be forgiven for thinking that painters such as Marcus Gheeraerts and William Larkin were making portraits *of* new clothes: it is very noticeable in a portrait such as Larkin's picture of the Countess of Oxford (1614/18), just how much better painted the dress is than even the hands and face, let alone the background (Strong 1993). Edward Norgate's *Miniatura, or the Art of Limning* (1650) makes it clear that, for miniature paintings at least, the sitter's garments were brought to the studio and left there for him to work on: 'when you are alone, you may take your owne time to finish them with as much neatnes and perfection as you please, or can' (Hardie 1919: 26–27).

The three Jacobean garments which survive physically and are also represented in paint make it clear that these records of clothes are photographically accurate: they are a portrait, probably of Jane Lambarde (c. 1620–30), with the crimson velvet mantle she is shown wearing, which both belong to the Draper's

Company (see below and Arnold 1980a); Margaret Laton's portrait and her embroidered jacket, c. 1610–15, both now in the Victoria and Albert costume collection; and Sir Richard Cotton's portrait with his slashed satin suit (Arnold 1973).

The sums of money which have been quoted need to be set in context to be understood. The poetaster and musician Thomas Whythorne, though he was an educated man and quite well connected, would have thought himself extremely fortunate if he had managed to land a widow with £20 a year. Clothes in general were far more expensive in relation to other elements of the household budget than they are now, since every inch was necessarily processed, spun, woven, and stitched by hand, and the actual cost of luxury garments was extraordinarily high. Consider, for instance, stockings: when knitted silk stockings first came in in the 1560s, they cost perhaps £8 a pair, and still were around £3 a pair by 1582 (Thirsk 1973: 54). Anne of Denmark's clerk of the wardrobe had wages of £6, 5s for the year, with a fee of 12d a day (thus adding another couple of pounds to his disposable income), but his livery cost her £30, 9s, 8d (PRO E101/437/8, no foliation). A domestic dispute of 1616 escalated into a Star Chamber case when Lucy Bressye locked away her servant George James's livery coat (PRO STAC 8,59/4). The Puritan pamphleteer Philip Stubbes complained in 1583 that shirts covered in 'needlework of silk, and curiouslie stitched with open seame and many other knackes beseydes' cost 'some ten shillings, some twentie, some fortie, some five pound...some ten pounds a peece' (cited in Ashelford 1996: 31). Stubbes, again, speaks of gowns of silk, velvet, grograine, taffatie, scarlet and fine cloth 'of xxx or xl shillings a yarde' — this is probably Puritan exaggeration, but Prince Charles was certainly paying sixteen shillings a yard for satin in 1620, and velvets were as much as twenty-four shillings (Orgel and Strong 1973: I. 305). S. William Beck similarly quotes an account of Lord William Howard's in which he paid 24s a yard for purple velvet (he died in 1640) (Beck 1886: 362). Valerie Cumming notes that each of the princess's dresses took 20¾ yards of the basic material (Cumming 1978: 325), so enough fabric for a velvet dress might cost £20 or more.

The standard of luxury among great aristocrats rose inexorably in the course of the century. Mary Sidney's father spent a 'mere' £57 on her trousseau for her marriage to the Earl of Pembroke in 1577 (HMC De L'Isle and Dudley 1925–66: I. 249, 269–70). For a comparable society wedding six years later, that of Mary Kytson to Lord Darcy in 1583, her parents spent £203 5s on 'divers parcells of silk' from the mercer Sir William Stone, which then presumably had to be made up with appropriate trimmings. Still later, when Mary Sidney's niece Lady Mary Wroth married, she received a handsome wedding present from her father's captains at Flushing (Vlissingen), £200 to buy a chain of pearl or other ornament, as she pleased. Her letter of acknowledgement thanked them all: she had bought 'very faire gloves' with the money: that is, she chose a luxury textile item rather than a permanent jewel (HMC De L'Isle and Dudley 1925–66: III, 140).

Royal budgets were on a different scale from those of ordinary mortals. Queen Elizabeth, in the last four years of her reign spent £9,535 a year on clothes. This expenditure — particularly in the latter part of her life when she was no longer young and marriageable — has, like that of Anne of Denmark, roused the censoriousness of subsequent historians, but as in the time of her father, it was evidently perceived by contemporaries as a political necessity. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Fortescue, told the House of Commons in February 1593: 'as for her apparel, it is royal and princely, beseeming her calling, but not sumptuous nor excessive', a statement which appears to have been acceptable to the House (D'Ewes 1682: 473, cited in Arnold 1988: xvii). A not-excessive wardrobe for a queen translated, according to the inventory made in 1599, into some 1,326 items, which included garments that had belonged to her half-siblings Edward VI and Mary Tudor, more than forty years old (Ashelford 1996: 37). Thus even Elizabeth wore second-hand clothes; and as Janet Arnold has shown in detail, her clothes were re-modelled on several occasions: one length of expensive velvet or brocade would appear in more than one guise in successive seasons (Arnold 1988: 19–21, 38–9). Moreover, very careful track was kept of everything she wore, and the garments were treated as state treasures: one of the Gentlewomen of the Privy Chamber kept a daybook, in which she recorded every item which left the Great Wardrobe on a particular day, all jewels worn by the Queen, or sewn on her costumes, and anything that fell off or got mislaid (Arnold 1980b). Arnold comments, 'She certainly loved beautiful clothes …but the impression gained is that she regarded the rich silks and velvets, gold embroidery and spangles as state treasure; they were looked after most carefully. Some items dating from the 1560s were still there, unaltered, in 1600' (Arnold 1988: 3). Arnold describes the system for keeping track of items as 'virtually foolproof' (1988: 172).

Under James VI, this royal expenditure escalated to an alarming extent. For one thing, Elizabeth had glittered as a solitary star, and very consciously so: she was vigilant in suppressing over-fineness in her ladies. When one of the Maids of Honour, Lady Mary Howard, wore 'more finery that became [her] state', the Queen's rage was spectacular (the story is told in Harington 1779: II. 139–40). In the next generation there was, besides James, his wife, Anne of Denmark, and an ever-increasing brood of royal children. Against Elizabeth's Great Wardrobe expenses of £9,535 in the last four years of her reign, we may set expenses of £36,377 annually for the first five years of James's reign (a figure which does *not* include Queen Anne's bills, though it does include clothes for Henry and Charles). Towards the end of her life, Anne of Denmark had a wardrobe grant of £8,000 a year; additional, presumably, to what she chose to spend out of her general income, which was considerable (McClure 1939: II. 219). John Chamberlain, summing up Anne's finances after her death for Sir Dudley Carleton, gives the following figures for Anne's annual income: £60,000 for her household, servants and stable, 24,000 which was her jointure and allowed for her own person, £13,000 'out of the

sugars' (presumably a monopoly), and the £8,000 wardrobe grant: if this is accurate, £105,000 per annum passed through her hands (McClure 1939: II. 224). Her wardrobe grant might be perceived as excessive, given that she was Queen Consort rather than Queen regnant, but when set against the figure for James, it clearly absolves her of primary responsibility for the 'extravagance' of the Jacobean court. The fact that it was the male members of the royal family whose spending on clothes was grotesquely high suggests that the fashion was led by the king rather than the queen.

We do not have very much information about the economics of Queen Anne's court. The Public Record Office holds only about thirty pages out of Anne of Denmark's accounts, relating to the year 1614–15: because her household was dissolved on her death, her accounts, unlike those of the king's household, were not automatically preserved (E101/437/8). The most interesting thing about this scrap of documentation is that it confirms the Queen's financial independence: it gives a large part of her wages bill, and also details her income from fee-farms, which was nearly £16,000 for that year. Unfortunately, it does not include her wardrobe account for the period; though some textile-related bills turn up in the section on extraordinary expenditures, which does survive: she paid Richard Miller £135 for 'stuffes', a bill which stands out, for its size, in a general context of such miscellaneous expenditures as £10 to firework makers, £10 to her players for a play performed on December 17, 1615, and £30 to an Italian poet.

Again, the sums quoted for the Great Wardrobe need setting in the context of other expenditure: the annual cost of the Royal Navy in the same period, for example, was estimated as about £56,000 (McClure 1939: II. 172). In 1608, the bill for clothing the thirteen-year-old heir presumptive, Prince Henry, was a more than princely £4,574 14s.

Looking at where the money actually went, it is clear that the cost of these items was essentially in the fabric and trimmings. For ordinary garments, the tailor's charge was normally about a quarter of the cost of the material (Ashelford 1996: 51); but when the value of the material rocketed, the amount the maker charged did not keep pace: a suit of Prince Henry's, for example, cost £38, 0s, 7d for the material, while only £3, 10s went to Alexander Wilson for his highly skilled construction, and presumably, design (PRO LC/9/95, f. 36v–37r). He seems to have been the prince's regular tailor. It is clear from these accounts that the principal material of each suit tended to cost between £20 and £40. There was no *couture* in the seventeenth century: no designers, such as the much later Worth or Dior, whose work commanded a premium. Developments in fashion came from, or were attributed to, the clients, and artisan skills in designing and making were taken for granted.

In the context of court dress, the term 'fabric' can normally be interpreted as silk. Silk, with its incomparable lustre and unique capacity for absorbing dye, was both the most desirable of textiles, and in a class of its own in terms of price (though

linen, particularly when embroidered, was not cheap either): it was on silk, therefore, that the Jacobean aristocracy spent their fortunes, and in some cases, their patrimonies. Raw silk and woven silk fabric were imported into Europe from China from the early days of the Roman empire, and silk was produced in the Middle East from the sixth century onwards, which found eager buyers in medieval Europe (Muthesius 1997; on the demand for silk in the early medieval west, see Fleming 2007). By the sixteenth century, Florence and Genoa had shifted from being entrepôts for the importation of Byzantine and Islamic silks to being centres of production in their own right (Genoa was particularly famous for its silk velvets) (Cavaciocchi 1993). The silks which came into Tudor and Stuart England thus mostly came from, or via, Italy (see Ciatti 1994 for some good photographs of sixteenth-century Italian luxury textiles). One of the most notable suppliers was Sir Baptist Hicks, mercer, whose shop at the sign of the White Bear in Cheapside was frequented by the entire *beau monde* of his day. Hicks dealt directly with Italian suppliers, so could command a better supply of fine silks than any other mercer in London. He kept a representative permanently in Livorno as early as 1595, and one in Florence from 1602 (Ashelford 1996: 43, 82). When James I came to the throne, he chose Hicks as the main supplier to the Great Wardrobe. Between Michaelmas 1608 and August 1609, he paid Hicks £14,083 for 'wares'. Hicks's position with respect to the Jacobean court parallels that of Jacques Coeur at the court of Charles VII in the mid-fifteenth century: the King and Queen and their court became so hopelessly indebted to Coeur for silks that he was accused of poisoning the King's mistress and sentenced to death; his wealth was confiscated by the Crown and all debts cancelled. A cautionary tale for mercers, though the result (because of the interruption of supplies) was the development of the silk trade in Lyons (Scott 1993: 182). Hicks was perhaps fortunate to die a natural death, a rich man.

The activities of Hicks and his competitors had substantial economic consequences, with Italy and France coming off best: by 1550, half the population of Lyons, the centre of the French silk trade, some 40,000 people, were supported by the silk trade alone. As far as the English economy was concerned, the court's obsession with silk meant a haemorrhage of money out of the country. Even James had some rudimentary sense of the significance of this, since he made serious, though unsuccessful attempts to start an English silk industry. The silkworm raising enterprise was based at Greenwich, under the supervision of John and Frances Bennett, and Queen Anne wore a dress of English silk taffeta to celebrate James's birthday in 1606, but the project failed to take off (Scott 1993: 203–207). This dependence on imported silk ensured that the aristocracy got poorer while the merchants got richer, weakening potential over-mighty subjects, but strengthening the City.

The context of this escalating royal expenditure is that the later part of the reign of Elizabeth and the reign of James saw the development of a kind of

consumption spiral. The income of aristocrats actually *fell* by about 20% in real terms between 1559 and 1602, but at the same time, they were forced into spending more and more on ephemera, most notably textiles (Stone 1965: 130–1, 138–43, 156–62, 184–7, 197–8, 547–52, 562–4). An anecdote of William Camden's suggests the sacrifice which might be involved: 'A lusty gallant that had wasted much of his patrimony, seeing master *Dutton* a gentleman in a gowne not of the newest cut, told him that he had thought it had been his great grandfather's gowne. "It is so" (said Master *Dutton*), "and I have also my great grandfather's lands, and so have not you"' (Camden 1614: 299).

Aristocratic lavishness in dress prompted emulation in lower orders of society: this was met both by a rash of sumptuary laws — seven Parliamentary statutes and ten proclamations of the Privy Council were issued between 1463 and 1600 defining what members of each class were permitted to wear (Hayward 2009) — and also by a determined attempt on the part of the aristocracy to preserve proper differentials by becoming ever more gorgeous themselves. Buckingham Justices of the Peace found it necessary to prohibit even husbandmen from wearing 'Jagged nor Cutte' garments (Berger 1993: 29). The preacher William Perkins complained that 'wanton and excessive apparel ... maketh a confusion of such degrees and callings as God hath ordained' (quoted in Barish 1981: 92). As each fashion was imitated in turn, the process spiralled out of control. The development of relatively low-budget gorgeousness, for example by the enterprising weavers of Norwich, who developed fashionable textiles in the later sixteenth century — basically woollen stuffs with a little silk in the weft to give them a higher lustre, spirited imitations of the luxury silks of Italy and Lyons — forced the aristocracy into ever greater extravagance (Priestly 1990). The Earl of Rutland was spending £1,000 a year on clothes alone late in the reign of Elizabeth. The spiralling value and significance of élite textiles was not even confined to what people wore on their backs. Lying-in was a social event, and wealthy women vied in the magnificence of their beds of state. The countess of Salisbury confirmed the status of the Cecils (her husband had recently succeeded his father Robert) when she appeared in a lying-in bed with white satin embroidered hangings which had been decorated with silver and pearls at a cost of fourteen thousand pounds (McClure 1939: 415–6, a letter of 4 February 1613).

The immense importance of clothes as signs of gender and class identity is emphasised by Stephen Orgel (Orgel 1996: 27, 102). The absolute importance of identifying oneself as a member of the élite by sumptuous garments and embroidery is illustrated by two occasions on which members of the English élite had themselves painted in fancy dress as 'Wild Irish'. In Sir Thomas Lee's portrait as a kern, or Irish footsoldier, he is semi-nude with a shirt as his principal garment, and his legs and feet are bare, matching contemporary descriptions: 'the men had long tunic-like shirts hanging below the knee. These were ... kilted at the waist ("folded in wrinkles", as Fynes Moryson puts it)', which is precisely how Sir

Thomas Lee is clad (Quinn 1966: 91). David Beers Quinn illustrates (plate 11) a barelegged kern apparently nude except for a brief shirt open low over the breast, but with full hanging sleeves; a woodcut from John Derricke, *The Image of Ireland* (1581), which seems to be what Lee intends to evoke. But Lee's shirt is finest linen, embroidered all over with blackwork, to demonstrate his actual status. Turlough O'Neill could have maintained a whole army of kerns on what this one garment would have cost. Similarly, a Jacobean painting probably of a London woman called Jane Lambarde, dressed *à l'Irlandaise*, wrapped in a thick mantle and wearing her hair loose, demonstrates her actual status by the quality and costliness of the mantle's materials: the actual object survives, and is made of 'two lengths of rich crimson velvet, lined with two lengths of silk shag ... immediately beside the shag border is a band of silver and gold bobbin lace, worked in a lozenge pattern with points at the edge ... at the end of each point are bunches of four or five strings of silver and gold thread' — we are a long way from the wandering woman *(mná siubhail)*'s hairy mantle (Arnold 1980a. On the Irish mantle, or *fallaing*, see Quinn 1966: 91, 96). Jane Lambarde was a wealthy citizeneness, daughter of Sir Thomas Lowe, Lord Mayor of London. Stephen Orgel comments on sumptuary legislation, 'Not surprisingly, [it] works only in one direction; it does not prohibit the gentry from wearing frieze jerkins' (Orgel 1996: 98). That is certainly true as far as the law goes; but the remorselessness of the social pressure preventing them from doing anything of the kind is very strongly suggested by these paintings. When Henry VIII's sister Mary, the dowager Queen of France, married beneath her (she chose Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk) their joint portrait as man and wife was accompanied by a verse in which their different rank is represented in terms of 'cloth of frieze' and 'cloth of gold'.

The fashion for slashed garments is probably a direct reflection of this consumption spiral. High-fashion textiles such as brocades, taffetas and velvets were both beautiful and by modern standards, extremely durable in construction: normally, what had been a gown in one generation might be transformed into a pair of sleeves in the next, or part of a cushion, or a child's dress of state: while textiles must be classed as ephemera in comparison with gold, silver or gemstones, they normally retained considerable exchange value through two or three changes of use, or even more. But slashing necessarily condemned the fabric to a short life, because however close the weave, sooner or later, the slashes frayed, and made it impossible for the fabric to be recycled. Hearn 1995: 200–201 illustrates an extreme example: a portrait of Diana Cecil, Countess of Oxford, c. 1614–18, attributed to William Larkin. She is wearing a sumptuously embroidered gown which is literally in ribbons: the extreme photographic realism of the painting makes it clear that the cloth is simply cut, and not bound in any way. The dress could have been worn perhaps twice or thrice. Some close-up photographs of sixteenth-century slashed and razed (half-slashed) satins may be found in Arnold 1988: 186–7, and they make it clear that fabrics thus treated could stand very little

wear. A cautionary tale told by William Camden illustrates this precisely: John Drakes, a Norwich shoemaker, asked the local tailor to make him a gown precisely copying one which had been recently been ordered by a local notable, Sir Philip Calthrop. Sir Philip got wind of this when he dropped into the shop to be measured, and spotted a second parcel of cloth identical to the stuff he had chosen. When the tailor explained; '"Well", said the knight, "in good time be it! I will," said he, "have mine made as full of cuts as thy sheeres can make it."' When Drakes came to pick up his gown, he was furious to find it slashed from end to end: the tailor explained that Sir Philip's was too. '"By my latchet", quoth John Drakes, "I will never weare gentleman's fashions again."'. A very proper conclusion, in early modern terms; but in order to force it on a wealthy shoemaker, the knight has himself been forced into conspicuous consumption (it may be relevant to note that this anecdote is set in Norwich) (Camden 1614: 236).

So why was this happening? Textiles, to us, are of limited social significance, partly because the development of synthetic fabrics and industrial production means that all kinds of fakery are now possible. With a very small number of egregious exceptions, the differential between the clothes of the poor and those of the élite is within a relatively small order of magnitude: it is possible to buy a party dress (at least in an Oxfam shop) for £15, while a Bond Street price-tag is in the order of £1500, and with more workaday clothes, the differential is still smaller; a sweater, for instance, may cost £20 or £400. Cheap copies abound. The actual garments themselves are not vastly different in shape and cut; the distinction between spun polyester and cashmere is a relatively subtle one; and the eye of the potential customer for luxury goods has to be carefully educated — even a dedicated shopper such as Mrs Victoria Beckham may find herself inadvertently acquiring a fake handbag rather than a real one. In 1600, a costume in 'cloth of silver', cut velvet, tuff-taffeta, or any of the other insanely luxurious fabrics used for court and masque costumes, could not conceivably be imitated with down-market equivalents, not even by Norwich weavers, and cost its wearer several hundred pounds. The clothing of the poor was absolutely distinguishable from it, at first glance (Spufford 1984 illustrates and discusses the clothing of the masses).

The 1590s and the early sixteenth century were not good times: they were great decades for English literature, but extremely difficult for ordinary people (see Hindle 1998 for an analysis of social and economic insecurity in Elizabethan and Stuart England). The extraordinary obsession with textiles in this period suggests, perhaps, the precariousness of wealth, the need to look prosperous as a symbol of creditworthiness. One particular occasion which illustrates this starkly is the 1613 royal wedding; an occasion, inevitably, when ambassadors and other foreign visitors would flock to the English court.

For the 1613 marriage of the Princess Elizabeth to the Pfalzgraf Frederick, a Warrant to the Great Wardrobe was issued, which still survives. The total amount spent was £12,990: it is worth observing that while Elizabeth's jewellery and her

servants' liveries *together* came to £3,914, the sums spent on textiles — clothes, hangings, etc. — amount to at least £8,000. Which is to say, less than a quarter, possibly much less, of this gigantic expenditure, was in any form which might be regarded as permanent investment in portable wealth, a fact which the future 'Winter Queen' may have come to regret. The courtiers vied with one another to match this magnificence: Lord Montague's two daughters' dresses cost £1,500, and Richard Sackville, the third Earl of Dorset, was dressed with such magnificence that according to the Master of Ceremonies, Sir John Finet, he 'dazzled the eyes of all who saw' (quoted in Hearn 1995: 199). If the portrait of him in Ranger's House, Suffolk represents his wardrobe for the occasion, which it probably does, it is still possible to see why: the cost of his outfit is impossible to calculate, but must certainly have run into four figures (Hearn 1995: description 198–9, illustrated 199). Several of the items worn in this painting appear in an inventory of his clothes: '[a] Cloake of uncutt velvett blacke laced with seaven embroadered laces of gold and black silke...and lyned with shagg of black silver and gold; [a] doublett of Cloth of silver embroadered all over in slips of sattin black and gold' (MacTaggart and MacTaggart 1980).

Impressing foreigners is very much part of the reason for this expenditure. Lisa Jardine points out that tapestry was considered far more important and valuable than paintings in the early modern period because it was portable, and could travel with its owner on state occasions for instant magnificence (Jardine 1996: 390–400); the same is true of clothes. The marriage was an international occasion; and other moments when truly spectacular expenditure on clothes takes place also often involve foreign eyes. For example, when Lord Roos went on an expedition to Spain, his spending on the clothes of his *retainers* was noted by John Chamberlain, reporting to Sir Dudley Carleton:

> The Lord Roos is gon for Spaine very gallant, having sixe foot men whose apparelling stoode him in 50^{li} a man, eight pages at 80^{li} a peece, twelve gentlemen to each of whom he gave 100^{li} to provide themselves, some twenty ordinarie servants who were likewise very well apointed, and twelve sumpter cloths that stoode him in better than 1500^{li}.

— which is to say, without counting his own apparel, doubtless extremely magnificent, Lord Roos spent more than £4,000 on textiles to impress the Spaniards (McClure 1939: II. 26). It is interesting that this closely itemised piece of gossip was considered news worth reporting. Similarly, one of the most spectacular displays of dress in the entire Jacobean period is that of Buckingham and his embassy on the 'Spanish Marriage' mission.

Masque costumes illustrate some of these points about élite textiles in a rather acute form: again, we should probably remember that ambassadors and other

important foreigners attended masques (Orgel and Strong 1973: I. 191, and n.b. Orgel 1991: 11). For example, *Tethys' Festival*, by Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, was performed to celebrate the creation of Prince Henry as Prince of Wales in 1610. The mercer's bill was £668 0s 8d, the silkman's £1,071 5s, and the embroiderer requested payment of an unsettled account of £55 for embroidering costumes with silver and sea-green silk and gold oes [i.e. circles] (Reyher 1964: 507). The bill for gold and silver lace for the same masque was £1071 5s: no less than 780 yards was used on each of the fourteen costumes (Reyher 1964: 508). The cost of an individual costume therefore ran to at least £130, though this may not include shoes, stockings and other extras, let alone jewellery.

Prince Charles' Wardrobe Accounts detail the cost of three costumes for the relatively modest Twelfth Night masque of 1620, *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon* (there were eleven male dancers altogether, but the prince paid for the clothes of two, Humphrey Palmer and James Bowy, presumably because they could not otherwise have afforded to take part). The bills for the tailor's services came to £52 8s (which is £17 9s 4d for each costume). The bills for textiles, mostly satin, and silver lace came to £123 17s 7d (£41 19s 4d for Palmer and Bowy's costumes, £49 4s 9d for the prince's, which was slightly more sumptous). £11 6s went to the embroiderer, and headdresses were also bought: shoes and stockings are not mentioned in the account, though they were expensive items.

The masque costume for which we are best able to match intention, reality and cost is a woman's outfit for Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones's *Hymenaei*. We have a description from Jonson of what how he envisaged the costumes worn by the eight great ladies who played the 'Powers', three paintings of ladies thus attired, and a set of bills for one of the costumes. As Jonson describes it:

> the upper part of white cloth of silver [was] wrought with Juno's birds and fruits: a loose under garment, full gathered, of carnation striped with silver and parted with a golden zone; beneath that another flowing garment of watchet cloth of silver, laced with gold… their haire being carelessly… bound under the circle of a rare and rich Coronet, adorn'd with all variety and choise of jewels; from the top of which, flow'd a transparent veile, down to the ground; whose verse, returning up, was fastened to either side in most sprightly manner. Their shoos were azure, and gold, set with rubies and diamonds; so were all their garments; and every part abounding in ornament. (Orgel and Strong 1973: I. 111)

Three portraits survive of ladies probably costumed for this masque; one by John de Critz the elder illustrates a lady in the costume as described (Hearn 1995: description 190, illustrated 191). Because the masque was not a royal one (it celebrated the marriage of the Earl of Essex and Frances Howard) the bride and

groom's friends had to stand the expense, and we also have an account for the actual cost of an outfit, that of the Countess of Rutland (Sir Philip Sidney's daughter), which survives at Belvoir Castle (Orgel and Strong 1973: I. 105):

> Item, 20 December, delivered for my Lady to Mr Behall, the
> gentleman huisher, for the maske, by commandment, l ^{li}
> Item, 5 Januarii to Mr Behall for further charges of the maske, xxx ^{li}
> Item, 4 Martii, paid for cutworkes bought for my Lady, at the maske
> per Mr Concombe, x ^{li}
> Item, paied to Holmeade, silkeman, for maskinge ware, iiij ^{li}, viij ^{s}.
> Item paied, the xviiijth of May, to the tyre woman for a cornet, vj ^{li}, a
> payer of embrodred silke hose, iiij ^{li}. a ruffe, xxx ^{s}, a paire of
> shoowes, xiij^{s}, for my lady for the maske, xii ^{li}, iij^{s}

The grand total would appear to be £118, 9s, though it is far from clear that this covers all that was needed, since the bill does not itemise the individual garments. Women's costumes were more expensive than men's not because they were more elaborately decorated, but because of the greater yardage of material required.

We can also get an idea of the cost of De Critz' painting from some recorded bills: he charged Robert Cecil £4 apiece for portraits in 1607, while in 1606, he got less than £20 each for full-length, life-sized pictures, such as this masquer's portrait, from the King (Poole 1912–13: 48). He was paid £53, 6s, 8d on 20 August, 1606 for painting three whole-length portraits of King James, Queen Anne, and the Prince of Wales for the Archduke of Austria. De Critz was at the top of his profession, Serjeant Painter to the King, and one of the most respected artists of the period (see further Jones and Stallybrass 2000). Thus the cost of a permanent record by a top-class painter is an insignificant element in the total cost of *Hymenaei* to one of the participants: about the same as her stockings and shoes. We hold 'Old Master' paintings in great respect: it is hard for us to understand that a lifesize portrait of a lady in a masque costume might cost a fraction of the cost of the costume which is thus immortalised. But these vertiginous figures suggest how important these garments must have been as functional art-objects. If courtiers were prepared to spend ten times the cost of keeping a family for a year on one costume, then an exact, sensuous, and discriminating perception of luxury textiles was an inevitable consequence.

One aspect of élite textiles which increases in importance in this period is needlework, which evidently became something of an élite obsession. The rise in importance of embroidery may be partly to do with a virtually invisible material innovation; the modern needle, a high-precision instrument made of steel, with a pierced eye. The modern process for needlemaking, which is highly complex, was developed in Spain, possibly as the result of contact with the technologically-advanced Arab world: because the new needles were sharper and more perfectly

regular, they did not damage delicate fabrics, and probably, embroiderers could sew faster. Janet Arnold illustrates a sixteenth-century needlemaker's workshop in Nürnberg, from Jost Amman and Hans Sachs, *Eygentliche Beschreibung Aller Stände auff Erden*, Nürnberg, 1568 (Arnold 1988: 181). According to John Stowe, the first person to make them in England was a black Spaniard in the time of Mary Tudor (Beck 1886: 237: the very small number of black people in London in the first half of the sixteenth century seem mostly to have got there via Spain). He refused to teach his art to anyone, and the supply was only assured by the manufactory of Christopher Greening, founded in 1560 (Bunt 1961: 10).

Be that as it may, needlework became more and more noticeable as an aspect of élite costume in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century (on men's clothes as well as women's). There were upper limits to the cost of fabric, and the number of yards it was possible to wear and still remain mobile: needlework, particularly using precious materials (gold, silver, pearls), was perhaps the only way in which court clothes could be made yet more expensive. The needlework on Lady Wooten's dress for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth in 1613 cost £50 a yard; presumably, therefore, about £1,000 for the whole dress (McClure 1939: I. 424–5). This marriage, of course, was an international occasion, but on a more ordinary level, the surviving set of annual accounts for the wardrobe of Charles I suggests that the specialist contribution of Edmund Harrison, the King's Embroiderer, doubled the cost of a garment. For example, two apparently comparable sets, an ordinary suit with the doublet of 'lemon cullor sattin' and the hose of 'sand Cullor Cloth' and another suit with a doublet of 'pinck Cullor Sattin' and hose of 'greene tabie' (the same satin/cloth ratio) which was embroidered by Harrison in cloud-work, with 'the slashes of the body and sleeues wrought with purles, plates, twists and Cullord naples silke' cost, respectively, £14.17.9 and £50.1.0 (Strong 1980: 80).

Professional needlework communicated wealth and status; it could also be used to communicate meaning. The use of symbolic embroideries was fashionable from the 1580s, and continued into the Jacobean period: in 1600 the heiress Elizabeth Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, was painted in a dress embroidered with ivy, owls, snakes biting their tails, and rabbits: wisdom, eternity, fertility (Painting, attrib. Marcus Gheeraerts the younger, in a private collection, illustrated in Hearn 1995: 179–80, no. 122). Some time between 1611 and 1614, Anne of Denmark was also painted by Gheeraerts in a dress embroidered all over with flower-sprigs and peacock feathers: the peacock, of course, being Juno's bird, and the design therefore chosen to emphasise her status as royal consort (now at Woburn Abbey, illustrated in Hearn 1995: 192–3, no. 130). Other bizarre, and presumably meaningful embroidered garments include Frances Clinton, Lady Chandos's dress embroidered with butterflies and altars, and the dress of an unidentified lady in a portrait now at Cowdray Park which is embroidered all over with the four-square, ivy-twined pillar from Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblems*: its meaning,

according to Whitney's poem, was 'I look to the Queen for support' (both illustrated in Arnold 1988: 86–7).

In conclusion it is inappropriate to deduce that the Jacobean obsession with luxurious clothes can be laid at the door of Anne of Denmark, just because she was female. James wore six hundred thousand pounds' worth of jewels at his daughter's wedding: it is unlikely that this was in order to please his wife. The Stuart Royal Wardrobe Accounts tell a frightening tale of runaway expenditure, completely unconnected with the Queen. I offer the following tentative conclusions. Probably the central purpose of élite textiles was to mark and preserve status differentials within English society; but another, by no means negligible, was to preserve the reputation and status of the English in an international context by displays of calculated magnificence.

Neither of these are frivolous objectives: it was those notably masculine monarchs Henry VIII and François I who formed this dangerous association between courtly grandeur and international credibility. James's immediate predecessor, Elizabeth, had used costume as a way of rendering herself fabulous, partly because of the difficulties inherent in ruling effectively as a woman. James and his family did the same; and it is all too easy to forget how strange this was in the context of the concept of kingship prevalent in the sixteenth century. The last adult male to occupy the English throne, Henry VIII, never fought a real battle, but like Henri II, he jousted publically, with considerable courage, and was badly injured at least once. James's biological maleness was one of his principal assets, but temperamental difficulties, notably his fear of edged weapons and his poor physique, kept him from making a show of strength in traditionally masculine ways, such as making war (the traditional pastime of Stuart kings), or even the jousting which killed the French king Henri II — it is worth remembering that every single one of his Stuart predecessors on the Scottish throne died by violence. All contemporary observers agree about James's poor physique. It has recently been suggested that James suffered a mild form of cerebral palsy, resulting from physical trauma during his delivery (Beasley 1995). His son and successor Charles was also a delicate child, slow to walk and weak in the legs: he was also very small, even as an adult.

James, and in turn, Charles, effectively took advantage of Elizabeth's feminization of kingship: during her reign, she had deftly switched the focus of tournaments and other entertainments from the actual principals to herself as chief spectator. Similarly, at a court masque, James, watching from the centre of the hall, while others watched him watching, was the still centre round which all the action pivoted. Sumptuous magnificence in dress was a way of demonstrating his power and authority preferable to the battlefield or the tilt-yard, to which he was physically unsuited.

So why have historians blamed Anne of Denmark? For the last two centuries, some (though by no means all) very wealthy men have demonstrated

status through their wives, whose business it has been to make highly ostentatious public appearances displaying elaborately costly clothing and jewellery. Mrs Merdle in *Little Dorrit* (1855-7) is a classic example in fiction: 'This great and fortunate man had provided that extensive bosom which required so much room to be unfeeling enough in, with a nest of crimson and gold some fifteen years before. It was not a bosom to repose upon, but it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon. Mr Merdle wanted something to hang jewels upon, and he bought it for the purpose ... Like all his other speculations, it was sound and successful. The jewels showed to the richest advantage. The bosom moving in Society with the jewels displayed upon it, attracted general admiration. Society approving, Mr Merdle was satisfied' (Book I, ch. 21).

This pattern, characteristic of the nineteenth century, firmly associates display with women. In Stuart England, by contrast, display was compulsory, but élite men performed the task of conspicuous consumption themselves, to an extent which historians have been somewhat reluctant to recognise. Our perception of the relative domains of the sexes in early modern England is skewed by anachronistic assumptions based on nineteenth-and twentieth-century social models. Thus the elaborateness of the dress worn by men and women alike in the first half of the seventeenth century may be a historical practice towards which our response is insufficiently nuanced. Textiles were highly relevant to life in the *public* domain in Stuart England, and there is no reason to perceive an interest in fine silks as 'feminine', or indeed, effeminate.

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