

Fashion as the Regulation of Bodies:
A Study in Medieval and Early Modern Sumptuary Regulations

Research Thesis Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with research distinction in History in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

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April 13, 2021

Introduction: Why Fashion?

The *Devil Wears Prada* is a memorable film to many not just because of the snarky repartee but also because it gives average people a look into a mysterious industry that determines clothing preferences and influences consumers. As Miranda Priestly says so wisely, “that blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs and so it’s sort of comical how you think that you’ve made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you’re wearing the sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room.”¹ The truth is, that quote applies to the true nature of historical fashion, dating back to Ancient Greece and Rome. Fashion, and the history of it, is not only indicative of economic patterns, social status, and cultural preferences but also is one of the few well-documented daily experiences that most people had. Regardless of privilege every person needed to have access to both food and clothes in order to survive day to day life.

Sumptuary legislation officially ended during the Colonial era, but it continued to have long-reaching effects that still impact how our society today views fashion and bodies. These laws focused on regulating not only the material and design of clothing, but also diet, general behavior, dowries, and common celebrations including weddings, funerals, and even christenings. Sumptuary regulations had a hand in everyday experiences of the laity from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Era. Legislators have justified their existence in many different ways over time; so, too, have contemporaneous moralists who made careers on discussion of such laws. The reasoning provided for the establishment of these laws was financial, economic, nationalistic, even ecclesiastical in nature, however the reality was that these laws were more

¹ Lauren Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada* (London: Harper, 2003).

concerned with the systematic regulation and restriction of the bodies of women and the lower classes. Specifically, they strategically controlled status, movement, and even reproductive rights. While clothing seems irrelevant to this argument, moralists and legislators at the time saw these aspects as deeply connected. Fashion was not about popularity or cultural whims; instead, it was about the performance of status through a visual medium. Visual identifiers of status and class in fashion restricted the upward movement of lower class groups. In the Medieval and Early Modern Era, this was particularly relevant to women's reproductive rights, as the restrictions on behavioral fashions impacted practices of contraception and sex along the divisions of social class. Even the legislature of the time purposefully tried to control the development of fashion in order to prevent social climbing and restrict the bodies of lower classes.

In most cases, demonstrations of fashion were achieved through the presentation of clothing, in particular opulent textiles like silk and metallic brocades, that exemplified wealth and purchasing power; in others, it was achieved by the public possession of objects, or even the presence of certain people within one's household or court. Whatever form fashion took in the Middle Ages, it developed over time to become a tool that was weaponized by the ruling classes to restrict the bodily autonomy of those beneath them in the social hierarchy.

To better understand fashion as a tool of restriction and control, it is important to recognize the power of the Church and understand how its moralist views led to the creation of a social hierarchy based not only on wealth and status, but also sexual and marital status. All of this is rooted in the philosophical ideas of the Late Antiquity as they relate to asceticism and modesty. These ideas are reflected in the New Testament, particularly in the teachings of the Apostle Paul. Once church fathers like St. Augustine and Tertullian adopted and elaborated ideas

about asceticism and virginity as a point of pride in image, the church began to distinguish between lay people and ecclesiastical authorities through the use of vestments. Although these clothing pieces were not popular according to fashions of the time, they were held up as a point of pride that elevated the social status of the church members who wore them.

Ecclesiastical ideals placed women as subordinates within the church and within their marriages. This led to the habitual debasement of women as mere producers of the next generation. The vilification of pride, vanity, and sexuality in women also emerged from the church, leading to restrictions on female sexuality through modes of dress. European legislatures consistently held similar values to that of the Church and as such were concerned for the moral wellbeing of their townsfolk. Most prominently, Italy's cities and provinces passed the most sumptuary laws, the majority of which were concerned with women's clothing. Other focuses of sumptuary laws included birthing celebrations, baptisms, funerals and regulations of dowry at the time of marriage. All of these events were regulated alongside clothing for the same reasons: to prevent a person's public demonstration of opulence and wealth which would imply a higher status and lead to moral corruption.

Persons and bodies were subject to exploitation under these restrictions. Families used both wives and wet nurses as visual accessories in order to demonstrate wealth as well as fertility and virility, another indicator of status. The result of seeing a "wife" or a "wet nurse" as a fashionable accessory was a restriction of reproductive choice in both groups of women. The specific relegation of black women in particular to the status of wet nurse made clear how the visual aspect was important to the accrument of wet nurses for the sake of status. It was not only women's bodies that were restricted by sumptuary laws. In the Early Modern Era, men also faced strict clothing restrictions under the laws of England and Scotland due to the regulation of

livery. The practice of livery not only led to regulation of male bodies, but also the utilization of these bodies as actual ornaments themselves. Higher class men began to use those below them as a fashion accessory to prove their wealth and status. The most extreme example of this accessorization of human beings occurred with black servants and children in portraiture from the Early Modern Era.

In support of these practices, contemporary legislators justified and rationalized the passage of laws restricting fashion or luxury for nationalist or economic reasons, in particular to encourage the purchase of locally produced goods and reduce dependence on international imports. However, the cases where these reasons are clearly true are few and far between compared to the overwhelming evidence of fashion being used as a tool to restrict the movement and behavior of bodies. This paper will use primary sources of both a written and visual nature in order to demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that fashion was created and consequently regulated in order to restrict and regulate the bodies of lower classes.

All across Medieval Europe, women were defined as dependents of their fathers and husbands. In England, the legal practice of coverture went one step further to merge the actual personhood of wife and husband.² This idea of the legal subordination of women dates back to Antiquity with the dependence of women upon their fathers and eventually that was codified in Roman law.³ Women were seen as inherently subordinate to the men in their lives, and incapable of making legal decisions for themselves. Therefore, society of the time could not trust women to behave in a modest manner, and developed laws that would tell them how to dress and behave

² Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Age* (London: Routledge, 1991), 92.

³ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 93.

according to their place in society as a necessary means of ensuring the morality of society as a whole.

Judeo-Christian Sources of Asceticism and Modesty

Modesty was the main moral argument put forth by those in favor of strict sumptuary legislation. This idea's roots in Early Christian doctrines gave it moral authority, which garnered support in both legal systems and under ecclesiastical authorities. Despite most people's initial ideas about Christianity, modesty and asceticism did not originate within the teachings of Jesus, or even in the Gospel Narratives. These ideas developed much later as Christianity grew in popularity and began to take on a role as a new faith independent of Judaism. Although Jesus and John the Baptist seemed to have been practitioners of sexual abstinence in their lives, their preaching holds no such commands, other than to encourage monogamy.⁴ Instead, it is later teachers like Paul, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian that emphasize asceticism and celibacy in their writings about the doctrine of Christianity.

The following texts and doctrines show exactly how religion, and Christianity in particular, was distinctly connected to the bodily practices of its followers. Control over one's body according to the values of asceticism was a public performance to demonstrate self-control. The doctrine of Saint Paul had a specialized focus on converting and preparing pagan, gentile communities for the coming of the End. Paul saw the physical bodies of his followers as hugely important, even declaring them temples or members of the body of Christ.⁵ In 1 Corinthians, Paul regulates women's behavior in temple during worship, telling them that they are not

⁴ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 41.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:19, Romans 12:4-5 Revised Standard Version.

permitted to speak.⁶ The similarity in themes between this passage and the sumptuary laws of Antiquity and the Middle Ages is definite. It was a popular practice at ancient and medieval funerals in the Mediterranean to have a train of women follow behind beating their brows and loudly lamenting the death of the departed.⁷ In fact, the more women the deceased had following their casket, the higher status afforded to their memory and their family. The existence of one of the earliest sumptuary laws actually regulates not only how loud women can be at these funerals, but how many women can be present as well. Paul is not creating a new decree that regulates women's behavior, he just popularized it in a holy text rather than a legal one. Later, Clement of Alexandria also showed a great distaste for noise, and in fact he understood complete control of the voice, in silence, to demonstrate mastery of one's bodily functions.⁸ The practice of silence, of preventing one's body from burping, sneezing, or even laughing in order to prove some form of control may seem absurd to the modern audience but reflects a larger theme of controlling one's body, which later extended to controlling others' bodies.

Concerning the production of modesty through clothing, it is only the epistolary text 1 Timothy that covers whether women should cover their heads, and what role women should play in the church. The text itself tells women to dress modestly not "with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes."⁹ The language itself echoes that of the sumptuary laws from later eras. Even though Paul discusses head coverings in 1 Corinthians, the focus is on worship and how both men and women need to be covered. Here in Timothy the focus is on modesty, and shortly after that statement it is revealed why: "she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue [...]"

⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 RSV

⁷ Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy 1200-1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 12, 13, 72.

⁸ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 126.

⁹ 1 Timothy 2:9 RSV

with modesty.”¹⁰ The author here reveals that his concern is not in fact how God is worshipped, it is with female sexuality and reproduction. This is the same purpose that most sumptuary laws have in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era. The reproduction of more Christians through conversion, as well as the continuation of Christian families, is clearly the rhetorical goal in this text. This passage does not regulate men in a similar way. Properly regulated female modesty, or rather the lack thereof, is what concerns this author.

Tertullian’s writings reveal much about the connection that people saw between women, sexuality, corruption, and ultimately the avoidance of temptation. Sexual promiscuity was a definer of status: Jews in Antiquity used it to distinguish pagans from themselves, and when Tertullian began gaining followers the silent austere image of modesty was held up on a pedestal. One of his most famous pieces, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, focuses on the relationship between clothing and sexuality. Ultimately his conclusion is that women should remain veiled in church because to not cover one’s hair flaunted the status of virginity and defeated the whole purpose of the philosophy behind Christian abstinence and bodily self-control. Part of his concern with ensuring that women stayed veiled, without consideration of their marital status, was because of his deeply innate belief that regardless of baptism, no matter how much effort a woman put in, all women were innately seductive, and men were helpless before the onslaught of female sexuality.¹¹ This means that as the Christian Church grew within the Roman empire during the third century, so did the desire to have the ‘aesthetic of virginity.’¹²

These sources are not sumptuary laws. No legislative body passed them, nor were there legal repercussions for not following them, but they are important to the culture and later

¹⁰ 1 Cor 2:15 RSV

¹¹ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 81-82.

¹² Brown, *The Body and Society*, 139.

development of sumptuary legislation because of the ideas and themes to which they led. These ideas normalized the presence of criticism on clothing, behavior, and their association with upstanding Christians. By understanding the culture that emerged from early Christianity and continued into the Middle Ages we can gather insight into how the public perceived and followed these rules as they turned into laws and a culture of modesty that restricted behavior.

Ecclesiastical Legislation

Clothing was one of the ways that monks and nuns set themselves apart from the laity, and developed an ecclesiastical category of fashion and status. The exclusivity that came with being a holy leader of the Church was attractive to those with passion for religion. There were even more prerequisites for those who were especially enthusiastic about Jesus. In fact, the regulations that prohibited common people from styling themselves similar to these holy authorities are some of the first explicit sumptuary laws written during the Early Middle Ages. The modern conception of a monk with the simple brown robes and tonsure are present because image was one of the key ways that these religious workers identified themselves to the public, and were required by royalty to distinguish themselves.¹³

Religious women during the Middle Ages also had ways to distinguish themselves from the laity. The church and the women themselves ascribed nuns' a visual status that conveyed to the public their sexual purity. Nuns had clothing beyond the traditional habit that was designed to be exclusive and luxurious according to their social rank. For example, one of the few extant

¹³ "A Thirteenth-Century Castilian Sumptuary Law," *Business History Review: Special Illustrated Fashion Issue* 37, no. 1/2 (1963): 99.

garments recovered and reconstructed from the 12th century: the nun's holy crown.¹⁴ This crown was crucial to creating the identity of a person as the bride of Christ. The crown of the bride of Christ was made with crisp blue velvet that was of a very delicate weave. White silk woven with gold thread formed a cross pattern on top of the hat and was so delicate that it needed the whole structure to support it so it would not crumble while being worn. This was never a practical garment and it was never designed to appear simple. The presence of pure white, blue, red, and literal gold, some of the most expensive colors to manufacture, reveal just how much of a priority production of this vestment was in order to elevate the visage of the nun as she was being wed to God. In addition, red, white, and blue were the colors used to symbolize a commitment to physical chastity and virginity as a permanent status, blue in particular because of its use in depictions of Mary and St. Anne. Similarly, the cross of ornate gold that surrounds the nun as she is wed to Christ protects her, and symbolizes the joy of the union.

Arguments of Modesty

The church was the communal source of moral guidance to people across social status. The sermons presented the church's ideals of modesty and asceticism to the laity and described how they should be replicated in everyday life. Through weekly sermons the ecclesiastical authorities were able to argue for the enforcement of Christian values, and there are several examples of sermon stories that demonstrate the vilification of pride and the prioritization of modesty in image. Historian Aileen Ribeiro argues that social disapproval is not actually codified

¹⁴ Evelin Wetter, "Clothing for a Marriage Made in Heaven: The Role of Textiles in Ecclesiastical Consecration Rites," in *Arrayed in Splendour: Art, Fashion, and Textiles in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Christoph Brachmann (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2019), 27-28.

in law, and that therefore there is no way to know how the illiterate laity would behave.¹⁵ The language used in other sermon stories from the Middle Ages actually encouraged the church community to shame those who committed sin, inciting fear that one corrupt person could bring ruin upon the entire community's afterlife experiences. In one sermon story, *A Knight's Two Wives*, a woman's soul is literally weighed against her clothing that was, "ten different gowns and as many coats, and [less] would have sufficed her."¹⁶ The sermon story continues to describe that her crimes of pride and vanity are the same ones that led God to flood the world. Clearly the community was presented with an apocalyptic scenario in order to encourage peer pressure on not only the guilty woman, but everyone in the community to avoid sumptuous dress. The evidence available from these sermon stories and other contemporary literature reinforces the argument that the laity were just as involved in the sumptuous corruption of society, as were the legislative bodies.

In the sermon story *A Gown with a Train of Devils* a woman is vilified for her sumptuous dress and is shown to be more susceptible to corruption because of her gender and vanity. The primary concern of the story is not how much time she spends looking in the mirror each day, but instead the length of her train, "gaily adorned with scarves and trailing behind her was a long train upon which danced a multitude of fiends."¹⁷ This story highlights how women's clothing can be a breeding ground for corruption and sin. This woman's attire holds power over her. The priest who wrote this sermon story was responding to a common phenomenon. If that had not been the case this story would not have been reproduced enough for it to last so many years.

¹⁵ Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc., 1986), 12.

¹⁶ Joan Young Gregg, ed., *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 112.

¹⁷ Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews*, 110.

Clothing was seen as a way to intentionally deceive and seduce men, or something that would encourage vanity, which in turn would lead to raging sexuality.¹⁸ The primary idea is put very succinctly by Aileen Ribeiro, “Clothes are not immoral in themselves, but they become so when worn in inappropriate situations.”¹⁹ “Inappropriate situations” are in fact defined not by the populace at large, but instead by a very select group of people.

The vilification of a long dress train is not unique to this single sermon story. It is also referenced in a legislative provision from 1463 in Florence. The provision itself states that significant dress and cloak trains are worn to funerals, and that since the train covers up most of the dress’ lower layers women are taking advantage of that fact to wear low cut gowns to show off their décolletage, and shortened skirts to reveal their legs.²⁰ The train debate was also one to which Barclay contributed, a Late Medieval moralist who voiced many opinions about women’s fashion and frivolity. In addition to his rapid criticism of men preening like women and being attracted to color in clothes, he and other moralists complained that the long train of gowns, “swept up dirt with it, causing dust, and annoying passers-by, and making the women themselves filthy.”²¹ The main argument that these moralists make is that the trains make women so dirty that no man would ever find them attractive again if they saw their naked bodies in that moment.²²

A basic knowledge of dress-making dismantles Barclay’s argument about long trains making a lady’s body dirty. The actual physics of a particularly long skirt means that only certain points of the train can collect dust, something reflected in the art of the time. Portraits from H.

¹⁸ Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews*, 93.

¹⁹ Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 12.

²⁰ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 63.

²¹ Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 62.

²² Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 62.

Holbein show that this is exactly what happens.²³ If it was a full enough skirt, then some parts of it would overlap on itself limiting which points had contact with the floor. The scattering of dust into the air is impossible given the fabric and shoes in use at the time. Petticoats were made of a lightweight cotton or linen which when moved would kick up dust with them, but petticoats were short and designed to only provide shape and layers between the extant garment and the body, not to get in the way of the feet underneath the gown itself. The outer gown was almost always made of a heavy wool or brocade, maybe even a heavy velvet, especially in Medieval England.²⁴ These fabrics when moved do not lift off the ground because of their weight. A woman would have to be running, fast, and hiking up her skirts in order to elicit the reaction that these moralists are arguing happened constantly. Yet, according to the archaeological evidence of shoes available from the time, women were never running anywhere. Either they were wearing platform shoes of a ridiculous height, or delicate silk slippers that could rarely touch the ground without risk of falling apart.²⁵ All of these conditions indicate that this argument that women would be made dirty by their long trains is not feasible. Also, their argument also requires all tailors to be foolish in a trade they have studied their entire lives. If a dress had a train, especially a long one, it had a dust catcher. A dust catcher is a piece of fabric about a foot wide that lined, and served as a hem to, the bottom of the dress. Based on archaeological sources from excavations in London these bindings were made most commonly from woven coarse wool.²⁶ The weave gave the fabric ply that still allowed it to drape, the texture would pick up dust and

²³ Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 63. Hans Holbein, "Drawing: Two Views of an English Lady," The British Museum, accessed April 11, 2021, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1895-0915-991.

²⁴ Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard, and Kay Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing 1150-1450: Medieval Finds from Excavations in London* (London: Boydell Press, 2004), vii.

²⁵ Lucy Johnston and Linda Woolley, *Accessories: Shoes* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017), 16.

²⁶ Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing*, 35.

dirt from the floor, and it was a strong weave that reinforced hems allowing them to last longer under duress. They played an especially crucial role in maintaining structural integrity since frequently the main fabric of the dress was left with an unfinished hem according to tailoring practices of the time.²⁷ These bindings and added hems could then be removed as needed to keep the dress clean and maintain their structural integrity. Delicate dresses of silk, velvet, and gold were not easy to clean or maintain and the only way to guarantee that they could be worn repeatedly was by regularly removing the piece of fabric that ran along the floor. These wool bindings also had practical applications such as providing warm insulation, and with growing imports of silk, a lightweight fabric, the integration of multiple textiles into hems, bindings and facings became more common in order to keep the skirts weighed down and draping as desired.²⁸ These moralists had a hypocritical argument for which there was no basis, and instead reduced women to objects that are only to be desired. That desire for women was then ruined by literal dirt and dust in their writings to vilify the clothing and fashion itself. The implication in this literature is that if a woman is not sexually desirable, then she has no purpose in life, and that fashion leads to such purposelessness in women.

Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* advocates for a society where people do not feel inclined to utilize sumptuous items, exemplifying a modest and ascetic ideal. More was a prominent figure in the Church who was eventually elevated to sainthood, an example of a perfect Catholic. Early on in his narrative he depicts gold and silver as being used exclusively for chamber pots, showing exactly how he perceives their use in society.²⁹ In his ideal world precious metals have

²⁷ Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing*, 181.

²⁸ Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland, *Textiles and Clothing*, 128.

²⁹ Sir Thomas More, *Sir Thomas More's Utopia Containing, an Excellent, Learned, Wittie, and Pleasant Discourse of the Best State of a Publike Weale, as it is found in the Government of the New Ile Called Utopia. First Written in Latine, by the Right Honourable and Worthy of all Fame, Sir Thomas More, Knight, Lord Chauncellour of England;*

no place with those who truly have societal value. This is shown in a story about pompous and arrogant ambassadors who dare to assume that the utopians do not wear gold because they are poor and so choose to flaunt their resources around. Not only are these characters mocked relentlessly in More's writing, but their gold is literally shown to be weak enough to be broken by a utopian, and so flashy that golden items are frequently stolen.³⁰ Gold is a soft metal that cannot hold up to most hard objects when put to a test, but More is not writing about the literal or practical experiences of clothing, he is writing about hypothetical circumstances. The symbolism of the gold breaking shows that it, like its wearer, is weak, pliable, lacking will and a slave to the fashions of the time. The fact that gold chains are stolen shows that the flashiness of objects will bring downfall onto their possessors. These precious items are bad luck for good men. More's recommendation to rectify the corrupted behavior is modest dress, and turning away from bodily labor and function to spend every spare minute studying to enhance the mind.³¹ The goal of his Utopia is to distance oneself from the physical body, from concerns of pleasure, to instead turn towards intellectualism and philosophy. More has revealed that the opulence depicted in his story is representative of the physical body, of its ties to corruption and sin, and in order to escape these ties one must physically cast off the sumptuous clothing in exchange for "homely and simple array."³²

and Translated into English by Raphe Robinson, Sometime Fellow of Corpus Christi Colledge in Oxford. and Now After Many Impressions, Newly Corrected and Purged of all Errors Hapned in the Former Editions (London: Bernard Alsop, 1624), 79.

³⁰ More, *Utopia*, 81.

³¹ More, *Utopia*, 82-83.

³² More, *Utopia*, 80.

Sex Workers as Eve

Legislation that targeted sex workers during the Medieval and Early Modern Era demonstrated how explicit legislation was in its regulation of the movement of bodies and, in particular, open displays of sexuality in women. This regulation of sexuality and women's bodies was justified through interpretations of the Bible and religious practices of the time. Permissible sexuality as well as the performance of sexuality in low cut clothing were reserved for the upper class. Upper class women were told to emulate Mary by only having sex for the express purpose to procreate. In contrast, prostitutes from the Middle Ages were having sex to induce pleasure, and seduce men for personal gain, both of which led to the view that prostitutes were actively emulating Eve through their sexual behaviors.³³ The lack of clothing and shame of nakedness is associated with women also due to Eve's perceived corruption of Adam in the garden of Eden. Women must always cover up, because their bodies are the most shameful to the divine due to their actions in the garden of Eden.³⁴ To reveal themselves and their bodies in clothing was to debase their status as a woman.³⁵ Even when women face prosecution for crimes they committed, their clothing plays an important role. When men were hanged they were often left there naked for several days after. With women, it was ideas of modesty that forced women to be hanged in "long garments tied around their ankles."³⁶ Even when faced with execution, medieval women were unable to escape the fact that their bodies were so sexualized and objectified they needed to be entirely covered.

³³ Anonymous, "Family Ideals: 'A Homily of the State of Matrimony', 1563," in *English Historical Documents 1558-1603*, ed. Ian W. Archer and F. Douglas Price (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 504-510, 505.

³⁴ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 65. The passing of a Perguian law in 1460 condemned immodest revealing clothing on religious grounds.

³⁵ Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, "Reconciling the Privilege of a Few with the Common Good: Sumptuary Laws in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39, no. 3 (2009): 607.

³⁶ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 20.

Eve's original sin had most to do with carnal and base desire, a trait that is regularly described in moralist discussion of sumptuary legislation concerning women.³⁷ After Eve was disobedient and took direct action against God's will she was punished with both subordination to Adam as well as the pangs of childbirth, a consequence that only occurred after the performance of sexual behavior.³⁸ So not only are Medieval and Early Modern women depicted and viewed as innately greedy thanks to Eve, they are also always punished for any and every sexual behavior.

St. Ephrem of Syria originally interpreted the punishment of Eve as happening because Eve thought she would gain authority over Adam by consuming the apple.³⁹ By this interpretation Eve was ambitious and greedy before the original sin was ever committed. It also portrays all women after to be ambitious, greedy social climbers, who connive to gain more power.⁴⁰ According to Medieval thought this philosophy and behavior went against everything natural in the Great Chain of Being. The sumptuary laws that prevented social climbing reinforced this biblical hierarchy, one that Eve explicitly ignores in Genesis. The religious history fostered laws which targeted women for their social ambition, and was part of the reason women were regulated so much more than any other group.

The problem that church-fathers and authorities in Medieval Europe faced was that prostitutes were a necessary evil that society had to endure to maintain order. Maintenance of what was believed to be the natural order was of the utmost importance. St. Augustine wrote that

³⁷ Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews*, 106.

³⁸ Genesis 3:15-3:17 RSV.

³⁹ Genesis 3:16 RSV.

⁴⁰ St. Ephrem the Syrian, "Commentary of Ephrem on the First Book of the Torah," in *Fathers of the Church: St. Ephrem Selected Prose Works*, trans. Edward G. Matthews, ed. Kathleen McVey (Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 119-120.

prostitutes were like sewage systems: although disgusting, without them the rest of society would fall to filth.⁴¹ Prostitutes themselves served as a check on the bad behavior of men outside of marriage, preventing the further corruption of upstanding women by stopping adultery and rape. Medieval society followed this doctrine closely in legal systems and in the cultural mindset of society.

Humiliation and abasement are powerful tools when it comes to restricting lower classes or undesirables. Sex workers were typically the target of some of the most aggressive policies that regulated clothing and bodies. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, prostitutes were required to dress in a “filmy saffron-coloured material,” with the intent to publicly display their figures and distinguish them from respectable women.⁴² In the 16th c. the Turkish *chopine*, originally designed to be a bath shoe at a height of 18 inches, was adopted and then made vogue by prostitutes in Venice.⁴³ Visually it allowed them to distinguish themselves from classier women when working, and the actual design of the shoe made them walk differently, in a more typically feminine way. The design of the *chopine* as it was used in Europe and Italy in particular quite literally placed women on a pedestal. The shoes were not designed to be walked in for long periods of time, but were instead meant to alter how one stood and swayed, and to change the silhouette that was created with other pieces of clothing. The *chopine* was a feat of engineering that did not force women to act against their natural center of gravity. This international style was considered largely a fringe fashion item until wealthy women in Italy began to wear the shoe frequently, because they found it an attractive shape.⁴⁴ When the *chopine* became popular

⁴¹ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 206.

⁴² Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 12.

⁴³ Johnston and Woolley, *Shoes*, 17.

⁴⁴ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 51

amongst the upper echelon of society, legislatures cited the risk of potential miscarriages if women fell over while wearing these shoes, in order to justify the relegation of wearing the *chopine* exclusively to those openly performing sexual acts.⁴⁵ The concern there was only for the physical safety and reproductive health of wealthy upper class women, not those who made their living in a way that society deemed immodest. In several other cities sex workers were also required to wear red hats, ribbons, or sleeves of clearly contrasting color to their other garments to signal potential customers.⁴⁶ As the fashion of prostitutes moved into the mainstream, particularly those which involved long mantles or veils, laws were passed in 1416 Perugia in order to ensure that the general populace would still have the ability to identify prostitutes according to their dress alone.⁴⁷

Prostitutes were also relegated to separate spaces from the rest of society in Italian legislature in order to restrict where and when these women were able to operate their businesses. Their domain was most frequently public streets of towns, and if not there then taverns and alehouses were also considered locations of their business.⁴⁸ Tavern houses were one of the few places where people of separate class statuses were allowed to exist together. This meant that governments commonly produced propaganda and passed curfews to discourage attendance by virtuous women for fear of corruption.⁴⁹ The relegation of prostitutes to their places of business, even restricting them to specific streets, legally acknowledged them as

⁴⁵ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 51.

⁴⁶ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 209.

⁴⁷ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 64.

⁴⁸ Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 108-109.

⁴⁹ Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*, 113.

workers, and accorded them status as such, while simultaneously controlling how their bodies moved through the city.⁵⁰

The Circle of Life

The main events in a person's life from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era after birth included christening, marriage, churching feast, and funeral. Each of these experiences was an opportunity for people to demonstrate wealth, make alliances, and further political interests. Interestingly, they were also most frequently legislated under the category of sumptuary legislation, but the aspects of these celebrations that were regulated were not just the dress, food, or decorations. In fact, frequently these parties led to the regulation of celebratory behavior itself, something which has a clear relationship with people's bodies and how they move through a space.

The birth of a child was significant because children could be heirs, and they provided financial and moral status. Not only did it increase the population and allow women to fulfill their holy destinies of being mothers, it also proved the sexual virility and fertility of a couple. This too, was tied to fashion as it presented opulence and wealth as a requirement to perform it publicly and without an heir, an estate cannot guarantee the continuing growth of wealth and status that justifies the performance of fashion. The birth itself was a performative event that included the presence of a midwife, her assistants, friends, and local elite women. Even the performance after the birth had everything to do with fashion.⁵¹ In Italy, some cities passed laws that restricted which fabric could be used for the birthing bed as well as the infant's bed, and

⁵⁰ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 209.

⁵¹ Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*, 164.

prohibited silks for the infant's dressing gowns.⁵² This prohibition was supposedly concerned with the consumption of opulent resources for unnecessary purposes, but in reality, these sumptuary laws regulated the birthing bed because it was a location open for viewing and business to those outside the immediate family.⁵³ The other women present for the birth are there perceiving the surrounding environment, which presented the birth chamber as another opportunity for fashion to be performed and then discussed.

An heir was clearly a demonstration of status. Due to the later concern of when and how this heir would do his job and inherit property there arose a festive event: purification feasts. According to the church, a purification feast's purpose was supposedly to celebrate the mother being allowed to re-enter the Christian church after her lying-in period of forty days.⁵⁴ Most families instead saw it as an opportunity to make a public spectacle of the birth of an heir because when he came of age there would be a legal investigation into whether he was allowed to inherit his family's property.⁵⁵ The father of the heir would frequently give gifts to party-goers to solidify the memory and date in their minds to ensure personal testimony during these trials.⁵⁶ Of course, the more opulent and amazing the gift, the more likely people were to remember. In the case of Thomas Seint John (1439, London), whose witnesses were from events scattered throughout his childhood, this evidence of testimony indicates that there were practices beyond the churching ceremony that served a performative role in making alliances.⁵⁷ The requirement of wealth, in order to guarantee court testimonies for the purpose of gaining inheritance, was not

⁵² Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 38.

⁵³ Hollie L. S. Morgan, *Beds and Bedchambers in Late Medieval England, Readings Representations and Realities* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 99.

⁵⁴ Becky R. Lee, "Men's Recollections of a Women's Rite: Medieval Men's Recollections Regarding the Rite of Purification of Women after Childbirth," *Gender & History* 14, no. 2 (August 2002): 227-228.

⁵⁵ Lee, "Men's Recollections of a Woman's Rite," 225.

⁵⁶ Lee, "Men's Recollections of a Woman's Rite," 227.

⁵⁷ Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*, 167.

necessary for all cases, but it made it much more likely that the proof of age would be successful. Thus, we have the emergence of fashionable bribery: a way for families to ensure continued ownership of their estates through the public performance of wealth and paying people to enforce these policies. Money and gifts can control people's behavior and opinions, given the right circumstances. At these churching celebrations these gifts, however nice or personal they might have been, ultimately were a publicly declared contract obligating the attendees for later labor and performance in court.

The churching ceremonies were unique to the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era, but births had been capitalized for personal gain since late Antiquity. In Medieval Italy, there is a history of sumptuary legislation that specifically regulated the events, guests, and occurrence of Christenings in order to prevent rapid gains of power and alliances. In the Middle Ages, the baptism was meticulously planned by the father while his wife was in the birthing chamber.⁵⁸ These plans concerned not only the formal church ceremony but also lavish banquets with the intent to fix the birthdate in the minds of those in attendance as well as to demonstrate wealth.⁵⁹ Male social politics involved performance of ego and not only were these events opulent in their use of finery, but they also provided a public avenue to perform the fashion of having an heir. In England, there is even evidence in the legal testimonies that mothers habitually bought new clothing on the day of their churching ceremony, which was consequently restricted by the Acts of Apparel.⁶⁰

Baptisms presented an opportunity to gain status and display wealth, and were regulated accordingly by sumptuary laws during the Middle Ages. One of the highest honors available in

⁵⁸ Lee, "Men's Recollections of a Woman's Rite," 236.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Lee, "Men's Recollections of a Woman's Rite," 235.

public matters was to be christened as a child's godparent, a bond which involved public performance at the church and which solidified a relationship between multiple families. The ceremony itself served to unite families, and demonstrated the authority and sway a godparent could have while the public display of gifts provided ample opportunity to show wealth. In Italy, there is plenty of sumptuary legislation surrounding the performance and occurrence of baptismal ceremonies. In 1375 the legislature in Aquila passed a law that regulated the invitation of knights of the city's captain to any and all events. The law goes on to clarify and extend its regulation to also include any person involved with the city's captain, his treasurer, personal family, and even the notary of the statutes.⁶¹ This law explicitly prohibited invitation to be a godparent by any of the above listed persons, in order to prevent political power gains that would lead to unrest in the city. Padua also had a law passed in 1277 that prevented, "no more than two godfathers and two godmothers at any baptism and forbade gifts to the godchild of more than 12 *grossi* with the customary linen."⁶² In this particular law, fashion and clothing was explicitly involved. A traditional gift of plain white linen to the newly christened baby was customary immediately following the baptism. This robe was called the *batimale* and in other cities it is expressly stated that the robe could have no embroidery, precious stones or metals.⁶³ In the Paduan law further embellishment was prevented by restriction of the overall cost of the *batimale*, while other cities chose to ban the use of specific resources, especially gold thread for the use of embroidery. The evidence in this sumptuary legislation clearly shows that baptisms were publicly performed events to show off a person's status. The regulation of the bodies present in the laws prevents anyone considered undesirable by the state from gaining any power

⁶¹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 77.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 79.

through social avenues. They also prevent the transfer of wealth between families. Genoa, Treviso, and Perugia all passed laws that prohibited entirely, or greatly restricted, the giving of gifts to a newborn.⁶⁴ This was all about the transfer and establishment of wealth in Italy, evidenced even further by the fact that Pisa required each family to only have poor people fill the role of godparents, because the state wanted to prevent the unification of wealthy families and the consolidation of power.⁶⁵

Funerals were one of the most regulated performances of fashion due to the restrictions placed on the literal body that was mourned, as well as the bodies of those in attendance and how wealth was displayed by them. The practice of displaying opulence at funerals dates back to Ancient Rome and is restricted in the text the *Digest*.⁶⁶ Worked wood was banned from use in funeral pyres, as well as dowries of purple tunics, and the performance of more than ten flute players.⁶⁷ In the Middle Ages the number of performers was restricted as well. In later Italian sumptuary laws the concern is most frequently not about the textiles used in the dress of the corpse or the make of the casket, but instead the actual performance of the funeral itself. There was a large prohibition of loud, public, expressions of emotion.

Women attendees in funerary practices were seen as visual accessories that proved the status of the deceased man they followed. The overall concerns of governments in the Italian peninsula was that the sheer amount of emotional connection to events such as funerals could lead to social unrest within their cities.⁶⁸ Therefore the only purpose allowed of funerals was to be the transport of the dead body to its grave, nothing more, nothing less. Public displays of grief

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 77.

⁶⁶ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 2.

⁶⁷ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 13.

⁶⁸ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 71.

constituted women crying, wailing, tearing their hair out, beating their breasts, hands, and even tearing their clothing. During the Middle Ages grief was something to be witnessed by the public, by family and friends. Men did not shave, and women wore specific mourning garb.⁶⁹ Since the public display of grief was traditionally a role assigned to women, they faced the brunt of the legal attack on funerary practices during this era. In fact, throughout the era of sumptuary legislation there are increasing restrictions that eventually result in the ban of women entirely from attendance to funerary processions.⁷⁰ The only condition under which women were allowed to attend processions under these laws was when the deceased was a woman or a child. Sharon Strocchia posits that this was because both of those groups were politically insignificant to the public. There was no status that they could gain or be ascribed after death even with the performance of fashionable mourning, therefore regulation of the attendance of women was no longer necessary.⁷¹ Strocchia's theory is clearly legitimate given the fact that funerary legislation is one of the ways that women's bodies were explicitly regulated and controlled in relation to male status and fashion.

The funeral procession was a visual performance of status, and the women present served a similar function to men in livery, as will be discussed in a later section. Their clothing, behavior, and mere presence all participated in a performance of popularity and status. Although the goal of these sumptuary laws was to restrict the visual status accorded to the deceased, it ended up restricting the public participation of women, where women went and how women used their bodies and expressed their emotions in society.

⁶⁹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 74-75.

⁷⁰ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 74.

⁷¹ Sharon T. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 10. Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 74.

Weddings and Dowries

The counterpart to the performance of christenings and their relationship to proofs of age is the performance of weddings and the payment of dowries. Weddings were a public celebration that displayed the bride's familial wealth. Cloth of gold was used in the ceremony, originally dating back to Ancient marriage practices, the fabric itself sheltering the bride in a large structure. The splendor of it was to show how the joy of sex was present initially in marriage. Then as the celebration ended and the fabric was slowly packed away it was supposed to represent the constant years of having to be a slave to the physical body by bearing children.⁷² The marriage ceremony itself was a demonstration of wealth and opulence in order to emphasize fertility and virility in the newlyweds.

The more important discussion centers on the coercion women faced with legal restrictions of their dowries. Restrictions on the overall value of women's dowries was cited as being caused by the purchase of sumptuous clothing for women by their parents increasing exponentially.⁷³ The dowry was defined as including cash, the trousseau, and any wedding gifts. Due to sumptuary legislations, the total value of dowries was limited according to the city. In order to counteract the expensive clothing, trousseau, and gifts the overall cash had to be reduced. This was largely beneficial for women at first, because when their husbands received less cash it meant that they owned more clothing with value. Fashionable items were not only visual demonstrators of wealth, but provided financial safety nets for young women entering into a new marriage. Once married, a woman could not make a will or contract of any kind without

⁷² Brown, *The Body and Society*, 100.

⁷³ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 55.

her husband's express involvement and approval, except when it came to her clothes and jewelry.⁷⁴ Since wives were not legally able to take out loans of any kind, access to her clothes as a source of potential cash would be hugely important to women while under the guardianship of their husbands.⁷⁵ In Italy there was also the emergence of the "counter-trousseau," whereby the groom before the actual ceremony would spend an equal or greater amount of cash to that of the total dowry value in order to furnish their future bedchamber, purchase clothes for his new wife, and more.⁷⁶ However, if any of these objects were borrowed for this counter-trousseau, they had to be returned to their rightful owners after a year. All that is described above is how the marital structure is supposed to work according to the law. The issue emerges when the reality of financial situations of brides' families is reviewed. Frequently families could not afford both to finance the wedding celebration according to status, as was legally required, and also provide a decently sized dowry.⁷⁷

The inability of upper-class members of society to procreate and appropriately celebrate was a concern of the local governments, because it allowed the authorities to control the movement of money through European cities, which led legislators to pursue regulation of the clothing portion of trousseaus with a vengeance in order to control the rate of marriages. One of the earliest laws concerning dowries was passed in 1272 in Messina. This law put a cap on how much cash could be in a dowry and also restricted, "the number of guests invited to ten for each couple and the groom's companions to four; limited the weight and value of gold in [...] bridal garments; restricted the use of fabric with stripes; forbade the wearing of silk mantles."⁷⁸ The

⁷⁴ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 91.

⁷⁵ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 92.

⁷⁶ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 56

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 57.

section concerning the number of guests is very similar to those regulations that focus on baptismal guests and godparents for precisely the same reasons. The incentive to follow these laws was the fact that payment of any fines related to violations had to be taken from the cash portion of the dowry.⁷⁹ All of this discouraged women from purchasing or possessing opulent clothing, but the true purpose seems to have been to prevent brides from building up a nest egg separate from her husband's property. Free movement and independence are derived from access to money and status. These laws do nothing more than force women to abide by the legal status of being under her husband's complete guardianship.

The regulation of women's bodies through dowries goes beyond enforcing legal and social status to actual suppression of reproduction in subordinate classes. In Pisan, it is explicitly stated that the main concern in new legislation is the population size. The consumption of finery is blamed for population decrease because fashion is why, "young women do not marry, and young men do not take wives."⁸⁰ Writings of the time said that women with dowries of 200 florins were unable to marry because they had too little money left after the purchase of clothing. Legislators were regulating women's dowries and restricting them in order to encourage upper class women to marry and procreate. The presence of dowries in a marriage negotiation, especially those that concern trousseaus, are not relevant to the peasantry. This means that the government and legislature was specifically trying to encourage those of a higher status to increase the population. This regulation of reproduction, and the groups it actually affected indicates a larger suppression of the poor population and their opportunities to reproduce with a clear prioritization of upper-class reproduction.

⁷⁹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 59.

⁸⁰ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 51.

Ownership and Property

There is a social construct concerning the beauty of women, where women themselves are associated with consumption and decoration, reduced to objects in the public gaze. Alan Hunt rightly theorizes that the “attribute of ornament is readily transferable to the person; thus, women came to be conceived as ornaments.”⁸¹ This attribute is part of what led to the restriction of women’s bodies under the performance of fashion by men, using their wives as literal accessories. The majority of sumptuary laws in early Medieval England and Scotland concerned the dress of men, which meant that, for once, women were only a passing thought in the actual legislation. The legal phrase, “and that their wives, daughters and children be of the same condition in their vesture and apparel,” make it clear that in England and Scotland women were regulated according to the rank of the dominant men in their lives.⁸² However, brides and wives had the unique ability to heighten the financial status of the family into which they married, as well as maintain and even raise the social standing of that family as well.⁸³ Frivolous expenditure was expected of women and their nature, which allowed men to pay fines without the loss of moral standing. After all, women embodied the sin of vanity, so overconsumption of sartorial goods was assumed. Women could therefore embrace this image at the behest of their husbands in order to convey certain images and messaging to the public.

The legal systems that were in place to regulate financial transfers had a unique loophole in England and Scotland concerning married couples. Women under English law were

⁸¹ Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passion: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 230.

⁸² Kim M. “Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws,” *Gender & History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 27.

⁸³ Phillips, “Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws,” 32.

considered adults at 12 years old for the purposes of consensual marriage. However, once they entered into the sacrament of marriage as structured by the Church, they lost all autonomy and were seen as part of their husband.⁸⁴ Since married men had guardianship of their wives, they controlled the finances. This allowed the transfer of valuable clothing, in the form of gifts from husband to wife, to be unregulated under English law. Gifts given for similar purposes, such as expressing a public presence of opulence, were regulated because they were outside the bounds of marriage. In addition, women were not legally held accountable for any fines or legal violations; and since man and wife were one and the same, the transfer of wealth was nonexistent according to the law.⁸⁵ This allowed men to use their wives as a public display of their wealth. Upper class and noble men during this era were notorious for prioritizing self-image. They are also the most well-documented in this behavior, but the use of women as accessories to male status occurred because there was such a presence of sumptuary laws that exclusively focused on men in England and Scotland.⁸⁶ Men wanted to avoid regulation, and therefore used their wives as scapegoats in the name of public image.

In the French court romance, *La Roman De La Rose* (1230), the dynamic of ownership between husbands and wives and the vilification of female seduction in public image in fashion is made clear. This source is especially important because of its role in popular literature at the time, providing a contemporary commentary that goes beyond what legislators said was a problem in society. Frequently, literature reflects the ideas of a time, and offers a critique that would be shared by a large portion of the audience if it were to stay in popularity as *La Rose* did.

⁸⁴ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 92.

⁸⁵ Susan Mosher Stuard, *Gilding the Market: Luxury and Fashion in Fourteenth-Century Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 118.

⁸⁶ Stuard, *Gilding the Market*, 60.

The opening scene of *La Rose* is narrated by the male romantic lead who describes his clothing in great detail. In fact, he even takes the time to add to his shirt a zig-zag stitch.⁸⁷ While this stitch in modern day is known for reinforcing or binding raw seams in order to prevent fraying, the text of the poem actually demonstrates that this action is purely on the exterior of the garment for show. This stitch, if done correctly, also requires almost three times as much thread as a normal straight stitch, thus also implying the wealth and frivolity of the gesture. This passage implies a critique of the character's masculinity by demonstrating his woman-like tendency to primp and preen over his appearance. More likely, it reflects what upper class men prioritized in their day-to-day experience.

In French literature from the 13th century the word *cointe* is frequently used to describe women; the use of this word actually indicates how men are concerned with the world of fashion in order to have access to women's bodies. This word in Old French had the connotation of meaning clever, unique, original, and in the context of fashion, was used to describe characters who had intentionality, purpose, and originality in the choice of their clothing.⁸⁸ Sarah-Grace Heller analyzed the use of this word throughout French literature and determined that its use is directly correlated to presenting a female figure as attractive to a male narrator. Despite the long monologues where masculine narrators lament the female trickery they were subjected to through *cointerie*, ultimately it shows just how complicit male performance is in fashion for public display. Each male character that is confronted with these figures, ends up being attracted to them. It is precisely the *cointerie*, the clever fashion, that entices men to pursue women in these narratives. *Cointerie* is also most frequently the literary catalyst for sexual frustration post-

⁸⁷ Sarah Grace Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France* (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 3.

⁸⁸ Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*, 102.

marriage. There are numerous quotes from stories that declare how a woman's dress has too many layers for her husband to have easy access to her body.⁸⁹ Then, in the same narrative, the husband demands that his wife change how she dresses and performs fashion for his personal preference, not even that of society's. Mal Marié, a character in *Roman De La Rose*, even declares his own preferences to be different and distinct from women's affinity for frivolous clothing: "I want only sufficient clothing to protect myself from cold and heat. [...] With my cheap stuff lined in lamb as with fine blue wool lined in squirrel."⁹⁰ According to trends and production means of the time, that passage actually implicates him in the production of performative fashion just as much as the women he was berating. Sheepskin when compared to lambskin as a warm layer is obviously more sustainable because of the years of wool harvest that can be gathered before the sheep is sent to slaughter. Based on that evidence alone, there is a clear financial deficit in the clothing source he describes. Granted, out of all the small furry animals that were used to adorn cloaks and outer layers, squirrels would have been among the cheapest because of their sheer abundance.

The most telling line in this monologue is the mention of "blue wool." Blue rarely occurs in nature, and it is even rarer to find in high enough quantity and concentration to dye a thick fabric, like wool, to a clear shade of blue. Indigo was the easiest source of blue dye to obtain due to its quantity as well as concentration, but it was present in India, not France. Before the 18th century Europeans were not consistently producing blue dye, and as such, this particular fabric would have to be exported from wool production in Europe, to India for a dye job, and then

⁸⁹ Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*, 110.

⁹⁰ Heller, *Fashion in Medieval France*, 117.

shipped back.⁹¹ Based on the reality of clothing production in Europe, Mal Marié actually contradicts his claims of masculine superiority in a lack of preference because his clothes require specialized production. This knowledge would have been available to audiences reading *Roman De La Rose* as the sumptuary laws passed at the time would have made it clear to them that he was the punchline for claiming to be above fashion. Blue, Indigo, and Purple were clearly restricted to the extreme upper echelon of society including royalty because of its elusive production in Europe.⁹² This literature demonstrates that the public saw the primary concern with men regulating women's fashion was their own public image of not being dominant enough in their marriage, literal accessibility to their wives' body, as well as reproductive control which is directly related to the former point. Men were concerned with how women were perceived publicly because it directly reflected on their public image, and reputation of masculinity.

Henry VIII was infamous for his performance of both opulence and austerity in fashion. In portraiture from the Tudor era we see his wives Jane Seymour and Katherine Parr painted covered in cloth of silver tissue.⁹³ Under His Majesty the price of such metallic cloth could be as high as £12 14s per yard of fabric.⁹⁴ In both of these portraits the architecture of the dresses worn were very efficient in their use of the precious metals.⁹⁵ Based on the financial and visual evidence available Henry VIII must have known the inherent value of metallic cloth and wanted to have the effect or illusion of it being used throughout the garment without actually spending as

⁹¹ Amelia Peck, "'India Chints' and 'China Taffaty,'" in *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York, NY: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 104-119, 112-113.

⁹² House of Commons and King George III, "An Act Against the Wearing of Costly Apparel (1509)" in *The Statutes of the Realm: Printed by Command of His Majesty King George the Third, in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain in 1810. From Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts* (London: Dawson's of Pall Mall, 1963), 8.

⁹³ Lisa Monnas, "All That Glitters: Cloth of Gold as a Vehicle for Display 1300-1550," in *Arrayed in Splendour: Art, Fashion, and Textiles in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 130-132.

⁹⁴ Monnas, "All That Glitters", 131.

⁹⁵ Monnas, "All That Glitters", 129.

much money, according to the emergence of ergonomic designs from the 16th century.⁹⁶ In addition, any precious metal used to produce cloth of gold or silver cannot be reclaimed from that source. The metals will eventually tarnish and dull, and unfortunately since they are in the form of fine threads there is no way to restore the original shine that these articles of clothing would have possessed. These dresses and the metallic cloth used within them not only were sumptuous commodities, they were impractical, short lived, and publicly displayed by Henry, who both purchased the fabric and commissioned the portrait.

The legal loophole that women presented to their husbands allowed them to publicly flaunt their wealth, indulge in the sin of pride and vanity, and use their wives as scapegoats due to the inherent nature of their sex. The women themselves did not control the purse strings of the house, and they did not legally own any of the dresses that their husbands provided during the time of marriage. Frequently, widows had to go to court to reclaim any valuable clothing they had made during the marriage or even from before.⁹⁷ In Italy, husbands paid the gabelle tax that women had applied to their dowries and covered the fines that their wives incurred because of their dress.⁹⁸ Even in the state where women were the most regulated group of people when it came to sumptuary laws, legally, the men were still responsible for the infractions.

Wet Nurses and Contraception

As demonstrated in the previous section, women were utilized by their husbands during the Medieval and Early Modern eras as fashion accessories to their status. This exploitation of women also applied in the employment of wet nurses and the frequency of a wife's pregnancy,

⁹⁶ Monnas, "All That Glitters", 131.

⁹⁷ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 93.

⁹⁸ Stuard, *Gilding the Market*, 119.

both of which would directly affect a woman's autonomy in reproduction. Wet nurses became fashion accessories that women of status or wealth were assumed to possess. The development of wet nurse culture under this regulation of status relegated the majority of nursing to slave labor. In the 13th century, Majorca city was a prominent area where the majority of people present were Muslims.⁹⁹ This blend of cultures in the Iberian Peninsula had a clear visual hierarchy that was based on skin color, which led to the practice of slavery and exploitation of black labor. Slave women in this region sold for significantly more money since they had the ability to breastfeed and reproduce.¹⁰⁰ This had huge ramifications for the reproductive rights of both the women who were enslaved, as well as those who were members of the upper class. The use of these women as wet nurses, under enslavement, was the same kind of bodily exploitation and abuse that they faced from their masters when forced into the role of mistresses, where they are no longer in control of their own bodies.¹⁰¹ If there was a free woman who performed the reproductive labor of nursing children, she was always married.¹⁰² The sexuality of wet nurses had to be dominated and controlled by the law as well as the social structure of the time. This is why highly expensive wet nurses moved into the house of the family they served; that way they could be constantly observed and regulated by the authorities of the house to prevent corruption.¹⁰³ Not to mention that any moral or behavioral deviation from societal expectations was believed to affect the very breast milk that these women were providing to children.¹⁰⁴ People who could afford wet nurses were paranoid about whether their children would face potential ruin at the hands of their wet

⁹⁹ Rebecca Lynn Winer, "Conscripting the Breast: Lactation, Slavery, and Salvation in the Realms of Aragon and Kingdom of Majorca, c. 1250-1300," *Journal of Medieval History* 34, no. 2 (2008): 164-184, 167.

¹⁰⁰ Winer, "Conscripting the Breast," 168.

¹⁰¹ Winer, "Conscripting the Breast," 171.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Rebecca Lynn Winer, *Women, Wealth, and Community in Perpignan, c. 1250-1300: Christians, Jews, and Enslaved Muslims in a Medieval Mediterranean Town* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 150.

¹⁰⁴ Winer, *Women Wealth and Community*, 150.

nurse. In thirteenth century Castile, there were laws under which wet nurses could be charged with homicide, based on the accusation that their poisoned milk caused the death of an infant.¹⁰⁵ If wet nurses did not behave in a Christian manner they could be legally charged with harming infants of a higher status. Thus, the law controlled bodily autonomy and behavior according to the trends of the time. This medical concept dates back to Ancient theories. Tertullian wrote about an emperor who was raised on the breast milk of a Christian, thereby making him more virtuous.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in the legend of Macrina, Thecla is described as the only one of her siblings to be raised on her biological mother's milk. This sets her apart as being special from her brothers beyond the distinction of gender.¹⁰⁷

This reproductive elitism began to seep into the public image. The performance of child-rearing became more of a definition of social class, something that went beyond the bedroom and what happened within the house to something that could be flaunted outside of it. In fact, the physical appearance of the potential wet nurse was highly important to the families that were seeking them out.¹⁰⁸ This was relevant not only to the physical image of the mother herself, but also had to do with humoral theory. Black women, especially those with darker skin were seen as "hotter" according to humoral theory, which hypothetically made them more masculine and more sexual, but less maternal.¹⁰⁹ This theorization trickled down to the masses which meant that there was a preference and high demand for light-skinned black wet nurses. As evidenced with many other commodities during the Middle Ages to Early Modern Era, desire and scarcity led to

¹⁰⁵ Winer, *Women, Wealth, and Community*, 212, f.n. 111.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *Body and Society*, 154.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Body and Society*, 278.

¹⁰⁸ Winer, "Conscripting the Breast," 172.

¹⁰⁹ Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine & Society In Later Medieval England* (Phoenix Mill: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1995), 33. Winer, "Conscripting the Breast," 173.

the regulation of bodies. The inherent association between wet nurses and enslavement granted these black women the attribute of “ornament,” an object to be flaunted and regulated. If there was ever a lack of a wet nurse in a house, the upper class risked their status, which in turn increased the economic demand and regulation of the labor itself.

Breastfeeding itself functions as a contraceptive, therefore women who were relegated to the status of wet nurse were subject to having their fertility subtly controlled by their employers or slave masters. The biology that triggers the production of breast milk begins with the production of progesterone and estrogen during pregnancy, the two hormones which in the right ratio are what make up standard birth control pills. After the delivery of a baby, approximately 48 hours later, the progesterone present in a woman’s body starts to decrease, which in turn triggers the production of breast milk.¹¹⁰ Prolactin is the hormone which is responsible for this production. It is also an effective natural contraceptive. Prolactin will continue to be produced as long as there is a physical demand for breast milk.¹¹¹ This means that each woman who was required to be a wet nurse, either of a lower class or enslaved status, was unable to get pregnant during the time that she was nursing the upper class’ children. It also means that the upper-class women were able to get pregnant significantly faster because they did not have the continuing production of prolactin which would inhibit pregnancy. The low status women lost choice or autonomy concerning their reproductive decisions. There is evidence that people understood the correlation between breast-feeding and the inability to get pregnant. In the early 13th century, Aldobrandino of Siena states that sleeping with a man while breastfeeding not only corrupted the

¹¹⁰ Linda Dahl, *Clinician's Guide to Breastfeeding: Evidence-Based Evaluation and Management* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

milk, but it also made the “pregnant woman kill and destroy the child when she breastfeeds.”¹¹²

The church discouraged the use of contraception, with the understanding that a couple would need to accept God’s decision to give them a baby, but clearly there was knowledge of how constant breastfeeding prevents pregnancy.¹¹³ Lower-class women often took jobs wet-nursing out of desperation, to pay for food, or be given a place to live and be taken care of to alleviate the financial burden from their own families. Desperation is not indicative of autonomous choice and leads to situations of exploitation and objectification.

Beyond the obvious control of reproduction of the lower classes and the ownership of their bodies, upper class women were also controlled through the employment of wet nurses. The heads of the household were in charge of managing the purse strings and as such were responsible for paying a wet nurse or buying a slave to be a wet nurse. Most frequently they were also the nonconsensual source of the slave’s pregnancy that would induce the woman’s ability to be a wet nurse for the noble family.¹¹⁴ With their free, upper-class wives, husbands were completely in control of all reproductive decisions. A man could easily require a wet nurse to be utilized even if his wife did not want to get pregnant again quickly. This pattern of promoting the reproduction of the upper classes, while simultaneously suppressing that of the lower classes shows how the intersection between sumptuary legislation concerning bodies and reproductive rights goes beyond the gender binary to intersect with class identity.

All of these difficulties faced by women who reproduced were championed by early Christian writers in order to encourage women to find post-marital celibacy, yet again attempting to control their reproductive choices. Eusebius and Athanasius wrote about the physical

¹¹² Winer, “Conscripting the Breast,” 176.

¹¹³ Brown, *Body and Society*, 439.

¹¹⁴ Winer, “Conscripting the Breast,” 169.

hardships that married women faced when reproducing.¹¹⁵ These are some of the only sources to confront the mortality rates of childbirth, as well as the physical toll that breastfeeding took on women. However, none of this was without an agenda, in fact the main argument of these pieces was to encourage virginity and abstinence in women. The presentation of the biological realities of childrearing was designed to scare women away from having sex for fear of the physical damage their body would undergo. Unmentioned is the fact that there are patterns of disease when women are having children frequently. There is an inherent risk in childbirth itself, and the more frequently that act occurs, the more risk there is of endangering a woman's life. Additionally, childbirth in Antiquity and the Middle Ages was performed without basic sanitation practices that we prioritize today. Women regularly were forced to put their lives on the line in order to reproduce at the rate their husbands desired. There is nothing more severe about controlling someone's body than controlling whether they live or die.

The upper-class desire for a lack of sin to corrupt breast milk also has its origins in images of the Madonna and as such, the physical performance of Christian fashion through breastfeeding. Mary was without sin, and as such was a mother who would never have the risk of sin being transferred to her child. That is why the virgin birth as a narrative was so crucial to anti-sexuality doctrine of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. The image of the lactating Madonna, or *Madonna Lactans*, served to symbolize the Eucharist to congregations.¹¹⁶ The care and physical nourishment that the Virgin provides to Jesus in this iconography is what allows him to sustain the Church and all of its members with his body and blood. According to this interpretation of the symbolism Medieval women would likely have had a desire to emulate

¹¹⁵ Brown, *Body and Society*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Winer, "Conscripting the Breast," 177.

Mary in breastfeeding, and as is evidenced by the primary sources, the very women they are trying to suppress the reproductive rights of are closest to Mary in behavior.

There was a hierarchy based on colorism in Medieval Iberia, which conveniently allowed upper class white Iberians to prevent reproduction of those with darker skin: those that are associated the most with Islam and Africa. Given the hostilities of Christians against Muslim populations in Medieval Aragon and Castile, the relegation of black women and Muslims to the status of slaves or servants made political sense for the governments in power. The reduction of black women to ornamentation elevated the status of those of white Iberian origin within the region while simultaneously stripping black authorities of their social influence. The strategic erasure of the black presence in the Iberian Peninsula was a political maneuver that completely ignores the great cultural influence that Black Africans had on the language, architecture, and fashion of Aragon and Castile.¹¹⁷

Masculine Performances of Fashion through the Demonstration of Alliances

Women were not the only ones relegated to the status of ornament through cultural practices and legislation. Upper class men frequently used the presence of other noble men dressed in livery as a way to convey status, thereby giving those men the attribute of ornamentation. England and Scotland had a comparatively large pool of sumptuary legislation that focused on men and specifically livery and the fiscal value thereof. This included not only the textiles and colors of the uniforms but also the swords and daggers involved as well.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 21.

¹¹⁸ Maria Hayward, "Outlandish Superfluities: Luxury and Clothing in Scottish and English Sumptuary Law from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century," in *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws in a Global Perspective, c. 1200-1800*, ed. Ulinka Rublack and Giorgio Riello (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 96-120, 117.

Livery was a vague uniform that could be issued to either household servants, or members of livery companies and civic officials.¹¹⁹ It was considered to be a salary of sorts and could include necessary items of clothing such as boots.¹²⁰ The function of livery is what is most important here. Distribution of livery was an informal retainer implying, but not explicitly demanding, the indentured nature of the relationship to the lord that issued the clothing.¹²¹ Livery was regulated most often in England and Scotland according to the person who issued it. For example, under Henry VIII, servants who wore livery in the royal household were exempt from the Acts of Apparel because they were ascribed the status of king by association.¹²² Frequently the number of people allowed to publicly wear livery as a unit, as well as the type of livery on display were regulated according to social class standards of the time. Livery signified a version of ownership of the lower gentry by those that issued it. The actual issuing of livery was hugely consequential, and could even signify a romantic bond under the right circumstances.¹²³ Livery was so much more than just a uniform of a particular household. Livery served as a way for noblemen to categorize subordinate nobility as territory to be staked out, bought, and claimed. Even the language used to describe recruiting men to wear livery was similar to that surrounding the enclosure debates, that of literal property and territory.¹²⁴ This clothing was not only a way to distinguish allyships and visually demonstrate power, but also was a performance of ideal masculinity.

¹¹⁹ Maria Hayward, *Rich Apparel: Clothing and the Law in Henry VIII's England* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 137.

¹²⁰ Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *World Clothing and Fashion: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Social Influence* (Armonk, NY: Routledge, 2014), 425.

¹²¹ Gordon McKelvie, *Bastard Feudalism, English Society and the Law: The Statutes of Livery 1390-1520* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 2020), 1.

¹²² Hayward, *Rich Apparel*, 139.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Francis Bacon, "The Parliamentary Debate Over Enclosures, 1597," in *English Historical Documents 1558-1603*, 541.

Livery was not only used to signify one's service but often the symbols that were on livery were also used to denote and categorize property, "both fixed and moveable," thereby demonstrating how fashion was used to restrict and regulate bodies according to the legal definitions of property.¹²⁵ Those who had been issued livery were not free to move their bodies or domiciles at will, or speak out against their lords. Historian Gordon McKelvie argues that "the system cannot be viewed as exploitative, as relationships were reciprocal and lay at the heart of all avenues for social advancement."¹²⁶ This system was mutually beneficial, but both groups involved gave up different things in order to participate. Lords and the retainers benefited in terms of status, demonstration of power, and entitlement to manual labor, whereas the retainees in the system of livery benefitted by gaining status and security, but at the expense of surrendering their identity as an individual to be a part of a visual performance for the overseeing lord.¹²⁷ Yes, these relationships were extremely beneficial to both parties involved, but not in a comparable way, because the lords who sought out lower nobility only sacrificed money to dress them and with attempts to convince them using bribery.¹²⁸ Ultimately, once a person agreed to be on retainer they lost any and all power of negotiation, which reduced them to subordination under the nobleman who issued the livery.

Livery was primarily regulated because of the sheer amount of money these uniforms could cost, and the amount of social clout a man gained from having that much wealth on display. For a man of status to have so many men in employ wearing livery it could actually become suspect. Sometimes investigations were called in order to determine the legitimacy of

¹²⁵ Hayward, *Rich Apparel*, 139.

¹²⁶ McKelvie, *Bastard Feudalism*, 13.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ McKelvie, *Bastard Feudalism*, 14.

men in livery present at major events.¹²⁹ Even Richard II, one of the earliest medieval legislators of sumptuary laws, knew the importance of expensive livery and decided to spend £9 on cloth of gold for the production of livery. That value was almost twice what a minor merchant would have earned in a full year.¹³⁰ Prosecution of the nobility and gentry in England for illegal distribution of livery affected those who had received the livery significantly more. Frequently those in the case sought a pardon, and if that were not possible they faced outlawry.¹³¹ Outlawry involved “having no legal protections, their goods confiscated, and facing the death penalty if captured.”¹³² Confiscation of the property of the nobility would mean no access to their previous homesteads or safe areas for those of a subordinate status who were involved, and they would be left to fend for themselves. Outlawry was frequently dodged by the legal offenders, but these punishments show no concern at all for those who were collateral damage. Instead, these laws show that sumptuary laws not only regulated women’s bodies, and the decisions regarding them, but through the practice of livery they also imposed similar restrictions on men during the Middle Ages. The legal precedent that the regulation of livery only concerned the status of its issuer makes it clear that the personhood of the one wearing the livery was insignificant to the upper class and legislators of the time.

Elizabeth I was openly hostile towards the practice of livery and affinity, and proactively regulated the practice through several royal proclamations.¹³³ This directly contradicted her actual performance and inclusion of uniformed servants at major events, like her coronation. On the eve of her coronation, Elizabeth I was described as passing under London Bridge on a barge

¹²⁹ Hayward, *Rich Apparel*, 140.

¹³⁰ Phillips, “Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws”, 1.

¹³¹ McKelvie, *Bastard Feudalism*, 91.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ McKelvie, *Bastard Feudalism*, 202.

covered in symbolic tapestries and flags to denote the crown and loyalty to the English nation.¹³⁴ The tapestries demonstrated opulence, and the symbolism depicted on those, as well as the flags, clearly shows the political agenda involved. On the actual coronation day, Elizabeth paraded around London with Heralds in ceremonial garb, and gentlemen in livery as declared by Aloisio Schivenoglia who was in attendance.¹³⁵ Elizabeth herself was surrounded with sixteen trumpeters, all dressed in scarlet, as well as forty-some ladies also dressed in crimson-velvet, and 100 archers dressed in red doublets with thick black velvet stripes and silver brocade detailing.¹³⁶ According to this eyewitness account, Elizabeth consciously produced a royal image at this event that involved the distribution of livery and uniforms to demonstrate her servants' loyalty, as well as her domination over them. On top of all this, her denouncement of livery involved over consumption, excess use of resources, and criticisms of the ego of her nobility--all of which she was guilty of herself. Nobility and clergy demonstrated great hypocrisy in regard to the regulation and distribution of fashion in the public eye. Elizabeth's performance of fashion during her coronation processions demonstrates the value that nobility placed on possessing the bodies of the subordinate gentry as status symbols. They could not be seen as having status, or having command over the population, without a visual representation to accompany them.

The book of Matthäus Schwarz provides crucial insight into the development of male opulence and fashion in the context of political alliances and the status that is associated with them. Each entry in the *First Book of Fashion* is coupled with a contextualizing detail about why that particular outfit was significant. In the first part of the book, which largely focused on

¹³⁴ Aloisio Shivenoglia, "An Account of the Queen's Entry into the City of London on the Eve of Her Coronation, 14 January 1559: Aloisio Schivenoglia Reports to Sabino Calandra, Castellan of Mantua, 23 January 1559," in *English Historical Documents 1558-1603*, 16.

¹³⁵ Shivenoglia, "An Account of the Queen's Entry," 15-16.

¹³⁶ Shivenoglia, "An Account of the Queen's Entry," 16-17.

Matthäus' childhood, the reason cited for a certain dress was his father's preference, and Matthäus' eventual rejection of tradition for an international aesthetic is prominently featured on its own page.¹³⁷ The *First Book of Fashion* is also an excellent example of masculine pride in performance and image, and demonstrates the historical continuation of modesty as an artful performance of status into the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Era. The book, published in 1520, was the passion project of one Matthäus Schwarz of Augsburg, wherein he documents every item of clothing and outfit he wore from birth. Augsburg's fashion and culture was greatly influenced by Spanish and Italian styles, due to their diplomatic connections, and did not see the passage of true sumptuary laws until 1583.¹³⁸

Matthäus' entries demonstrate that masculine fashion during the Early Modern Era was concerned with color, texture, structural design, and accessories, and he in particular utilized these points to demonstrate his political allegiance to Charles V. Bright colors were most frequently featured in outfits when Schwarz was meeting with someone outside of his immediate family. One of the most colorful outfits was that which Matthäus wore to the Imperial Diet in Augsburg, 1530. The presence of Ferdinand of Austria, as well as Emperor Charles V, prompted him to dress in bright colors, red and yellow, in an opulent silk satin.¹³⁹ Charles appeared in a golden coat, his bodyguards in yellow, and Ferdinand in yellow velvet gowns.¹⁴⁰ The color alliance here made Matthäus' stance clear, his allegiance was to Ferdinand as a future king, and his loyalties lay with the empire under Charles. The secondary theme of stripes in a deep red

¹³⁷ Matthäus Schwarz, *The First Book of Fashion: The Books of Clothes of Matthäus & Veit Konrad Schwarz of Augsburg* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015), 69.

¹³⁸ Schwarz, *The First Book of Fashion*, 44-45.

¹³⁹ Schwarz, *First Book of Fashion*, 147. Magdalena Renner, "Virtuelles Kupferstichkabinett: 33 Jar 4 Monet 10 Tag Allt," Virtuelles Kupferstichkabinett: Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, accessed April 11, 2021, <http://kk.haum-bs.de/?id=h-27-067a-102-103>

¹⁴⁰ Ulinka Rublack, "The Making of Appearances at the 1530 Augsburg Imperial Diet," in *Arrayed in Splendour: Art, Fashion, and Textiles in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 156.

fabric in Schwarz's outfit symbolized his closeness to the Catholic church.¹⁴¹ This was especially important given the presence of Protestants at the event. The protestants chose to wear a pink color to signal their affinity for religion without aligning themselves with the Catholic attendees like Charles V.¹⁴²

Despite the absence of legal treatises, Schwarz's book depicts masculine modesty in fashion openly, as a carefully curated image that actually had great affinity for opulence. As Schwarz grew older his fashions changed from frivolous and joyous newfangled designs to more somber simply structured gowns. This change is most clear in his wedding attire, when Schwarz realized he had to fill a role in his family. The portrait depicts Schwarz with his back to the artist, such that all the audience sees is a structured black cloak with a hint of red hose, perhaps an homage to the innovative taste he once was allowed to have.¹⁴³ After the wearing of exclusively black clothes became habitual, some clear patterns began to emerge in the artistic interpretation of Schwarz's dress. The artist started painting texture and textile patterns with much greater detail, in order to present a more accurate reflection of a piece of clothing that was all one color. For example, in the entry of April 7th, 1538, Matthäus is wearing a very opulent piece of clothing. The image itself says that the jerkin was made from Spanish velvet *passanterie*, and according to the visual detail, the gown featured a pattern of trim made of thick black velvet.¹⁴⁴ What is most important is looking beyond the sumptuous trimmings to what the black cloth

¹⁴¹ Schwarz, *First Book of Fashion*, 147.

¹⁴² Rublack, "The Making of Appearances," 156-157.

¹⁴³ Schwarz, *The First Book of Fashion*, 157. Christoph Amberger, "Virtuelles Kupferstichkabinett: Was Alt 41 Jar," Virtuelles Kupferstichkabinett Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, accessed April 11, 2021, <http://kk.haum-bs.de/?id=h-27-067a-113>

¹⁴⁴ Schwarz, *The First Book of Fashion*, 159.

Christoph Amberger, "Virtuelles Kupferstichkabinett: Was Alt 41 Jar 46 Tag," Virtuelles Kupferstichkabinett Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, accessed April 11, 2021. <http://kk.haum-bs.de/?id=h-27-067a-115>

highlights: Matthäus' accessories. His gloves are clearly made of a soft light brown leather, and the sword by his side is so long that it actually leaves the frame of the image, both in clear contrast to Matthäus' somber attire.¹⁴⁵ Even when promoting an image of wisdom and modesty through a minimalistic style Matthäus is still performing fashion in his old age, and was strategically using that idea of modesty to emphasize certain in vogue items. Clearly the performance of masculine modesty was in and of itself an act of fashion.

The Commoditization of Black Women and Children as Fashion Accessories

Black Africans in Mid to Late Medieval Europe were ascribed the status of accessory because of the color of their skin and the exoticization of African backgrounds. This state of oppression and exploitation was not limited to adult black women, as was clear in the case of breastfeeding in Europe. Frequently young black children, especially girls, were viewed as commodities to be traded and, like their older counterparts, visual accessories to convey status. One of the most notorious visual sources of this cultural phenomena are the portraits that were commissioned by Isabelle d'Este. Her patronage of portraiture and art during the Italian Renaissance publicized a cultural trend of the iconography of the black servant. The main artist she promoted was Andrea Mantegna. Mantegna was greatly admired by d'Este, and was commissioned along with several other artists to produce biblically inspired art for decoration of her *studiolo*.¹⁴⁶ Isabella's personal involvement in the artistic process can best be demonstrated

¹⁴⁵ Schwarz, *The First Book of Fashion*, 159.

¹⁴⁶ Clifford M. Brown, *Isabella d'Este and Lorenzo Da Pavia: Documents for the History of Art and Culture in Renaissance Mantua* (rue Massot: Librairie Droz S.A., 1982), 149.

by her deep sorrow and mourning that is present in letters sent to Lorenzo de Pavia after the artist's death in 1506.¹⁴⁷

The use of black visages in portraiture was intentional in order to highlight white skin as an ideal of beauty, thereby forcing black people to become visual accessories in portraiture. In February of 1492 Mantegna painted *Judith and her maidservant with the head of Holofernes*, where Judith's maidservant is depicted as a black woman for the first time in European art.¹⁴⁸ Nowhere in the passages of the Book of Judith is the appearance of her maidservant described, so there was no precedent for Mantegna to make the character of the maidservant black. Other works by Mantegna also include depictions of black servants showing deference to white women, including the Camera Picta fresco in Mantua.¹⁴⁹ As Paul Kaplan argues, the portraiture here of black maidservants to white Spanish women holds its history in the belief of white Spanish superiority over any other race. These portraits depict black women as in constant admiration and awe of the beauty and grace that their white mistress possesses. The posture of these women, hunched over, making themselves smaller and more insignificant, implies a subordination and acceptance of such status.¹⁵⁰

These works operated not only as romantic images of servitude and slavery, but also as propaganda for the Spanish royals. Under Isabel de Castile who was on the throne during this

¹⁴⁷ Clifford Brown, *Isabella d'Este and Lorenzo Da Pavia*, 99-100.

¹⁴⁸ Paul H. D. Kaplan, "Isabella d'Este and Black African Women," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 126-127. Andrea Mantegna, "On Being Present - Vol. II Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes," Le Gallerie Degli Uffizi, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://www.uffizi.it/en/online-exhibitions/on-being-present-2#4>.

¹⁴⁹ Andrea Mantegna, "Arte a Corte," YouTube (Palazzo Ducale Mantova, September 29, 2016), <https://youtu.be/k1LZrITHIU4?t=203>

¹⁵⁰ Kaplan, "Isabella d'Este and Black African Women," figure 29, 140. Girolamo Mocetto, "Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes," metmuseum.org, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/372075>.

era, Black Muslims were still being attacked and pushed out of Spanish territories.¹⁵¹ The depiction of black women as willingly inferior and subordinate reinforced the idea of Spanish divine right, and racial superiority in the mind of Isabelle d'Este as well as those who saw the portraits she commissioned. Artists then continue this trend through the Early Modern Era into the Renaissance. In a portrait by Titian of Laura Dianti, a relative of Isabella d'Este through marriage, the tradition is continued, clearly inspired by the work of Mantegna. In Titian's portrait, the black servant is a young boy standing at the side of Dianti looking up into her visage. His slack-jawed amazement reveals the intended impact of his presence.¹⁵² The boy is there as an accessory. Just as some today would take a photo with a purse or expensive car to express wealth, so here is the presence of a black slave a public demonstration of wealth. The added implication of dominance over provinces, lower classes, and black people due to his race and background are also present. Black people through this tradition of portraiture became ornaments, purposefully included to contrast the European standard of white beauty and demonstrate wealth and power. Black people in this context were not considered human; instead, they were a fashionable accessory that was there to be used in the public image, and as such could be regulated the same as a pair of shoes.

Alternative Justifications for the Regulation of Clothing

It is possible to make a brief argument that this thesis is incorrect, that the main motivation for the passage of sumptuary laws and restrictions was exactly as was written in the text. Most of those cases can be disproved, and others are so negligible in the grand scheme of

¹⁵¹ Giles Tremlett, *Isabella of Castile: Europe's First Great Queen* (New York: Bloomsbury 2017), 5-7, 261, 439.

¹⁵² Kaplan, "Isabella d'Este and Black African Women," 154.

sumptuary legislation that they are deemed insignificant as a counter to this larger trend. One of the main reasons cited by Italian cities when they began to regulate clothing during the Middle Ages was because of the sheer amount of money that was tied up in clothing. Cloth of gold and silver monopolized the use of precious metals, and once these materials were turned into thread and woven into fabric there was, and is, no way to extract it, or even polish it to maintain it long term. That is partially why the government of Genoa in 1449 declared that a “great quantity of money [is] kept dead and wrapped up in clothing and jewels.”¹⁵³ This constant demand of precious metals for fabric that was fashionable, especially since fashion changed and new gowns would need to be made, meant that there were frequent shortages. From the 14th to 15th centuries there was such a massive shortage of silver in Europe that historians have described it as famine-like.¹⁵⁴ This is the same reason that Henry VIII later privatized the import of cloth of gold to be exclusively for royalty.¹⁵⁵ If the resources were limited, only royals should be able to consume them.

The Italian and English governments wanted money, and the easiest way to get it was to confiscate expensive movable goods from their population. Instead, the concern was clearly stated to be economical use of limited resources. During the course of the mid-1300s to the late 1400s, Italian cities began regulating not consumption, but use. The fashion at the time was for men to have doublets as short as possible, and for women to have gowns that were extremely low cut.¹⁵⁶ Both of these new designs involved less use of fabric and by all accounts should align with the values that lawmakers claimed to have, yet they are some of the most rapidly legislated

¹⁵³ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 45

¹⁵⁴ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 45-46.

¹⁵⁵ House of Commons and King George III, “An Act Against the Wearing of Costly Apparel (1509)” in *Statutes of the Realm*, 8.

¹⁵⁶ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 62.

cases available. In fact, these changes were so constant that lawmakers began adding provisions to the laws themselves for women to have the time and resources to alter their gowns for the new restrictions.¹⁵⁷ In addition the growing influx of international fabrics such as Chinese silk, or even clothing of the ‘French style’ threatened the perceived cultural identity of those in Florence during the 15th century;¹⁵⁸ which in turn led to the development of a legal treatise known as *gabelle*. This was developed after a long period of increases in sumptuary legislation throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, during which women’s sumptuous dress was also blamed for the economic crises, declines in marriages, and low birth rates.¹⁵⁹ Florence in particular faced great economic hardships after the plague of 1363 and a war against Pisa, which made the idea of *gabelle* very attractive to the government. *Gabelle* was a law that taxed scarce resources after their purchase.¹⁶⁰ For example if a woman wore any cloth of gold under *gabelle*, even after she paid for the resource itself, in order to continue wearing any clothing that had cloth of gold she would have to continually pay tax on it each year. This law applied to both men and women of all classes, and seems to have been exactly what it was declared to be: a way for the government to make money off the whims of its wealthy populace. In 1373 Florence expanded on their initial passage of *gabelle* to allow women to pay to wear clothes that had been outright banned in the city.¹⁶¹ Florence not only financially benefitted from those who did pay *gabelle*, the tax itself was also a great deterrent for women who desired to dress above their proper social standing.

The legal practice of *gabelle* implied an environmental and economic concern for resources, especially coupled with regulations of excessive dress such as long trains or extreme

¹⁵⁷ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 63.

¹⁵⁸ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 62.

¹⁵⁹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 113.

¹⁶⁰ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 47.

¹⁶¹ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 47.

shoe points. Even the moralist argument can be reduced to structured peer pressure to encourage mindful consumption. However, other sumptuary laws contradict this motivation. If the true motivation of these laws was to conserve fabric, especially cloth of gold, then shorter garments would be encouraged in the laws, and the reason for their existence openly stated. That is not the case. In 1488, a regulation was put into place requiring higher necklines. The caveat was of course that this fabric had to be suitably modest for even women of upper classes.¹⁶² The goal of this law was primarily to regulate the fashion of Italian women that involved flaunting of décolletage. Not only were dresses from that point onward required to be made with higher necklines, above the collarbones, but any older dresses had to be altered to meet the new requirements.¹⁶³ The regulation of women's chests was so drastic because it became an eroticized point of exhibition for expensive jewelry. The wealth and opulence of the jewels encouraged one to stare, just as Diane Owen Hughes argues the earring focused the male gaze upon a woman's face.¹⁶⁴ Since women were seen as innately sexual and seductive, their traits would transfer to the jewels they wore, or the necklines of their dresses. Such physical traits do not have to be sexualized in order to be regulated, instead their association with women alone is enough to garner negative attention. Those with money able to pay gabelle, and those who would be most likely to be required to were wealthy merchants and their wives.¹⁶⁵ *Gabelle* provided an opportunity for the government to reallocate funds away from those who did not have the social status required in order to wear such sumptuous dress, but had the means to pay the fines.

¹⁶² Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 62-63.

¹⁶³ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 63.

¹⁶⁴ Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passion*, 220. Diane Owen Hughes, "Distinguishing Signs: Ear-Rings, Jews and Franciscan Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance City," *Past & Present*, no. 112 (1986): 3-59, 48.

¹⁶⁵ Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 81.

The focus of legislature concerning wool in England during the Early Modern Era demonstrated a clear nationalistic and economic motivation for the passage of sumptuary laws that was distanced from the regulation of bodies. This economic crisis of an overwhelming amount of wool was exacerbated by the growing access to global markets, and the competition of more luxurious international goods. The era of exploration distinguished itself with the establishment of imperial authority and demonstrations of loyalty to the throne. The struggle for global authority between Spain and England concerned establishment of international pockets of power as well as lofty political arguments which influenced consumption in various countries because the import of external goods and resources could become restricted due to political conflicts. In England, there was clear concern over the amount of wool that had overwhelmed the English market for textiles. English fashion at the time was characterized by a group of Dutch merchants as “elegant, light, and costly garments, but [the English] are very inconstant and desirous of novelties, changing their fashions every year, both men and women. [...] Their garments are usually coloured and of a light stuff.”¹⁶⁶ Clearly the popular dress design at the time was not heavy woven wool, as would be most advantageous to the English government and sheep raisers. Cecil, under Queen Elizabeth released a memorandum that clearly expressed concern for the economic state of England due to the lack of profits from wool exports.¹⁶⁷ This led to the passage of multiple acts that protected native industries in England. One such act banned the use of any foreign wool or worsted stuff to be used in the making of caps and hats, while another required any ship exporting textiles to have at least 1/10 of their cargo to be

¹⁶⁶ Emanuel van Meteren, “A Dutch Merchant's View of the English: Emanuel Van Meteren, 1599,” in *English Historical Documents 1558-1603*, 489.

¹⁶⁷ William Cecil, “Memorandum by Cecil on the Export Trade in Cloth and Wool 1564,” in *English Historical Documents 1558-1603*, 575.

composed of English wool.¹⁶⁸ This is one of the few cases where the evidence available indicates that the true motivation behind these sumptuary legislations and restrictions on consumption actually prioritized the economy.

Conclusion

Although the last sumptuary laws were passed in Poland (1776) and Bavaria (1818), the effect these codes had on the restriction and regulation of bodies has been far beyond the intended reach. Instead of habitual regulations being passed about the restriction of dress, these laws created a culture of modesty that elevated puritanical ideas, which consequently has influenced the value and view modern society places on the display of bodies and wealth.

The modern sociologist Pierre Bourdieu saw fashion in 1984 as a way for, “elites [to] secure their positions of power.”¹⁶⁹ Even the critics of his statement cited feminine exhibitionism as the main purpose behind fashion in the 20th century.¹⁷⁰ The goal of this thesis was to establish a new view of what fashion was during the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era, and prove that the performance of fashion led to the regulation of bodies.

Fashion is a way for people to demonstrate power and wealth, regardless of gender. It is a social structure and performance of status that restricts bodies, and as it is regulated or controlled, continues to change how people are forced to move through the world. Even though the evidence in this paper is presented from the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Era, it would be remiss to assume that modern society is above such behavior. Just as imported furs or

¹⁶⁸ Elizabeth I, “Protecting Native Industries,” in *English Historical Documents 1558-1603*, 77.

¹⁶⁹ Rossella Ghigi and Roberta Sassatelli, “Body Projects: Fashion, Aesthetic Modifications, and Stylized Selves,” in *The Sage Handbook of Consumer Culture*, ed. Olga Kravets, et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2018), 290-315, 297.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

expensive textiles were regulated in laws back then, now name brands have increased their prices to astronomical heights in order to ensure that it is extremely difficult for non-wealthy people to acquire them. That is a modern restriction on upwards mobility in the presentation of one's image which is parallel to what was being regulated in the laws England and Italy passed during the Middle Ages. Similarly, the United States legislatures have begun restricting reproductive rights to only be readily available to upper class women, with the requirements frequently involving hotel stays, travel expenses, and multiple appointments. All of these factors regulate who can have children and when, according to wealth and status.

Medieval and Early Modern Culture was very visual, which is why fashion as a medium to present status worked so effectively amongst the populace. Since there was a lack of literacy in the lay population, images and pictures were the most productive ways to communicate ideas. This visual culture that emerged from Early Christian ideas developed a culture of modesty which influenced Puritanism and how sumptuary laws were written and enacted across Europe. However, their vilification of femininity, blackness, and frivolity did irreparable damage to women and people of color, who still face similar ideas rooted in this culture of modesty that reduce them to subordinate statuses in society.

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