SUMPTUARY LEGISLATION AND CONDUCT LITERATURE IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

Sumptuary Legislation and Conduct Literature in
Late Medieval England

Ariadne Woodward

This study is an examination of attempts to control dress in late medieval England. Concerns about dress expressed in sumptuary legislation and conduct literature were demonstrative of deeper anxieties about gender, class, status, the interrelationship between medieval contemporaries, nationhood and morality. Clothing was especially targeted because it was an important marker of status and of individuals' morals. However, the lack of evidence of enforcement of sumptuary legislation and the limited scope of this type of legislation demonstrates a certain ambivalence towards a strict control of what individuals wore. Clothing played an important role in social negotiations. Late medieval society was extremely hierarchical and yet these hierarchies were somewhat fluid, which was both a source of confusion and opportunity.

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INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to his work *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, Gilles Lipovetsky commented that "the question of fashion is not a fashionable one among intellectuals."[1] While this may no longer be the case, many areas of fashion history remain to be developed and explored. Many traditional histories of medieval dress have been descriptive in nature. They have focused on the fabrics, the colours, the provenance, and the general appearance of medieval fashion. They have researched the details of wools, silk, and linen production.[2] Economic historians, in turn, have studied in detail the distribution and trade of textiles, while costume historians have focused on the detailed reconstruction of garments, conducting inventories of elements of dress.[3] However, beyond these traditional subjects of enquiry, the study of fashion offers a richness and versatility to the study of the medieval period. Fashion and its representation in literature, legal documents, art, iconography, religious documents, and conduct literature provide the historian with a link between the individual and hierarchical social structures.[4] As stated by E. Jane Burns, the editor of *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Cloth Work, and Other Cultural Imaginings*:

> The spectrum of possibilities raised by the study of medieval cloth and clothing in all their represented forms ranges widely from the use and circulation as a mark of visible wealth, social position, or class status to the varied attempts by clerical and legal authorities to regulate gender and rank by controlling dress and ornamentation.[5]

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[1] Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3, quoted in Catherine Richardson, *Clothing Culture: 1350-1650* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2004), 2.
[2] Jane E. Burns, "Why Textiles Make a Difference," in *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. Jane E. Burns (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5.
[3] Ibid., 6.
[4] Ibid., 1.
[5] Ibid., 1.

Clothing in the Middle Ages, much like today, served numerous functions. On the one hand, clothing, much like shelter and food, is one of the essential needs for humans to survive. Clothing protects us from the elements, and therefore is a fundamental human need.[6] However, the need that humans have for clothing is embedded in culture and wearing clothing is not simply a functional act.[7] The protective aspect of clothing cannot explain why clothing comes in various styles and is often decorated. Natural processes, such as birth and death, are embedded in traditions and rituals that are imbued with meaning. This is also true about the clothing we wear; clothing has a deeply symbolic character.[8]

Concerns about dress reflected deeper anxieties revolving around gender, status, the interrelationships between medieval contemporaries, nationhood and morality. Clothing was specifically targeted because it was seen as an important signifier of individuals' place within society and of their morals. Although conventionally historians have tended to focus more attention on attempts to control women's clothing in late medieval England, one of the arguments of this thesis is that men's clothing, too, was an object of concern for its role as status marker and its moral significance. These beliefs underpin attempts to restrict and control dress through conduct literature and sumptuary legislation in the late medieval period. Advice books for both men and women warned against ostentation and immodesty in dress as well as in behaviour. Concern especially about status and clothing is reflected also in the sumptuary statutes, although the limited scope of the legislation reveals a certain ambivalence about formal controls of clothing. There is very little evidence of enforcement of sumptuary laws in late medieval England and moreover many of the elites whose livelihood depended on the cloth trade were less

[6] Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27.
[7] Ibid., 27-28.
[8] Ibid., 28.

than enthusiastic about restrictions on the clothing market. For other reasons the elite may have been less than whole-hearted in their support for strict control over the kinds of clothing individuals should wear. Although late medieval English society was extremely hierarchical, these hierarchies were fluid and this lack of fixedness was the occasion both of confusion and opportunity. Clothing played an important role in these social negotiations as contemporaries used dress aspirationally to move up socially.

This paper was originally intended to focus on women in late medieval England, with clothing being used as a tool of historical analysis which would allow for a better understanding of attitudes towards women, insight into gender roles, and general social dynamics within the domestic sphere. However, it soon became clear through research that much of the literature from the period was concerned with how men were dressing. The concern about how men were dressing was not just about determining status and rank; moralists were very concerned about how men were putting themselves on display in sexually suggestive ways. Clothing was being used by men to reflect personal identity, and as an expression of individual temperament, in a period that the male body was more on display than ever before.

For this study of the meaning and regulation of clothing in late medieval England, we will be focusing exclusively on written sources. A full-length study of the issues, using visual and material (archaeological) evidence would be indispensable, but is beyond the scope of the present paper. Using conduct literature and sumptuary legislation as complementary sources will allow for a better understanding of attempts to regulate behaviour and maintain "boundaries" within medieval society. In *The Governance of Consuming Passions*, Alan Hunt presents us with an interesting model to work with. As a sociologist, Hunt attempts, in his study of sumptuary legislation, to build a "sociology of governance." The concept draws most directly from the work

of Michel Foucault in his identification of historically constructed objects of governance.[9] Hunt applies the concept to sumptuary law:

> Governance is exercised where a relatively persistent set of often conflicting practices select and construct some social object that is acted on in such a way as to control, restrain, limit and direct the activities of the selected object of governance(....) Central to the concept of 'governance' and 'project' is that they always involve 'attempts' whose characteristic is that while generally more or less concerted they typically produce results such that the project remains, to a greater or less extent, always in need of supplementation, revision, repetition and likely to produce unintended consequences; attempts are thus characterized by a cycle of attempt, followed by partial realization/failure, which in turn initiates fresh or revised attempts.[10]

This is worth considering when thinking about fashion and sumptuary legislation within larger systems of control within society. Sarah-Grace Heller's article, "Anxiety, Hierarchy, and Appearance in Thirteenth Century Sumptuary Laws and the *Roman de la rose*" demonstrates how sumptuary legislation and other forms of writing complemented each other. The author shows how the *Roman de la rose* (one of the most popular vernacular works written in medieval French), the sumptuary legislation of thirteenth-century France, contemporary sermons, and other literature of the period, demonstrate together the social anxiety that was created over the power of clothing and who should be allowed to wear what.[11] Furthermore, the anxiety surrounding hierarchy and clothing in these texts served as a form of indirect enforcement of the sumptuary legislation, holding certain behaviour up to shame or ridicule.[12] A similar approach to primary sources and methodology will be used here. The sumptuary legislation, conduct literature and other moralist tracts from the late medieval period reflect generalized concerns

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[9] Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passion: A History of Sumptuary Law* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 4.
[10] Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions*, 3-4.
[11] Sarah-Grace Heller, ''Anxiety, Hierarchy, and Appearance in Thirteenth-Century Sumptuary Laws and the Roman de la Rose," *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 2 (2004): 346.
[12] Ibid., 322.

about instability and moral decay in society at large. This approach comes with one caveat; the power of sumptuary legislation must not be overstated. This type of legislation was rarely enforced, and thus we must look at governmentality as a type of cultural prescription for the various problems that dressing improperly was seen to bring to society.

To understand why there were more pressing attempts to exercise control over dress in late Medieval England, we must first begin by looking at the political, social and economic context. The first half of the fourteenth century was marked by significant political turmoil. King Edward I, who reigned from 1272 to 1307, and King Edward III, who reigned from 1327 to 1377, fought destructive wars. Wars were fought against Scotland, and against France; notably the year 1337 marked the beginning of the Hundred Years War, which continued intermittently until 1453. King Edward II, who reigned from 1307 to 1327, faced numerous conflicts with the aristocracy which ended with his being deposed and killed.[13] The first half of the fourteenth century was also marked by two major natural calamities: the agricultural crisis and Great Famine of 1315-1322, and the Black Death of 1348-1349. While the Great Famine affected Northern Europe, the plague swept across the entire continent.[14] The ease with which the plague was carried from village to village is demonstrative of the completeness of the commercial network in the late medieval period. The movement of travellers and goods through the continent allowed for the spread of the disease.[15] The Black Death resulted in profound social and economic changes in late medieval society.[16] One of the most immediate impacts was the demographic collapse that took place across Europe. Within a year, the population of England

[13] Christopher Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850-1520* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 228.
[14] Ibid., 228.
[15] Ibid., 271.
[16] P. J. P Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History 1250-1550* (London: Arnold, 2004), 161.

was reduced by almost a half.[17] The city of London, for example, is estimated to have had a population as high as 80,000 in 1300. In the year 1400, it was approximately 40,000.[18] The Black Death marked the beginning of a cycle of epidemics that continued into the late seventeenth century. Plague continued to be a leading cause of death well into the fifteenth century.[19]

Another important phenomenon to take into consideration is the expansion of a more complex commercial network across Europe. Between 1300 and 1600, the European landscape saw the establishment of sophisticated trade routes and renowned mercantile and industrial centers.[20] These routes carried imported silks, spices and gold as well as European-made materials such as metalwork, timber, coal and cloth.[21] The city of London's wealth, as an overseas port, depended on the import and export of goods from across Europe. Many of the prosperous merchants from the city had become so by conducting overseas trade. Merchants from foreign countries such as Portugal, Spain, Holland, France and Italy were attracted to the city because of its wealth and its wool.[22] As commerce became more established, the people who lived off trade established independent sociopolitical status.[23] The expansion of commerce visibly increased the availability of luxury goods from foreign lands, such as silks, spices and elegant cloths.[24] It is only after 1200 or 1300, and even later in many areas in Western Europe, that a developed market economy emerged. By the late Middle Ages, commerce was further

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[17] Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History*, 161.
[18] Caroline M. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 45.
[19] Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History*, 163-165.
[20] Martha C. Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-4.
[21] Ibid., 7.
[22] Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, 46.
[23] Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe*, 7.
[24] Ibid., 14.

eroding the imagined boundaries between people of different social orders while simultaneously creating a more complex social hierarchy.[25]

One of the most important immediate effects of the rapid depopulation that took place because of the Black Death was that it created labour shortages. This resulted in landowners and employers having to pay higher wages to workers. Consequently, patterns of employment and land holding were disrupted in favour of the lower echelons of society as opposed to the traditional elites.[26] The wage increased for workers, since they were now in short supply. This in turn created problems for those who sought to hire labour. For example, servile peasants in England could now seek employment in other regions. They were also now in a position to negotiate lower rents for themselves. Another group that benefited from more freedom of choice was the wage earner. This group could now demand higher wages and could choose to move from one employer to another because workers were high in demand. Workers could also request rewards in the form of victuals such as bread, meat and ale. They could make greater demands than previously possible about how much they worked, and less specialized workers could take up more specialized work. Even women saw a slight improvement in their economic circumstances. While they still were less well-remunerated than their male counterparts, they too could now demand higher wages for their work. Women entered new occupations, and some moved into towns where more economic opportunities were available to them.[27]

Despite the shortages of workers, the economic impact of the Black Death on English towns was not as catastrophic as one would assume it could be considering the seriousness of the

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[25] Martha C. Howell, "Gender in the Transition to Merchant Capitalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), 562.
[26] Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History*, 166.
[27] Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*, 278-281.

demographic collapse that took place. Industries may have been disrupted in the mid-fourteenth century, but the general level of commercial activity was very high at the turn of the fifteenth century. Towns that specialized in woolen textiles actually saw their sizes increase after the Black Death, and some larger towns such as Bristol, Norwich, Southampton and York went through a phase of prosperity around the end of the fourteenth century.[28]

The English economy did not suffer too greatly for a variety of reasons. Landlords were able to maintain a high level of expenditure because their incomes did not drop in any considerable way. England was prospering due to its production of goods and its cloth exports. Previously, the country had had to procure these products from other countries in Europe.[29] Despite this, anxieties around perceived societal shifts were high during this period, as there was significant enough change as to mildly disrupt the traditional hierarchy within late medieval society. Dyer, in his monograph *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in the Later Middle Ages* describes this period as the "new middle ages," that is, a period which emerged from a process of commercialization in the thirteenth century and a period of crisis in the fourteenth century to emerge as a society with an enhanced capacity for change.[30] In particular, the late fourteenth century can be characterized as a period in which the non-elites benefited from an improvement of their condition, as real wages rose and standards of living increased substantially.

It should come as no surprise that these changes were unwelcome and caused anxiety amongst the traditional elites. The natural social order seemed to be called into question. Certain

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[28] Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*., 295-296.
[29] Ibid., 296.
[30] Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 40.

restraints were removed while new forms of freedom and choice became available.[31] England was producing more goods and wearables, and a larger segment of the population could now afford to purchase them. More affordable consumer products and cloths became available.[32] While England was exporting more cloth than ever before, there was also significant increase in the domestic demand for clothing items. A growing segment of the population had more purchasing power. People who had previously been able to purchase only the bare necessities in terms of food items, could now purchase more ale and meat. They could also spend more money on things such as clothing. They could change their clothes more often. Their higher purchasing power gave them more choice in the styles and fabrics they chose to wear. People who were not amongst the traditional elites now had more money to purchase fashionable garments. For example, wages earners and peasants chose shorter and more tightly fitting clothing which imitated the style of dress of the aristocracy at the time.[33] These changes unnerved those at the top of the social hierarchy.

According to John Scattergood, a highly significant shift in fashion took place in England and across Western Europe around 1340. Fashion was always in flux, but around that year, a new look emerged. Before this date, more ample and loose-fitting clothes had been favoured. Clothing had been relatively ungendered. As of the 1340s, a more tight-fitting style developed creating a more elongated appearance. Men's tunics were shorter and skimmed the body, while women wore long dresses that were similarly tight-fitting above the waist. More decorative elements were added to garments. The edges of clothing were often cut into more elaborate shapes. Hose became longer and more elongated and tunics became shorter for men. It

[31] Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*, 278.
[32] Ibid., 322.
[33] Ibid., 296.

is as this time that men's shoes became more pointed and elongated, and the shoulder and chest became padded[34] According to many scholars interested in dress, the mid fourteenth century marks the beginning of fashion as a phenomenon. Fashion manifested itself through the imposition of certain tastes and rhythms on a specific social class.[35] It is estimated that the duration of a certain fashion in clothing was constantly changing, while changes in the general silhouette of clothing seemed to take place approximately every fifty years.[36]

[34] John Scattergood, "Fashion and Morality in the Late Middle Ages," in *England in the Fifteenth Century. Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium*. ed. Daniel Williams, 257-258.
[35] Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 65.
[36] Ibid., 65.

Images demonstrating the clothing before the shift that took place in the mid fourteenth century. The first demonstrates various styles of male dress, with Mary, wearing relatively similar garb to men's, in the centre. The other shows the clothing of working people.

British Library, Add. MS 42130 (Luttrell Psalter, c. 1320-1340), fols. 96v and 172v.

Image demonstrating the variety of styles of male dress after the shift that took place in the mid fourteenth century.
British Library, Harley 4380, fol 108.

Taste, manners, and dress were linked to class.[37] For young men of the aristocracy (or for those who aspired to be amongst their ranks), dressing in elaborate fashions was a way of asserting themselves as members of the elite.[38] For knights in the late middle ages, the ideology of chivalry and court display was a way of distinguishing themselves and their values from those

[37] Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 46.
[38] Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 98-99.

of bourgeois merchants.[39] These differences of class and values was outwardly expressed through dress.

Chroniclers throughout Europe noted that soldiers were wearing increasingly tight-fitting clothing that put their bodies on display. The chroniclers would lament this style and state that it came from another land (sometimes France, sometimes Italy, but always another foreign land). For these chroniclers, these seemingly outrageous displays were clear evidence of moral decadence. Members of the clergy, as well as members of the bourgeoisie, lamented and criticized the members of the class above them, whose dominance over them and vulgar display of wealth they saw as distasteful and arrogant.[40] We will see this in more detail when we look at some of the moralist tracts from the late medieval period.

Because of these shifts, outward appearances in post-Black-Death society no longer as strictly displayed class or social grouping.[41] Medieval contemporaries had traditionally described their society as being divided between those who fought, those who prayed, and those who worked (the underlying conception, for instance, of the "three estates" in France of clergy, nobility, and commons). While these social classifications served as a useful model for contemporaries (and for twentieth-century historians), with the rapid changes that had been taking place in the fourteenth century, they no longer adequately described the complexity of the late medieval social hierarchy.[42] The idea of a preordained social order in any case is a fiction; social and economic relationships were continuously in flux both before and after the Black

[39] Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 24.
[40] Piponnier and Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages*, 65.
[41] Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*, 279.
[42] Dyer, *An Age of Transition*, 38.

Death.[43] Despite, or perhaps because of this anxiety-producing flux, efforts were made to maintain this fiction of a neatly divided social order.

As Dyer puts it: "Contemporaries, especially in the fourteenth century, reiterated the archaic tripartite division of mankind into warriors, prayers, and workers precisely because they sought some certainty in a shifting world, and knew that townspeople, professionals, and many other groups could not be fitted with ease into any of the three orders."[44] Amongst them were the merchants (with the aldermanic class which was very wealthy, often engaged in wholesale trade, and which ruled the cities largely in their own interests[45]), artisans, lawyers, and bureaucrats. This highlights the complexity of the "third order," originally conceptualized as rural dwellers who worked the land. The expansion of commerce in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries created new sources of wealth beyond landholding, generating an anomaly in the old tripartite division of society, which assumed that the powerful and wealthy members of society were part of the first two orders. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and beyond, the wealth of merchants began to equal that of landowners. In the article "Crafts, Guilds and the negotiation of work in the medieval town," Rosser points to the complexity, diversity and adaptability of organizations of working people in medieval towns. Offering advice to scholars studying the issue, Rosser states that "Our understanding of work in medieval towns is likely to be furthered less by classifications of supposed 'structures' or 'hierarchies' of labour than by a sensitive reading of the *processes* whereby agreements were reached in particular periods and places."[46]

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[43] Gervase Rosser, "Craft, Guilds, and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town," *Past & Present* 154 (February 1997): 3.
[44] Dyer, *An Age of Transition*, 38.
[45] For London's aldermen, see Caroline M. Barron. *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People, 1200-1500*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.
[46] Rosser, "Craft Guilds and the Negotiation of Work in Medieval Towns," 30.

Let us return to our medieval contemporaries. The expansion of commercial routes across Europe had given new people access to luxuries once reserved only to the nobility. The expansion of commerce had also created new sources of wealth beyond landholding, which created an anomaly in the old tripartite division of society. It was assumed that the most powerful and wealthy members of society were part of the two first orders, but in the fourteenth and fifteenth century (and beyond), the wealth of merchants began to equal that of landowners. The expansion of commerce increased both the supply and the demand for luxuries, most notably clothing.[47] The seemingly rapidly changing social, political and economic landscape was met with great concern about the natural order of society being disrupted.

Despite these economic, political and social changes taking place in Europe, people living in the Middle Ages desired to live in an orderly society. As explained by P. J. P. Goldberg in *Medieval England: A Social History 1250-1550*, hierarchy was considered an integral and important way to organize one's lives and social relationships.[48] Hierarchies were socially demarcated in the ways people were addressed, how they behaved and what clothing they wore according to class.[49] In England, the wearing of silk and fur was primarily a privilege reserved to aristocrats. The peasantry wore locally produced textiles. City dwellers that were particularly well off wore high quality textiles to distinguish themselves from those of lesser means, but wore them differently as to also distinguish themselves from the aristocracy. An example of this is the head-dress worn by bourgeois women which remained plain while that of aristocratic women became more elaborate.[50]

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[47] Howell, *Commerce before Capitalism in Europe,* 208.
[48] Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Society History,* 3.
[49] Ibid., 4.
[50] Ibid., 4.

We will begin our analysis by looking at the cultural context within which anxiety about dress was expressed. To do so, we will look at literary and prescriptive sources from the late medieval period, including a special focus on one text, William Caxton's translation of *The Knight of the Tower* (1484). We look at these sources not as evidence of social practices but rather for the ideologies that they reflect.[51] The aim of the authors of this type of literature was to socialize people into certain modes of behaviour that were considered desirable for the social group from which they came. Books and texts circulated in specific milieus and were often directed at specific social groups, which allows us to gain better insight into the values of these groups.[52] We will approach the conduct literature from the period as a reflection and reaction to a seemingly rapidly changing social, political and economic landscape rather than a literal representation of how late medieval society was.

The second section will consider formal legislation of restrictions on dress in late medieval England. We will see how this legislation demonstrates how men's clothing was an object of concern because it was seen as marker of status and a reflection of one's morals. However, the limited scope of the legislation and the lack of evidence for the enforcement of sumptuary legislation indicate that there was a non-negligible ambivalence towards the formal regulation of dress.

[51] Felicity Riddy, "Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text," *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (January 1996): 66.
[52] Riddy, "Mother Knows Best," 67.

THE MEANING OF DRESS IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH CONDUCT LITERATURE

The social historian P. J. P. Goldberg points to conduct literature as being an important source through which the scholars of the period can recapture some of these subtle social distinctions as well as expectations surrounding people's general manners. Goldberg cautions us to approach these sources with a healthy dose of scepticism. The writers of the conduct literature that was written and circulated during the period attempted to socialize people into specific modes of behaviour. This does not mean that these texts necessarily mirrored how people actually behaved.[53]

An overarching theme that appears throughout these texts is the connection between inappropriate dress and mortal sin. Medieval people were taught moral precepts through the seven deadly sins. The motif of the seven deadly sins appeared everywhere from sermons to hymns, catechisms to books of exempla.[54] The concepts of pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony and lechery were simple to remember and gave lay people spiritual direction.[55] The standardisation of the seven deadly sins is rooted in the monastic tradition; the categorisation of the seven deadly sins has existed in the Christian world since the early middle ages.[56] They were part of everyday life and from theology they made their way into art and literature.[57] Not only were medieval contemporaries familiar with the concept of the seven deadly sins; they believed that avoiding such vices (and conversely practising the seven Christian virtues) guided one to a

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[53] Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History*, 4.
[54] Frederick Tupper, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins," *PMLA*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1914): 93.
[55] Ibid., 94 and Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c 1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 60-61.
[56] Anne Marie Emma Alberta de Gendt, *L'art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles: Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* (Paris: Champion, 2003), 148.
[57] Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967), xiv.

Christian life.[58] As Christian thought and morality was central to societal debates, the concern with vexing God was used in both the sumptuary legislation and conduct literature of the period to dissuade men and women from wearing excessively sumptuous apparel. It is within this cultural context that the works that will be studied here were produced.

One text that uses the seven deadly sins frequently as moral touchstone is *The Knight of the Tower*, a collection of edifying tales aimed specifically at young women of high birth. Before diving into an analysis of the stories in *The Knight of the Tower*, we must first present some background information about the original French work and its English translation. In 1371-1372, Geoffroy IV de la Tour Landry, born in the province of Anjou wrote what would become a very popular educational treatise commonly known as the *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles*. It is not known for certain, but it is believed that the Knight had at least two sons and three daughters, the latter of whom were named Jeanne, Anne and Marie. This would have given him a reason to compile tales into an educational treatise for them.[59] While books of moral instruction directed at women and girls were popular in the Middle Ages, as was the compilation and improvement of tales, the Knight's book is unusual because of the diversity of the sources used.[60]

In the prologue to the book, the Knight explains how he met with a priest and two other members of the clergy to provide him with material for his work. These materials include the Bible, texts recounting the deeds of kings, and a number of chronicles from France, Greece, England, and other foreign lands. The knight favours, as Anne-Marie Gendt puts it, "sources véridiques" to establish his authority over his subject matter, such as "les Saintes Ecritures et des

[58] Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, xiv.
[59] M. Y. Offord, introduction to *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, by William Caxton (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), xxxvi.
[60] Ibid., xxxviii.

texts de teneur historique."[61] However, these cited sources of inspiration do not directly appear in the book. Instead, other compendia that themselves were drawn from scripture and historical texts were evidently the basis for his tales. The thirteenth-century Franciscan *Miroir des Bonnes Femmes*, uncited by the author, for instance, is the most important source used.[62] Pretending to have read directly all the scriptures and weighty histories was a way for the author to give authority and weight to the advice he was giving in his writing. Favouring a didactic discourse, The Knight of the Tower recycles a wide variety of texts. The central and densest section of *Le Livre du Chevalier* comprises a long list of stories with examples of "good" versus "bad" women from the Old Testament, many of which are borrowed directly from the *Miroir des bonnes femmes*.[63] The other chapters either expand or digress from the *Miroir*'s format, drawing moral lessons for the girls from local legends, chronicles, animal fables, fabliaux (comic tales), saints' lives and the Knight's own lived experiences.[64]

By writing this book, the author hoped to have a positive influence on the future conduct of his female readership and offers himself as their guide through the process.[65] The unsavory characters who feature in his moral tales have for the most part been borrowed from the Bible. The first section of the book, a series of texts that make up thirty-six chapters, is dedicated to them and the stories revolving around their transgressions.[66]

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[61] Gendt, *L'Art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles*, 37.
[62] Ibid., 38.
[63] Roberta L. Krueger, "Intergeneric Combination and the Anxiety of Gender in Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles," *L'Esprit Créateur*, XXXIII, 4 (1993), 62.
[64] Ibid., 63.
[65] Gendt, *L'Art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles,* 67.
[66] Ibid.*,* 82.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the book's popularity extended into Germany and England.[67] Two English translations of the book appeared in the fifteenth century. The first one, by an anonymous writer, was written during the reign of Henry VI.[68] It exists as a single manuscript and can be found at the British Library.[69] A second translation, and the first printed, was made by William Caxton. William Caxton was responsible for setting up the first printing shop in England around 1476, in Westminster, which allowed for the production of books from movable type.[70] His translation of the *Knight of the Tower* was finished on June 1, 1483, and the text was printed in January 1484 during the reign of Richard III.[71] Caxton's English translation version of the *Knight of the Tower* (edited for the Early English Text Society by M. Y. Offord) will be analyzed here in more depth as it offers a rich array of tales that are both paternalistic and moralistic in tone. Because this version of the text would have had the greatest readership in England, an analysis of this version allows us to gain some insight into the cultural context within which ideas about clothing circulated in late medieval England.

In the preface to his version of the Knight of the Tower's work, Caxton writes that he undertook the English translation at the request of a noblewoman. It is not known for certain that this woman truly existed. It has been speculated that this woman could have been the dowager Queen Elizabeth Woodville, the wife of Edward IV and mother of five girls; however, this has not been definitely proven.[72] However, Caxton indicates in his preface that this work is dedicated to the teaching not only of the daughters of this specific noblewoman, but also of ladies and gentlewomen more generally. Despite stating that the advice offered in the book

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[67] Gendt, *L'Art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles,* 48.
[68] Ibid., 49.
[69] Ibid., 49.
[70] A. S. G. Edwards, "Books and Manuscripts" in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, ed. Elaine M. Treharne and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17.
[71] M. Y. Offord, introduction to *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, xv.
[72] Gendt, *L'Art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles*, 50.

would be profitable to all kinds of people, he notes that the targeted audience are members of the aristocracy when he recommends that every gentleman or woman acquire this book to learn how to govern their children virtuously.[73] This could be considered a clever tactic by Caxton to draw not only the gentry but the urban elite to purchase the book. As a merchant in London, he was certainly aware that the merchant class would be an important market for the book.[74] However, by stating that it is for members of the aristocracy, he could draw the attention of an urban elite that aspired to raise its status in society. Literature of this sort could be used by families to socialize them into the manners and values of the aristocratic ranks to which they aspired.[75] Felicity Riddy has argued that some conduct literature, such as "What the Goodwife Taught her Daughter," was squarely aimed at a bourgeois readership, and sought to socialize the young into modes of behaviour specific to their social grouping.[76] Other texts that were ostensibly aimed at the aristocracy, such as *The Knight of the Tower*, would also benefit a bourgeois readership with aspiration for upwards social mobility.

Although Caxton himself admits that the translation is imperfect,[77] overall he followed quite closely the original French text. Much like Geoffroy de la Tour Landry, Caxton imagined this work to have an educational value for young women. Their instruction, with the help of this book, was to take place within the domestic sphere.[78]

A considerable amount of the Knight of the Tower's book is devoted to drawing out the portrait of virtuous and non-virtuous women. For the Knight of the Tower, a woman's virtue had

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[73] Caxton, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, 3.
[74] Shannon McSheffrey, "Whoring Priests and Godly Citizens: Law, Morality, and Clerical Sexual Misconduct in Late Medieval London," in *Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England,* ed. Norman L. Jones and D. R. Woolf (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 50.
[75] Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History*, 6.
[76] Riddy, "Mother Knows Best," 66-67.
[77] Caxton, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, 4.
[78] Gendt, *L'Art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles*, 50.

more value than her level of nobility or her beauty. True nobility, in his eyes, was to conduct oneself according to the prevailing standard.[79] According to him, there were virtues to cultivate and vices to avoid, which were very much aligned with the general classification of vices and virtues that was popular in the Medieval period.[80]

Attempts to discourage women from dressing inappropriately through the moralizing tales in *The Knight of the Tower* reflect anxieties about gender in late medieval society. Concerns about excess and exaggeration in perceived distasteful fashion choices applied to both sexes. However, the concerns were not entirely the same. Because of their "weaker" nature, women were seen as naturally more susceptible to sin, and leading others to sin with them. The luxury/lust of women was seen as detrimental not only to individual honour but to society at large. In the late medieval period, luxury and lust were synonymous, as we will see a little later on. Women, seen as temptresses, brought men to commit sins of the flesh, which in turn led to social disorder.[81] The tales in *The Knight of the Tower* and other writings that condemned women's poor behaviour demonstrate this point. The Knight's discourse surrounding both positive and reprehensible behaviour in women is based on the system of seven deadly sins and their opposite virtues. In the stories he shares with his female audience, he exploits the didactic possibilities that this systemisation of values offers.[82]

As we have seen previously, a significant part of the book is directly based on the *Miroir des Bonnes Femmes*. In this text, the discourse around vices and virtues is used to promote Franciscan values that encourage humility, poverty and charity.[83] The Knight of the Tower

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[79]Gendt, *L'Art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles*, 148.
[80] Ibid., 148.
[81]Ibid., 155.
[82] Ibid., 151.
[83] Ibid., 148.

presents a binary vision of the world divided between good and evil, men and women, chaste and adulterous, and so on.[84]

One of the first stories that concerns itself with women's fashion is in chapter 20: "Of them that take first newe gyses." The themes that arise here − distrust of novelty, fear of the seductiveness of the strange and foreign − arise frequently in the book. In this story, the Knight warns his daughters against being the first to try new fashions. He cautions them to be the last and wait the longest to try them, especially when the clothes imitate the styles of women from "strange" countries. The knight tells the story of a debate that took place between a baroness who lives in Guyenne and the lord of Beaumont, who is said to be a subtle and wise knight. The baroness told him that she had just come from Brittany, where she saw the lord's wife. She commented to him that her style of dress was not like the other ladies of Guyenne; the embroidered edges of her garments and of her hood were not as large as those that had become the fashion. The Lord responded that he wished for his wife to dress as elegantly and nobly as anyone else. However, he wished for her to be dressed like the "good" ladies of their country and not like the concubines of English men and military companies. He continued by stating that it is these prostitutes who first brought these styles (large embroidered edges and slit dresses) to France. He considers the women who have taken up these strange styles to have been poorly counselled, and that every good woman should wear the styles of the women from their own country. Following this lecture from the lord, the baroness is left speechless and embarrassed.

The Knight then addresses his daughters directly by reiterating that it is wiser to dress like the good women of their country than like the strange women from foreign lands. Women,

[84] Krueger, "Intergeneric Combination," 62-63.

he says, are prone to desiring new clothing and styles because their character is neither wise nor clever; their nature is fixed upon sensual gratification.

The link made by the knight between dressing in new styles of clothing and being interested in sensual gratification implies the conceptual tie between luxury and lust. As we saw previously, luxury and lust were synonymous at the time, both modern English words denoted by the same word in Latin (luxuria) and English (luste). This conflation of costly and sensually pleasing material goods with immoderate (and usually sexual) desire is inherent in the Knight's view. Furthermore, new styles of clothing were associated with foreignness. They were also associated with prostitutes. Many prostitutes in England were foreigners, with Flemish, Dutch, and Low German women appearing more prominently in the records as prostitutes and bawds.[85] There were also prostitutes who may have adopted foreign names as to make themselves more erotically suggestive and to appeal to people's desire for exoticism.[86] There was a sense of sexual impropriety associated with people from outside the realm, and "foreignness" of dress was seen as demonstrative of this. In any case, offensive new styles were often claimed to come from somewhere else. They were seen as "other," a theme that we will also see mirrored when we look at the sumptuary legislation from that period.[87]

A similar association between luxury, foreignness and strange dress is made in chapter 56: "Of the doughter of Iacob that was depuceled or her maydenhode taken fro her." The story presented here is a cautionary tale about a woman's inordinate and unhealthy interest in what people from other lands are wearing. The daughter of Jacob left the house of her father and brother due to her frivolity and levity of character. She traveled far from her family to go see the

[85] Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 56.
[86] Ibid., 56.
[87] Susan Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2003), 128.

attire of women from another land. Shechem, the son of Hamor, who was considered to be a great lord in that land, saw her, courted her, and took her virginity from her. When her twelve brothers found out about this, they slew him and most of his lineage for the shame that had been brought upon them by their sister. The Knight of the Tower comments that a foolish woman is capable of causing much evil and misfortune, and that her youth and her frivolous nature —and her unhealthy curiosity about the fashions of foreign women— caused the shedding of blood. Great calamity ensues from the poor behaviour of women, with multiple strands of caution being woven together: beware luxury/lust, and beware the lure of the foreign and strange.

The daughter of Jacob in this story committed the sin of lechery, but she is also responsible for leading a man to sin with her. On the one hand, medieval contemporaries perceived women as weak in nature and lacking agency in their own lives. On the other hand, they were seen as having the capacity to lead men into sin and are held responsible for men's reactions towards them. The contradiction highlights the complexity of how women were perceived. Women are held responsible for causing the sins of men in a number of the stories told by the Knight. For example, the story that appears in chapter 59 "Of the doughters of Moab/ of whom the euylle lygnee yssued," warns against fashionably dressed women with poor intentions. Geoffrey de la Tour tells the story of some "wicked women of the past," the daughters of Moab, who were "dishonorably begotten, and against the divine law." These girls are described as foolish and full of lechery. The heathen Balaam made the daughters dress fashionably and elaborately with precious stones. He sent them into the army of the Hebrews, who were all people of God, so that they would fall into sin with them and that God would cast his ire upon them. The fashionably dressed and well adorned daughters went into the army of the Jews. Many of the Jewish soldiers were so tempted by their beauty that they had sex with them.

The princes of the army took no notice to this, but God was angry and he commanded to Moses that the princes of the army should be hanged for having supported such iniquity. Many were put to death because of this.

The daughters of Moab were full of lustful thoughts, and by making themselves so attractive to the opposite sex with their extravagant garments, they caused men to also have lustful thoughts. Even more alarmingly, it caused the men to act upon their sinful thoughts. This in turn caused the wrath of God which led to the death of a great number of people. The story that appears in the next chapter presents us with another tale in which a woman is at the root of a man's sin. In chapter 60 "Of the Iewe & of the paynym / that were broched with a swerd", a similar fate befalls the army of the sons of Israel. In this story, the daughter of Madyan, who is described as a pagan, dressed herself in the best fashion that she could. She then went into the army of Hebrews to seduce the soldiers. One of the lords of the army caught sight of her and was so tempted by her that he made her come to his tent where he "took his delight" with her. God intended that one of the commanders of the army notice this happening. At once, he put a sword through both their bodies, and they both died shamefully because of the sin of lechery.

In both stories, the women successfully seduced powerful men by dressing in extravagant and expensive clothing, which led the men to their unfortunate fates. Once again, luxurious dress is tied with sexual immorality, which in turn is tied to treachery and military loss, and so on. The sin of luxury, synonymous with lasciviousness and lust, is considered to be one of the most serious of all vices by the Knight of the Tower. Although the terms "luxury" and "lechery" are now perceived as two different things, in the fourteenth century they both meant the same

thing.[88] This meaning of luxury took on its significance in the early Christian era.[89] It took its place as a sin in opposition to the virtues of sobriety and chastity.[90] The sin of luxury for women did not merely affect individual honour, but had wider implications by causing harm to society at large. As stated by Judith M. Bennet and Ruth Mazo Karras in "Women, Gender and Medieval Historians:" "Medieval people considered 'man' the human standard and 'women' peculiarly capable of both extraordinary good, as with the Virgin Mary, and evil, as exemplified by Eve."[91] The woman, as a temptress, who committed sins of the flesh and led men to sin with her, created social disorder. Furthermore, the married woman who committed adultery caused social instability, notably amongst the nobility, because she could give birth to an illegitimate child. This would have serious consequences, especially amongst the aristocracy which highly valued purity of blood in their descendants to legitimize their higher status within society. In a society that only recognized paternal filiations, the nobility could not risk having any doubts surrounding paternity.[92]

Another sin that was deemed to be one of the most serious by the Knight of the Tower is the sin of pride. It manifests itself in many of the stories through a particular narrative arc: a woman, dissatisfied with her appearance in God's image, alters her appearance with excessive apparel and make-up. In many of the stories, the connection between the two sins is made; the sin of pride leads to the sin of luxury, with the disastrous consequences that ensue.[93] Dressing in a sober manner reflects the virtues of chastity and humility, while dressing excessively reflects

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[88] Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 87.
[89] Ibid., 87.
[90] Ibid., 88.
[91] Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, "Women, Gender, and Medieval Historians," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.
[92] Gendt, *L'Art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles*, 155.
[93] Ibid., 160.

the sins of luxury and pride. Within this mindset, the Knight of the Tower chose to end his stories with a severe punishment for offending women. Women dressed in an excessive manner are saddled with cruel and violent punishments for their misdeeds.[94]

The connection between women's pride and men's lechery is made in chapter 51. "Of the good knyght that had thre wyues and of their lyues" tells the story of a knight and the sins of his three wives. The knight is said to be a good man of honest lineage. He had a hermit as an uncle, who was a good and holy man who led a deeply religious life. The knight seeks counsel from the hermit throughout the story.

After the death of his first wife, whom he loved deeply, the knight sought to find some relief from his grief by consulting with his uncle the hermit. The knight asked the hermit if he could pray to God for him to find out if his wife has been damned to hell or if she had been saved. The hermit, taking pity on his nephew, headed to the chapel to pray to God and to request from him that he should show him where the wife was. In a vision, he saw the wife in front of Saint Michael the Archangel and the devil on the other side. The wife was there on a balance, her good deeds with her. On the other side was the devil with all her evil deeds. There were also all her gowns that were made of very fine cloth, Calabrian fur and ermine. The devil cried out that she owned far too many gowns and that she could have done well with half of them. While she was dressed in extravagant clothing, she took not pity on the poor. The devil then spoke of all the vain and evil words that she had spoken during her lifetime which had ruined the reputation of others. The devil put all her sins in the balance and weighed them against all her good deeds. Her sins heavily outweighed all the good she had ever done. And thus, the devil made her put on her gowns that were now burning with fire and took her down to hell, the poor soul crying piteously.

[94] Krueger, "Intergeneric Combination," 63-64.

The holy hermit awoke and told the knight of his vision. He commanded him to give all her gowns to poor people, for God's sake.

In the tale of the knight's third wife, the knight went to the hermit and asked him to do the same as he had done for the two previous wives. In the holy man's prayers and visions, he saw the third wife being held by the hair from the claws of the devil. He held her firmly so that she could not move. The devil put burning needles through her brows that entered into her head, as far as he could push them in. With every thrust of the needle, the third wife screamed out in pain. Another devil then came in to join in the torturing by throwing brands of fire into her face. The devil then proceeded to burn her all over. This vision terrified the hermit greatly. However, the angel watching over this assured the hermit that the wife had deserved this kind of treatment because she had worn makeup during her life to make herself look more fair. The angel stated that she did it out of pride, a sin which causes men to fall into the sin of lechery. She was culpable of altering her appearance from the one that God has given her by painting her face and through her way of dressing. As punishment, a burning brand was going to be placed every day on the areas of her face where she had plucked out hair, and this for a thousand years.

In this story, the wives are damned to hell, humiliated, and cruelly punished for having dressed immoderately and/or for wearing makeup to alter their appearance. This is because the inappropriate dress of these women is associated with the deadly sin of pride. The first wife's pride came at the expense of charity towards the poor. In the case of the third wife, the knight points out that the sin of pride in women leads men to commit the sin of lechery. As in some of the stories that we have seen previously, women are seen as weak and therefore more susceptible to falling into sin, while on the other hand they are held fully responsible for men's reactions towards them.

Dressing in inordinate attire was not only linked to the sin of pride and the sin of luxury, it was also linked to the intent to disguise oneself. This is demonstrated in the story that appears in chapter 48. This is another cautionary tale for women warning them against dressing in new fashions. In the tale "How the hooly bisshop reprysed and taught many ladyes," the Knight of the tower tells the tale of a bishop, who was a holy man, and the sermon that he gave. Some of the ladies who attended his sermons wore dresses styled in new fashions and wore headdresses that were shaped like two horns. The horned headdress style was one that was particularly disliked by moralists and satirical writers. The style had been introduced in England from other regions circa 1420, where it had been worn for some time before that.[95] The prevalence amongst the bishop's congregants of women who wore this sinful headdress led the bishop to tell the story of Noah and the flood. He told them that the deluge and the gathering of water in the days of Noah was due to the pride and disguises of men but even more so those of women, who disguised themselves with new and shameful garments. Then, when the devil saw their great pride and their disguises, he made them fall into the filth of the stinking sin of lechery. This was greatly displeasing to God and therefore he made it rain ceaselessly for forty days and forty nights. It rained so much that the waters covered the earth, ten cubits higher than the highest mountain. The whole world drowned, except for Noah, his wife, his three sons and his three daughters. This huge calamity came upon the world because of that sin.

Noah's flood was the result of the punishment that befell the earth because both men and women (although it is specified that is especially because of women) were dressing too extravagantly, which was demonstrative of their pride and of their intent to disguise themselves. In this case, the punishment took the form of the most catastrophic calamity imaginable: a flood

[95] France Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1926), 104.

in which almost all the world's inhabitants perished. The issue of disguise is brought up in a number of the tales; the fear that clothing can conceal one's true nature and that clothing could be used to fool an deceive others is a concern that also appears in the sumptuary legislation from the period, as we will see below.

The issue of disguise is at the center of the discussion in one of the most interesting tales in *The Knight of the Tower* revolving around clothing. It appears in chapter 62, "Of the roper or maker of cordes and kables and of the fat Pryour." This tale not only associates dress with sexual lust; clothing is also associated here with the intent to disguise and deceive others.

Unlike the other tales told above, it is not based on biblical or moral tales but instead on a fabliau, a comic narrative, which follows a common fabliau theme, the adventures of an adulterous wife and her gullible husband. In this tale, a rope maker's wife begins by paying a bawd (procuress) a little silver to put her in contact with a rich and lecherous prior. For the courtesy of a little gift and a little jewel, the evil bawd made the roper's wife fall into the "evil deed" with the prior. The prior came at night to lie with her, even as her husband slept beside her in the marital bed. As the prior was leaving one night, the fire suddenly flared up and the husband saw him. He was afraid and informed his wife that he had seen a man leaving the room. The wife feigned being also afraid and said that it must have been a goblin or a spirit. Despite her excuses, the roper felt great sadness and melancholy. The malicious wife then went to consult with the bawd and brought her home with her. The bawd managed to convince the gullible husband that his eyes had deceived him and that his wife was truly trustworthy and faithful.

On another occasion, the roper had to wake up early one morning to go to the market. He picked up the prior's breeches, mistaking them for the sack that he usually took with him to the

market. When the roper finally realized that he was carrying another man's breeches rather than his own sack, he was deeply troubled. Meanwhile, the prior who had been hiding under the bed, went to pick up his breeches but found the roper's sack in its place. The wife realized that her husband must have taken the prior's breeches in error. Not knowing what to do, the wife went to find the bawd and asked for her help. The bawd devised a ruse: she would put on breeches, as would the wife, and she would convince the roper that all women wore them in order to protect their chastity. When the bawd saw the roper returning from the market, she asked him why he looked so sad and if he has lost anything. He told her what was troubling him. She began to laugh and reassured him that there was no one more faithful and honorable than his wife. She told the roper that women in town had taken to wearing breeches to dissuade lechers and seducers who force their will on good women. She then pulled up her clothes to show him the breeches that she was wearing. As he saw this, the gullible roper believed that she spoke the truth. This was the second time that the bawd had successfully convinced the roper that his wife was not deceiving him.

In the end, however, evil deeds do come to light. One time, the roper saw his wife go to the prior's house alone. He threatened her but it was no use; she kept returning to visit the prior. On another occasion, the roper pretended to go out but hid instead. He saw his wife head to the prior's house, and proceeded to break both her legs. This did not stop her from seeing the prior, who would regularly visit her, even whilst she lay in bed with her husband. On one final occasion, the roper heard them as they performed the "fowl sin of lechery." The husband became very angry, drew a great knife with a sharp point and killed them both.

This story about a gullible husband being repeatedly deceived by his wife, quickly turns near the end into a violent tale of retribution. If the ending seems a little bit unnatural considering

the tone of the rest of the story, it is because the Knight changed the ending of the fabliau from which this story is drawn. Instead of having the comical tone of the fabliau, the knight gives the story a moralizing ending.[96] While the thirteenth century fabliau version of this tale had put an emphasis on the cleverness of the wife and the foolishness of the roper, the Knight's retelling allows for the roper to kill his wife and the clerk. The story makes explicit that the roper's neighbours agree with his extreme actions: the killings are justified and he is therefore not punished for the crime.[97]

As in the other stories seen above, women who sin are cruelly punished for their misdeeds. The story has been altered to fit this model. Furthermore, the moralizing tale has the misogynist tone of the stories that we have seen previously. The emphasis is placed on how ugly the prior is versus the roper. Therefore, the only justification possible for the roper's wife engaging in adultery with the prior is because she is drawn by the "foul sin of lechery." She is, naturally, more susceptible to such behaviour because she is a woman, a lesser being unable to control herself.[98]

This story also highlights fears about clothing permitting people to disguise their intentions and present themselves as other than they are. In this case, the breeches are used as a tool by the wife to convince her husband that she has not committed the sin of lechery. She falsely proves her female honour by wearing men's clothes, which counter-intuitively are presented as being the most chaste of women's garments. The item of clothing (the breeches) is the tool of deception which allows her to present herself as an honorable woman when she is quite the opposite. Furthermore, the part of the story in which the wife manages to convince her

[96] Gendt, *L'Art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles*, 126.
[97] McSheffrey, "Whoring Priests and Godly Citizens," 52-53.
[98] Ibid., 53.

husband that all women have taken to wearing breeches can be seen as an example of the kind of innovations in fashions in dress that the knight deplored.[99]

The story is interesting because it points to anxieties about people presenting themselves as other than they are. The ability for clothing to deceive and to disguise one's identity was another deep concern in late medieval society. This anxiety went beyond the fear outlined previously that clothing would allow people to dress above their stature within society (the main emphasis of sumptuary legislation, as will be seen below). In this case, the story points to a more subtle form of deception. It is the disguise of one's dishonorable intentions rather than the disguise of their identity. Nevertheless, the story speaks not only of the ability of clothing to propel the person adorning them into sin, but also the power of clothing as a tool of deception.

The *Book of the Knight of the Tower* is far from alone amongst late medieval conduct literature in reflecting concerns about dress. As we have seen previously in the *Knight of the Tower*, women's style of dress was targeted because it was seen as a reflection of the quality of their morals, and because the Knight's didactic text was dedicated to the education of his daughter (and by extension, all young elite women). However, we should not deduce from this that concerns about excessive sexual display were in general only addressed to women. Although much of the scholarship on the issue has focused on dress in relation to women, the following texts, as well at the legislation we will be analysing in the following section, clearly demonstrates a deep concern also with how men dressed and in particular how men were putting their bodies on display. Restrictions on how men dressed were not just about determining rank and status. Clothing was seen as reflective of sexual ethics, in both men and women. Writers and

[99] Krueger, "Intergeneric Combination," 67.

moralists expressed disgust with the new styles that had reached England in the late medieval period and ridiculed those who wore them.

The following is a poem from the late fourteenth century that highlights the ridicule of those who dress in extravagant styles. It appears in British Library, Harley MSS 536 and 941. The English translation is provided by Gale Owen-Crocker for the Middle English and Ruth Briggs for the Latin[100]:

> Broader than ever God made, they puff out their shoulders artificially;
> They are narrow, though they seem broad, these gents have the 'new look'
> They wear a new fashion, with the shoulders sat at the back of the chest;
> God's creation, therefore, does not please these people.
> Wide and high collars, their necks are prepared for the sword;
> Be mindful of the prophecy proclaimed against such people.
> Long spurs on their heels, they adore the points of their boots;
> They think it suits well, but not according to the rule of Salisbury.
> The hose have a strict band, the legs are caught in a noose by the body;
> They may not, I suppose, bend the knee without difficulty;
> When others kneel offering up prayers to Christ,
> They stand on their heels unable to bend.
> For fear of damaging their hose they go to great lengths not to bend;
> I believe for the sake of their long toes they pray while standing even on holy days.
> They impede many men and they cause much trouble at the altars by their standing;
> They get Christ's curse except when God sometimes pursues them.
> Wantonly, their breasts they protrude in a unholy fashion;
> Neither preacher nor priests can deter these vanities.
> With large points [laces] they fasten their shoes, as fashion dictates,
> Now short now long, behold, they vary like the wind.
> Their slit sleeves expose their knobby elbows
> They look like snared birds in frost and snow. [101]

This poem demonstrates that concerns about the moral dimension of clothing applied to both men and women. Women are said to be vain and sexually immodest because they wear clothing

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[100] Louise M. Sylvester, Mark C. Chambers and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, eds., *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*: *A Multilingual Sourcebook* (Boydel and Brewer, 2004), 166.
[101] Ibid., 166-167.

that allows their breasts to protrude. However, most of the poem is dedicated to how men are dressed. They wear clothing that make their shoulders look bigger, thus altering the appearance of their bodies from its natural shape, as God intended it to be. The poem criticizes the men's clothing, described as being so tight that it does not allow them to bend. The pointed shoes that were in style for men at this time are ridiculed. To remain fashionable with their 'long toes,' it is said that men do their prayers while standing, even on the holy days. Therefore, clothing has the ability to distract people from adequately performing their religious duties. This poem echoes a commonly expressed concern in sermons and other social commentary from this period; that new and extravagant styles of dress were threatening morality.

As we saw previously in *The Knight of the Tower*, concerns about the threat to sexual morality caused by excess in apparel were directed at women. However, the following texts clearly demonstrate that this concern was also prevalent when it came to how men were dressing. The poem "A Dispitison bitwene a God Man and þe Devel" appears in the Vernon Manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet.a.1). The poem is about the seven deadly sins and this particular extract is about the sin of pride. The translation is provided by Louise Sylvester.[102]

> Ornamented hoods and also cloaks, all that disgusting pride will bring them to grief. They strive for God's goodness with it: and turn to filth that which might help them greatly -wretched poor men. Now none of them is worth a fart unless he carries a basilard hanging by his side, and a swine's belly, and it is all for pride. God's rage, a stirrup is knitted on his cap but he has not got an inch to sit on. He has much suffering and great cold on his arse: men could see his genitals, if he were to tear his underwear.
> And also these women who practice so much pride with horns on their heads, pinned on each side, made of an old hat, and of a little tree, they wear their turned back and trimmed gites tight, with silk veils worn above: to be on display - everything is of the new fashion. It is of little value. They think they are very beautiful, but they are incredibly ugly. And they should think of their modesty

[102] Louise M. Sylvester, Mark C. Chambers and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, eds., *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*, 164-165.

> and how disgusting they are in soul and in body, they should make their cheeks red with their weeping.

The author of this passage presents embellished clothing, such as ornamented hoods and cloaks, as a manifestation of the sin of pride. The concern here is about both men and women putting their bodies on display: in fact, the anxiety about the way these fashions display men's bodies, and in particular their genitals, is much more pointed and sexual than the worries about women's headdresses. This demonstrates that concerns about dress being related to sinful and devious behaviour was in no way limited to women.

Even more explicitly expressed concern with men putting themselves on display in a sexually suggestive manner can be found in a mid-fifteenth century text, *Loci e libro veritatum.* The author Thomas Gascoigne comments on what he sees as being the vices of his age. The translation is provided by Ruth Briggs and Mark Chambers:[103]

> Adornment
>
> For that finery is expensive and unnecessary and revealing, baring a woman's bosoms and flaunting a colouring falsely acquired by rouge, i.e. by an unguent; and the finery of men, as just recently introduced since the year 1429, has caused too many evils, in arrogance, in fornication, in adultery, in sodomy, as is known in all too many ways. For men show off the shape of their thighs and their genitals through the slit in their gown, and do not now use breeches, but stockings, in which the shape of the size of their members is displayed in a shameful fashion. Such finery firstly leads to many sins and distracts the minds, when they should be thinking about the Lord, to the worst desires and the evil acts.
>
> Also, [such finery leads] to shameful speech, which deserves condemnation, and to immodest touching, which binds the soul in the ardour of lust and takes the mind from its freedom into captivity.

[103] Louise M. Sylvester, Mark C. Chambers and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, eds., *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*, 152-153.

We will note here that there is much more concern in this passage about the lust excited by men's clothing than by women's clothing. There is an explicitly stated fear that men's revealing clothing could incite the sin of others, such as "fornication," "adultery" and "sodomy."

Thomas Hoccleve's *The Regiment of Princes*, a Middle English poem, also contains sections that express strong disapproval of the extravagant styles of dress of men, but for different reasons. The following section of the poem brings up the issue of impersonation and of men wearing clothing that is not considered suitable for their social standing. Hoccleve laments the fact that it is no longer possible to distinguish between men of different social classes because of this. The following extracts are drawn from Blyth's edition (1999: 51-5), which is based on BL, Arundel MS 38. The translation is provided by Louise Sylvester.[104] We will see how concerns expressed here about men dressing above their status will be reflected in the sumptuary legislation of the late medieval period as well:

> No, truly, son, it is all wickedness, I think, so poor a man to impersonate his lord in his clothing; in my opinion it stinks. Certainly, great lords are to blame, if I dare say, who let their men usurp such aristocratic dress; it is not worthy, my child, without doubt.
>
> Some time ago men could tell lords from other people by their clothes, but now a man might study and ponder for a long time which is which. O lord it is up to you to amend this, for it is for your benefit; if there is no difference in dress between you and your men, your honour is less.[105]

Hoccleve is also concerned in *Regiment of Princes* that men's taste for finery and extravagant clothing would lead to a general impoverishment across England, another theme that we will see mirrored in the sumptuary legislation from that period. As Hoccleve puts it:

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[104] Louise M. Sylvester, Mark C. Chambers and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, eds., *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*, 168.
[105] Ibid., 171.

> In the old days, when a small amount of clothing was enough for a high rank or household, great houses were well filled with food; but now households are slender and lean, for all the good that men may reap or glean is wasted on outrageous outfits, so that men cannot keep their households.
>
> Pride would much rather carry a hungry mouth to bed than be outraged by lack of fine clothing. He sets not price by the law of measures, nor takes cloth, food or wages. Moderation is out of the country on a pilgrimage; but I suppose he will return before long, for need will drive us to it.[106]

Similar concerns come up in Peter Idley's *Instructions to his Son*. Idley was a gentleman falconer and under-keeper of the royal mews and falcons before becoming the Controller of the King's Works throughout the kingdom.[107] *Instructions to his Son* was written around 1450 and is drawn from a limited number of sources. Book II, from which the following extracts are drawn, is based on Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* and John Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes.* The translation is provided by Louise Sylvester:[108]

> I will tell you again if inordinate pride is now in practice. Never more, I think, since God was born, and in every degree and each estate. First to begin with the head, the hair is not cut but hangs down to the forehead like the top of an Irish horse: we are called true 'apes' by every nation.
>
> Then go further, to the shape of their clothes: they are cut on the buttocks even above the rump. Every good man truly hates this shape; it makes the body as short as a stump, and if they should bend, kneel, or crouch, the gown will not reach to the middle of the back: would to God that they were then without hose or breeches.
>
> A man will now not know a knave from a knight, for they are both alike in dress and apparel, in new silk doublets stretching right up, and few pennies in their purses, I think, to pay. No matter how it is got, as long as the garment is bright. This makes them learn the craft of a thief and to blot every page of the paupers of London.[109]

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[106] Louise M. Sylvester, Mark C. Chambers and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, eds., *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain*, 173.
[107] Ibid., 182.
[108] Ibid., 182.
[109] Ibid., 185-187.

Again, we have the recurring themes of not being able to distinguish between people of different social ranks because they are beginning to dress in the same manner. The men are altering their appearance through their clothing into unnatural shapes. The author ridicules these new styles and shows contempt (maybe even anxiety) for the short style of men's clothing which allows for their buttocks to show. Furthermore, with their lust for new fashions, they are impoverishing the English realm, a concern that we will see similarly expressed in the sumptuary legislation of the period.

The stories that we have analyzed thus far point to the various types of negative behaviour that inappropriate dress either incites or demonstrates. Luxurious dress was often associated with foreignness, and therefore also with lewd sexual behaviour and prostitution. As there was a general dislike of foreigners, sexual impropriety was often linked to people outside of the realm. Women's elaborate dress was also thought to excite pride, which was seen as dangerous because it could incite men's lust. In the case of many stories seen in *The Knight of the Tower*, women are paradoxically seen as being meek and therefore more susceptible to sin, while simultaneously being full of lust and capable of causing men to fall into sin (which suggests that women were full agents). The sin of pride and the sin of lust are often interconnected in the stories that we have seen, both in men and in women. Furthermore, since clothing was seen as a reflection of the self, clothing was also considered to be a dangerous tool of deception. It was seen as capable of concealing one's poor intentions and of masking one's identity. Overall, moralists and other writers admonished their contemporaries against excess in apparel because dress was an important signifier on various levels: it was seen as a reflection of one's sexual ethics and it was a powerful way to advertise one's status. The fact that there was concern about how men were putting themselves on display is made apparent. Men were dressing in hyper-

sexualized ways, which moralists deplored. This suggests that concerns about excess in apparel were not limited to women. On the contrary, the ways that men were dressing was of great concern to medieval contemporaries, and perhaps of even greater concern than how women were dressing. This will be made further apparent when we look at the sumptuary legislation from this period in the next section.

SUMPTUARY LEGISLATION IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Late medieval English people wrote, read, and heard moral treatises and stories that explained how inappropriate clothing − apparel that was too costly, too sensuous, too revealing − led to sin, social confusion, and economic ruin. It is not too surprising, then, that lawmakers in late medieval England, as in other parts of Europe, attempted to control and supervise what people could wear through sumptuary legislation. The period between 1300 and 1600 ushered in a great age of sumptuary legislation in Europe. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines sumptuary law as a law regulating expenditure, especially with a view to restraining excess in food, dress. equipage, and so forth. The word *sumptus* means "expense." While this type of legislation did not originate in late Medieval Europe, (the classical Greek and Roman worlds had had these types of laws, for instance), nonetheless this period marks a dramatic surge in the abundance, detail and repetitiveness of legislation revolving around dress and display.[110] Hunt points to the continuities between the classical and medieval periods in the type of legislation, while also stressing how clothing in particular became a primary target in legislation from the late medieval period onwards. Ancient regulations of consumption included restrictions on a broader array of kinds of display, but by the late medieval period, the focus came to be exclusively on dress.[111]

Throughout Europe in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, princes, urban magistrates and church officials sought to control and contain the display of luxury.[112] Legislators were concerned not only with social disorder but also the disintegration of good

[110] Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe*, 212-213.
[111] Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions,* 27.
[112] Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe*, 208.

morals.[113] To what do we owe such an increase of sumptuary legislation in Europe, and more specifically for our interests in England in the late medieval period? The shift in focus in sumptuary legislation from household items to clothing seems to demonstrate a greater concern with how people presented themselves outwardly to their contemporaries in the public sphere. It also reflects the change in clothing styles that took place in the mid-fourteenth century and the related shift in availability of clothing as a consumer good. In this first section, we will look at who sought to have this type of legislation implemented and what they hoped to achieve through such measures.

Sumptuary laws in late medieval England appeared in various forms, which makes it difficult to define them precisely. There were various kinds of laws and ordinances, promulgated by different bodies, attempting to regulate clothing such as parliamentary statutes, royal ordinances and proclamations, civic or town ordinances, and guild regulations, just to name a few examples.

For this study we will be looking at parliamentary legislation. The roots of the sumptuary legislation found in the Statutes of the Realm from the late medieval period can be found in the commons petition, a request for legislation presented to parliament by members of the House of Commons (sometimes on behalf of a particular interest group). Those that were adopted formed the basis of statutory legislation. These petitions are interesting to scholars because they offer insight into the demands made towards royal government.[114] By analyzing the rhetoric in these petitions, we can obtain better insight into both the political and ideological motives of different

[113] Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe*, 208.
[114] Mark W. Ormrod, "Introduction: Medieval Petitions in Context," in *Medieval Petitions Grace and Grievance*, ed. Mark W. Omrod, Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2009), 3.

social groups. These petitions offer rich evidence for a better understanding of late medieval English society.

For our purposes, we will look at parliamentary petitions that focused on limiting consumption and controlling what different social groups could wear according to their rank. An analysis of rhetoric will allow for a better understanding of the motives behind such legislation (which, we shall see, are quite complex and varied). To begin, we will look at the Parliament Roll of 1363. We will note that the issue of people dressing above their estate is related to the problem of the rising cost of victuals, an issue for which the commons sought to find a remedy.

In 1363, under the rule of Edward III, a Commons petition requested that Parliament take action in regulating trade. It was requested that the quality of food and clothing that could be purchased would be regulated.[115] This demonstrates that in the mid-fourteenth century, the attempts to regulate excess in consumption were not exclusively focused on clothing.

One of the requests made by the commons was for fixed upper-limits on the prices of victuals. While this is not a sumptuary law − but rather, an attempted price control − we must take note of this because the sumptuary law that followed it is linked to this issue. The part of the common petition requesting that upper limits be fixed on the prices for victuals appears as follows:

> 21. Also, that it may please the king and his council that small victuals such as capons, hens, chickens and other such victuals shall be fixed at a suitable price, so far as can reasonably be done, in ease and profit of our said lord the king and other lords and commons; and it seems to the said commons, if it may please our lord the king and his council and the other lords of the land, that the price of one young capon should not exceed 3d. and an old capon 4d., a hen 2d., a chicken 1d., a goose 4d.; and in places where the sale price of such victuals is less, it shall

[115] Chris Given-Wilson, ed., *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England* (London: British History Online, 2010), http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/parliament-rolls-medieval, Parl. Oct. 1363, "Introduction."

> remain without being raised by this ordinance. And that in towns and markets in the country they shall be sold at a lesser price, according as can be agreed between the buyer and the seller.[116]

The high price of food is also addressed in the sumptuary legislation which appears in the twenty-fifth item of the petition:

> Also, the commons declare: that whereas the prices of various victuals within the realm are greatly increased because various people of various conditions wear various apparel not appropriate to their estate; that is to say, grooms wear the apparel of craftsman, and craftsmen wear the apparel of gentlemen, and gentlemen wear the apparel of esquires, and esquires wear the apparel of knights, the one and the other wear fur which only properly belongs to lords and knights, poor and other women *[col. b]* wear the dress of ladies, and poor clerks wear clothes like those of the king and other lords. Thus the aforesaid merchandises are at a much greater price than they should be, and the treasure of the land is destroyed, to the great damage of the lords and the commonalty. Wherefore they pray remedy, if it is the opinion of the lords of the council.[117]

The rising price of food, then, is linked with the problem of people dressing beyond their stations. The statute does not indicate precisely how the two are linked, although the terms of the petition suggest that in their lust for more fashionable clothes the lower orders were demanding higher prices for food. While a strange logic seems to be at work here, this passage does demonstrate a strong desire to regulate trade and control dress; the free market was erasing social distinctions between different groups.

The petition was met favourably, and as a result detailed sumptuary legislation was enacted (discussed below), which sought to control both dress and food consumption according to social degree. The restrictions on victuals in the 1363 statute was rare in late medieval sumptuary laws, which generally focused exclusively on dress. In giving his assent to the statute, the king echoed the petition's language in decrying "the excess in dress of people beyond

[116] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, ¶21.
[117] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, ¶25.

their estate, to the very great destruction and impoverishment of the land, for which reason all the wealth of the realm is on the point of being consumed and destroyed."[118]

This passage suggests that extravagant spending is a major cause of economic ruin and implicitly equates sensible dress with economic prudence.[119]

The 1363 statute delineated a detailed set of specific restrictions on what members of certain social classes could wear, elaborating both social categories and the cost, materials, and decorations (such as precious stones) of the garments those different social groups could wear and the food they could eat. This makes it clear that the goal was not to limit consumption overall, but rather to limit consumption for people according to their social position. For example, grooms (whether they be the servants of lords, craftsmen, or artisans), were not to eat meat or fish more than once a day and were to eat other victuals "in accordance to their estate." They were not to wear anything gold or silver. They were not allowed to spend more than 2 marks (£1 6s 8d) on the whole cloth for their clothing and shoes. The legislation then went on to detail what amount of money other social groups were allowed to spend on clothing, and placed restrictions on what type of fabrics each group was allowed to wear. Craftsmen and yeomen were not allowed to wear clothing or shoes more expensive than 40s. They were not to wear precious stones, silk, or embroidered apparel. Esquires and gentlemen below the estate of a knight who made less than £100 a year from their lands could not wear cloth of gold, silk, silver or any type of fur. Wealthier men from this group were allowed more leeway in their vestimentary choices; they could spend more money on clothing and were allowed to have apparel "reasonably decorated with silver." No mention was made of limiting their consumption of victuals. Concerns with food consumptions were limited to the lower echelons of society (e.g.

[118] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, ¶25 "Answer."
[119] Howell, *Commerce before Capitalism*, 218.

grooms, servants, ploughmen, shepherds). Clothing restrictions were also placed on the urban classes according to their income:

> 28. Also, that merchants, citizens and burgesses, artisans and craftsmen, within the city of London as well as elsewhere, who clearly have goods and chattels to the value of £500, and their wives and children, may take and wear in the same manner as the esquires and gentlemen who have land and rent to the value of £100 a year. And that the merchants, citizens and burgesses who clearly have goods and chattels above the value of £1000, and their wives and children, may take and wear in the same manner as the esquires *[p. ii-279][col. a]* and gentlemen who have land and rent to the value of £200 a year. And that no groom, yeoman or servant of merchants, artisans or craftsmen may wear in apparel otherwise than is ordained above for the grooms and yeomen of lords.[120]

This part of the legislation allowed the wealthiest members of the bourgeoisie (those with goods worth over £500) to dress in the same fashion as knights who have land of £100 value or under. It also orders that the same dress restrictions that are imposed on the servants of lords be placed on the servants of merchants, artisans and craftsmen. This demonstrates shifting power dynamics in late medieval society, and attempts by certain social groups to assert themselves and their position within society. This can be seen as an attempt to claim that the wealthiest members of the merchant class were equivalent to different grades of the aristocracy. The following part of the legislation attempts to do so by setting controls on what knights who have land up to the value of 200 marks (about £133) a year may wear: they were not to wear "cloth of gold or a cloak, mantle or gown lined with pure miniver, sleeves of ermine or any apparel embroidered with precious stones or otherwise." As we saw previously was the case with esquires and gentlemen, wealthier members of a specific social grouping were allowed more fashion choices: knight who had land above the value of 400 marks (about £266) were allowed to dress as they

[120] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, ¶28.

pleased, with the exception of wearing ermine, weasel-fur and previous stones which could only be used on their heads:

> 29. Also, that knights who have land or rent within the value of 200 marks a year may take and wear cloth of 6 marks for the whole cloth for their clothing, and nothing of a higher price. And they may not wear cloth of gold, or a cloak, mantle or gown lined with pure miniver, sleeves of ermine or any apparel embroidered with precious stones or otherwise. And that their wives, daughters and children shall be of the same condition, and that they shall not wear reveres of ermine, or adornments of weasel-fur, or any manner of apparel of precious stones, except for their heads. But that all knights and ladies who have land or rent above the value of 400 marks a year up to the sum of £1000 a year shall dress at their will, with the exception of ermine, weasel-fur and apparel of precious stones, and these only on their heads.[121]

While it was the commons that requested that such legislation be put into place, the detailed gradation of society in which rank dictated what one could wear was left to the council to decide, according to Chris Given-Wilson.[122] This demonstrates the complexity of the medieval hierarchy, as the council sought to produce certain equivalences between the landed gentry and mercantile society.[123]

Dyer argues that the commons in parliament that petitioned for the 1363 legislation had been driven to do so because of the problem of rising prices. The commons was composed of the gentry and the leading townsmen. They believed that the stretching demand from wage-earners and other upwardly-mobile members of society for goods that they could not have afforded formerly had caused prices to rise. Dyer sees the sumptuary legislation that arose in 1363 as a reflection of the economic psychology of the elites who believed that consumption patterns

[121] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, ¶29.
[122] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, "Introduction."
[123] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, "Introduction."

should be reflected in the social hierarchy to guarantee a well-ordered society.[124] He identifies this sumptuary law as being the product of that concern, but also as being a reflection of a more generalized moral crisis caused by the Black Death.[125] The moral dimension of the concern surrounding how people dress mirrors what we have seen previously in the literature from the late medieval period.

Although the petition and the legislation that resulted from it seem to have reflected real (if not entirely articulated) concerns about consumption and its relation to hierarchy, the economy, and morals, it nonetheless did not last. The 1363 sumptuary statute was annulled by Parliament two years later.[126] The commons argued in 1365 that despite the legislation, prices has risen instead of fallen.[127] The commons indicated − in contradiction to the previous complaints − that restrictions in what we might call market forces were not producing lower prices but instead were producing higher ones. This included both restrictions in occupational mobility (measures that had forbidden people from working in more than one trade) and the sumptuary legislation. In asking for the statute to be repealed, the petitioners proposed:

> that all people, of whatever estate or condition they may be, may freely determine their consumption of victuals and apparel for themselves, their wives, children and servants in the manner that seems best to them for their own profit, without being impeached for this by any means whatsoever for things done in time past as well as in times to come.[128]

This part of the petition demonstrates that the MP's in parliament at this time themselves believed that dress should not be legislated and that it should be left to the head of each

[124] Christopher Dyer, *Standard of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England*, *C. 1200-1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 88.
[125] Christopher Dyer, *Standard of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 88.
[126] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, "Introduction."
[127] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, "Introduction."
[128] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Jan. 1365, ¶ 11. II.

household to regulate these matters. The request to repeal the 1363 sumptuary legislation was met favourably by the Crown, and the statute was accordingly annulled.

The records that survive do not give us any precision about who proposed the sumptuary restrictions in the first place, nor about who petitioned to have it repealed. These could have been different or even opposing factions amongst MPs, or it could have been the same people who changed their opinion once they saw the effects of the imposed restrictions. In any case, the voice of the king and people in parliament placed more importance on their economic interests over maintaining clear visual markers of social hierarchy in an attempt to restore the pre-plague social order.[129] This seems to demonstrate a certain ambivalence towards the formal regulation of dress by law, an ambivalence that is further evinced by the fact that there was not another general parliamentary statute restricting apparel for another century.

The failure of the 1363 legislation is in part due to the fact that the elite only partially understood the complex societal changes that were taking place around them.[130] In any case, the social orders represented in the parliamentary commons were not going to insist on setting limits to the amount of money certain social groups could spend on clothing and stating what types of fabrics and colours they could wear if it proved to be incompatible with their own economic interests (which it did). Much of the wealth of the burgesses in Parliament was derived from the luxury cloth trade, and thus shrinking their market was not in their interest.[131]

It was only in 1463 that sumptuary legislation was issued again. Between 1365 and 1463, occasional attempts were made to legislate dress −although it also has to be noted that these

[129] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, "Introduction."
[130] Dyer, *Standard of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 88.
[131] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Oct. 1363, "Introduction."

attempts were unsuccessful. In 1379, under the reign of Richard II, a Commons petition requested that dress according to rank be legislated:

> 55. Item, that no man or woman within the said kingdom, except knights and ladies, shall wear any kind of fur, cloth of gold, or ribbon of gold, or cloth of silk, if they cannot spend £40 a year, on pain of forfeiting whatever they wear if they contravene this.[132]

No attempt to control prices was made as in the 1363 Act, and no mention was made of food items. This item seems to be exclusively concerned with maintaining visual markers of social hierarchy within society. The request was met neither favorably nor unfavorably; rather the roll recorded that "the king will consider it further before the next Parliament."[133] The fact that no sumptuary legislation was presented at the next parliament suggests that this was a low priority item and thus that there was a certain ambivalence towards formal controls of dress. A form of sumptuary legislation was issued in 1420, but it was very limited in scope. In this year, a commons petition was presented which requested that:

> no person shall gild any scabbards called sheaths, or any metal, except with silver; nor silver-plate any metal except the spurs of knights, and all the apparel that pertains to a baron or man of higher estate; on pain of forfeiting life and limb, and all his lands and tenements in fee-simple, and goods and chattels, by the aforesaid gilder or silver-plater, as in a case of felony.[134]

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[132] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Apr. 1379, ¶55.
[133] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Apr. 1379, "Introduction."
[134] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. Dec. 1420, ¶18. 'Henry V: December 1420.'

The punishment was probably seen as excessive because the response was to agree to this legislation while amending the penalties that one could incur for not obeying the law. The petition became law in its amended form.[135]

This only occasional appearance of dress issues in parliament suggests that they were not a high priority. However, it is difficult to know what people thought the legislative status of clothing was. As we saw previously, prescriptive literature from the period indicates that there was a concern about what clothing meant and its potential to bring about sin, ambiguities about identity, and general disorder. On the next occasion when sumptuary legislation was presented in parliament in 1463, the preamble to the petition lamented not that there were no laws, but rather that the "statues and ordinances" on the subject were not being enforced. This may have resulted from genuine confusion − or it may have been a rhetorical tool used to pretend that there were longstanding laws rather than to openly introduce new ones.

In 1463, the issue of dress resurfaced in parliament with some sense of urgency. The statute issued in that year included exhaustive measures to curtail excess in dress amongst certain classes. Let us begin with the similarities with the sumptuary legislation of 1363. The fear of "excess in apparel" leading to the impoverishment of the realm is a theme that remains present in the later legislation. The association between inappropriate dress for one's status and its negative impact on the English realm remains a strong rhetorical tool used in the Common petition. One of the main reasons given for the need of this type of legislation is that people who dress luxuriously are contributing to "the enrichment of foreign realms and countries, and the complete destruction of the husbandry of this your realm."[136] This brings together the concerns about the

[135] Frances Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore, John Hopkins, 1926), 96-97.
[136] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, ¶20.

dangers excessive spending on clothing brings to the health of the domestic economy with economic protectionism.[137]

Another of the reasons stated in the sumptuary legislation for the importance of having such laws is that people were wearing clothing that was not appropriate for them was "to the great displeasure of God." This justification is aligned with the venerable critique of luxury and excessive displays of wealth drawn from Christian morality,[138] illustrated as we saw above in the conduct literature and moralizing texts from the late medieval period.

Much like the sumptuary legislation that preceded it, the text in the 1463 petition goes on to place restrictions on who could wear what according to their rank. Again, it is to be noted that no mention is made in this commons petition of victuals. The sumptuary legislation has become exclusively focused on dress. The restrictions on the type of fabrics and cuts that can be used according to one's rank and occupation are very detailed, and financial penalties for those who do not obey the rules are introduced (in 1363, the suggested penalty was to forfeit clothing that did not respect the law to the King). The penalties may have been introduced to try to make this type of legislation enforceable. While the legislation is explicitly directed at men, it is stated that wives and children are to follow the same rules as their head of household.

Knights below the status of a lord are not to wear any cloth of gold or fur of sable. They are not to wear velvet, unless they are from a specific order. Nor are they allowed to wear any kind of purple silk cloth. Esquires, gentlemen, and everyone else below the degree of knight are not allowed to wear velvet, satin brocade, or any fabrics simulating them. They cannot wear any fur of ermine. Except for certain exceptions, no esquire or gentleman is to use or wear any

[137] Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism*, 218.
[138] Ibid., 214.

damask or satin. No one without possessions above £40 annually can use or wear any furs of martens, beech martens, lettice, trimmed grey or miniver. They are also forbidden from having any girdle trimmed with gold or silver gilt, or a silk band made outside of England. Headcloths should not exceed the price of 3s 4d for people within this level of income.

The proposed legislation goes on to list other fabrics that are forbidden to other groups of people, such as agricultural workers and common laborers. As we saw earlier, non-skilled workers had more earning and purchasing power in a post-Black Death society. Their ability to purchase and wear more expensive clothing in more elaborate colours and fabrics was not well received by the upper echelons of society. The petition sought to redress this situation:

> And also to ordain and decree by the said authority that no agricultural worker, or common labourer, or servant of any craftsman living outside a city or borough, after the aforesaid feast of All Saints, shall use or wear in their clothing any cloth which costs more than 2s. the broad yard; and that none of the same servants or labourers shall allow their wives to wear or use, from the same feast, any clothing of higher price than specified above for their husbands; or that they allow their said wives, after the same feast, to use or wear any headcloths of which the price per length exceeds 12d.; or that any of the same servants or labourers, after the same feast, use or wear any joined hose, or any hose costing more than 14d. the pair; or that the same servants or labourers, or their wives, from the same feast, wear any girdle trimmed with silver; on pain of forfeiting 40d to your highness for every offence.[139]

While the concerns highlighted in the sumptuary legislation of 1363 seem to primarily demonstrate a concern with limiting excess in consumption, the 1463 legislation points to other motives. This exclusive focus on dress and the detail with which the ornaments, fabrics and style of clothing are legislated according to one's occupation and rank seems to demonstrate a great concern with preserving a strict social hierarchy; legislating clothing would be a way of

[139] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, ¶20.

imposing structure in a chaotic world in which "both men and women have worn and daily wear extravagant and inappropriate clothing."

The petition's provisions do make some significant exceptions to the restrictions on dress by social station, exempting members of the clergy, those working in the justice system, university scholars and aristocratic retainers. It could be argued that sumptuous clothing was permitted for these people because it was demonstrative of the importance of the institutions that the men wearing them were representing rather their own personal status − that they were in effect livery rather than personal clothing:

> Provided always that this ordinance of array shall in no way prejudice or harm anyone with regard to using or wearing any adornment, vesture or apparel in celebrating and serving at divine service; nor shall this ordinance extend to the justices of any of your benches, the master or keeper of your rolls, masters of your chancery, barons of your exchequer, or the present or future chancellor of the same, or to any of them. Provided also that the scholars of the universities of this realm, and the scholars of any university outside this realm, may use and wear such array as they are allowed to use and wear by the rules of the said universities; notwithstanding this act. Provided also that no henchmen, heralds, pursuivants, swordbearers to mayors, messengers and minstrels, or any of them, or players in their interludes, shall be included in this act; [...]Provided also that this act shall not extend in any way to any kind of *[p. v-506][col. a]* array necessary in war, or in feats of arms. (fn. v-496-176-1)[140]

All the demands were met favourably by the King:

> The king has granted this petition and all the articles contained in the same; and he wills that the ordinance to be made on this shall not take effect before the feasts named in the same, which will be in the year 1465. (fn. v-496-179-1)[141]

So far, the sumptuary legislation of the late medieval period seems to be demonstrative of a desire amongst those represented in parliament to maintain visual markers of social differences.

[140] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, ¶20.
[141] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, ¶20 "Answer."

In a society where more people had access to greater wealth, the clothing that people were wearing was not as clear a marker of one's social position, as it had been in the pre-Black Death society. Because of the explosion of affordable wearables, clothing was seen to have become a less reliable visual marker of status as the lines between different social groups were being blurred. The legislation is also demonstrative of a strong desire to encourage commerce and trade while protecting the interests of certain groups. However, a telling sign that the concerns raised in legislation around dress go far beyond the issues of economic protectionism, commerce and maintaining social hierarchy, can be found in the detail of the legislation. The focus has shifted from the price and the quantity of cloth to the style of clothing worn. This demonstrates a shift towards a concern of what is perceived to be in "good taste" according to one's social position.

Let us consider the following segment of the petition, which requests that revealing clothing for men be forbidden for all those who are below the rank of a lord:

> And further to ordain and decree that no knight below the status of lord, esquire, gentleman or any other person shall use or wear, from the feast of All Saints next, any gown, jacket or cloak which is of such a length that when he stands upright it does not cover his private parts and buttocks, on pain of forfeiting 20s. to your highness for every offence.[142]

This legislation seeks to place limits on the styles of clothing for men that we saw being ridiculed in the conduct literature from the period. As we saw previously, tighter fitting and revealing clothing had come into fashion in the mid-fourteenth century and had become particularly fashionable in the mid-fifteenth century. This legislation requests that only a very limited number of people be allowed to put their bodies on display in such a manner. Wearing

[142] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, ¶20.

fashionable and suggestive clothing was demonstrative of phallic pride and accentuated masculinity.[143] Provocative displays in dress demonstrated one's status and wealth.[144]

The section of the sumptuary legislation that revolves around pointed shoes is also demonstrative of this. The following segment of the Commons petition sought to ban shoes with points of more than two inches for anyone except Lords:

> And also to ordain and decree that no knight below the status of lord, esquire, gentleman or other person shall use or wear, from the said feast of St Peter, any shoes or boots with points longer than two inches, on pain of forfeiting 40d to your highness for every offence.[145]

It also sought to impose a penalty on cobblers who made pointed shoes or boots for anyone below the status of lord:

> And also to ordain and decree that if any cobbler makes any points for shoes or boots, after the said feast *[col. b]* of St Peter, for any of the said persons, contrary to this act, he shall also forfeit 40d to your highness for every offence.[146]

A different approach is taken to regulating pointed shoes in a separate petition on the same parliamentary roll. The following petition attempted to place a ban on the making of pointed shoes within a three mile radius of the city of London. The similarity in content about the regulation of pointed shoes suggests that there might have been a common source (most probably the city of London) between the sumptuary legislation we saw previously and this common petition[147]:

> 55. The commons assembled in this present parliament pray that it may please your highness, by the advice and assent of the lords spiritual and temporal in the

[143] Derek G. Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 174.
[144] Ibid, 172.
[145] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, ¶20.
[146] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, ¶20.
[147] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, "Introduction."

> said parliament, and by authority of the same, to ordain and decree that no cordwainer or cobbler in your city of London, or within three miles of any part of the same city, whatsoever he be, within franchises or without, shall make or cause to be made, after Easter 1465, any shoes, galoshes or boots with points longer than two inches, which shall be assessed by the wardens or rulers of the same craft in the said city and within three miles of the said city; or on any Sunday in the year, or at the feasts of Christmas and the Ascension of Our Lord, or at the feast of Corpus Christi, shall sell, order or cause to be sold any shoes, boots or galoshes, or on any Sunday, or on any of the said feasts, shall put, set or fit on any man's feet or legs any shoes, boots or galoshes; on pain of the forfeiture and loss of 20s. sterling for every offence against this ordinance, or any part of it; of which 6s. 8d. shall be had to your use, and 6s. 8d., to the use of the rulers and governors of the mystery of the cordwainers, and 6s. 8d., the remainder of the said 20s., to the use of him who shall find, detect and prove that this ordinance has been broken.[148]

This request was met favourably, with certain crucial amendments. It is made clear that the ban on making pointed shoes should not apply to the liberty of St Martin le Grand of London:

> Provided always that neither this act, nor any other act, ordinance or statute made or to be made in this present parliament, shall extend to the harm or prejudice, or be in any way harmful or prejudicial, to the dean of the king's free chapel of St Martin le Grand of London at the time [...][149]

St Martin le Grand was both one of England's royally chartered sanctuaries and one of the most important liberties within the city of London. [150] London was, in the late medieval period, an important destination for immigrants ; St Martin's had attracted immigrant artisans from the 1440's if not earlier.[151] Many foreign artisans went to work there because they could practice their trade there without being part of a guild.[152] The crown's amendment to the bill meant that the shoemakers in St Martin's were not affected by the ban on pointed shoes; this is probably due

[148] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, ¶55.
[149] Given-Wilson, *Parliament Rolls*, Parl. April 1463, ¶55 "Answer."
[150] Shannon McSheffrey, "Stranger Artisans and the London Sanctuary of St. Martin le Grand in the Reign of Henry VIII," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 43 no. 3 (Fall 2013), 549.
[151]Ibid., 550.
[152] Ibid., 552.

in part to the fact that their craftsmanship was much appreciated by consumers.[153] The artisans working in St Martin's benefited from a special status, as they did not fall under the city of London's jurisdiction and were exempted by the crown from restrictions on foreign labour.[154] The petition presented by the commons may have been an attempt to attack in an oblique way the privileges of St Martin's. However, this plan backfired as it was made clear here that the crown desired to maintain this privilege. The consequences of this was that those behind the petition (presumably London shoemakers and other craftsmen) were not allowed to produce the fashionable pointed shoe, while the group that they sought to control (the immigrant shoe makers in St-Martins) was given license by the King to continue to do so. It remains somewhat unclear who was then suppose to be buying the pointed shoes if they were restricted only to lords. That in turn, raises the question of whether there was ever any intention on the part of the crown to enforce these laws.

We saw previously that pointed shoes were the object of many moralists' disapproval. The new tight-fitting style of garments were also targeted. The sumptuary legislation from the period reflects these same concerns. Sexually suggestive items of male clothing (such as the pointed shoes) were reserved for the aristocracy; excess in clothing and flagrant displays of sexuality was permitted amongst only a certain elite.[155] Clothes were of primordial importance in the representation of the self. Clothing could be used as a marker of a certain code of ethics within a group. Distinctive ways of dressing demonstrated different models of masculinity.[156]

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[153] McSheffrey, "Stranger Artisans," 553-554.
[154] Ibid., 557.
[155] Kim M. Phillips, "Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws," *Gender and History* 19, no. 1 (April 2007), 26.
[156] Ibid., 29.

According to Derek G. Neal, the "body" had a significance beyond the outwardly social. The exterior appearance of a person could reflect their personal identity; it could express individual character and temperament. The male body was more on display at this time than in previous centuries because of the changes in fashion that had recently taken place. Men could express their masculinity in this way; some men dressed in more revealing and exaggerated styles. These displays were meant to demonstrate their position amongst other men.[157] As stated by Neal: "The provocative display of men's clothing, even in its possible appeal to the female gaze, makes most sense as aggressive competition, referring to a homosocial rather than a heterosexual arena."[158]

This explains to a certain extent why the sumptuary legislation in the late medieval period was directed at men. Sumptuary legislation in England at this time was primarily attempting to regulate the clothing of men.[159] In the legislation, women and children are always addressed as an afterthought and with the assumption that they share the status of the men with whom they are associated,[160] and that they are in male-headed households. The legislation does not imagine the possibility of women living outside this type of household structure (although in reality they did). In any case, there was a great variety of styles of clothing available to men, and being fashionables could have the power of accentuating masculinity.[161]

With this in mind, we can conclude that attempts to regulate dress through sumptuary regulations were driven by complex and competing desires. The study of late medieval sumptuary legislation demonstrates to us that medieval contemporaries' desire to regulate dress

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[157] Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England*, 8-9.
[158] Ibid., 172.
[159] Phillips, "Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws," 22.
[160] Ibid., 24.
[161] Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England*, 174.

through this type of legislation was not only due to economic factors and a desire to make sure that clothing reflected rank. The sumptuary legislation was a reflection of an attempt to make sense of the rapidly changing relationships between men and the shifting structures of society taking place in the late medieval period.

CONCLUSION

In the late medieval period, there was an understanding amongst contemporaries that the more comfortable living standards had come about because of the high mortality rate amongst those who surrounded them.[162] Based on the feeling that they were living through especially tumultuous times, it is easily understood that people living in this period found themselves drawn to the idea of Fortune. The goddess of Fortune, represented turning a wheel, was symbolic of the role of chance in the lives of those living through this time period.[163] As Rosemary Horrox says: "The message of Fortune was fatalistic: that not even the best laid human plans are proof against unexpected disaster, and that although an individual must take *moral* responsibility for his decisions, he cannot be held to blame for the events which overtake him in the world of action."[164] We will take note in the following image of the various styles of dress adorning the men on the wheel, as well as the pointed shoes that were fashionable for men in the late medieval period. The man on the left of the wheel, who is on his way up, is wearing the pointiest shoes and the shortest tunic. This demonstrates that according to this illustration, this type of open display of male sexuality was a tool of advancement.

[162] Rosemary Horrox, introduction to *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perception of Society in Late Medieval England*, ed. Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3.
[163] Ibid., 6.
[164] Ibid., 6.

Coëtivy Master (Henri de Vulcop?) (French, active about 1450 - 1485)*Philosophy Consoling Boethius and Fortune Turning the Wheel*, about 1460 - 1470, Tempera colors, gold leaf, and gold paint on parchment, Leaf: 7.3 x 17 cm (2 7/8 x 6 11/16 in.), The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

The late medieval period was a period of serious political, economic and social upheaval. The demographic collapse brought on by the black death and the rapid expansion of commerce affected power relations between traditional elites and the lower echelons of society. The late medieval period was paradoxically both a period of rigidity and flexibility. Nevertheless, contemporaries perceived the times they were living through as chaotic and unstable. This

caused anxiety about the "natural" hierarchical order within society being disrupted. As a result, attempts were made to assure that stability could be maintained. Clothing was specifically targeted because it was seen as being an important signifier of one's morals and social standing. Sumptuary legislation and conduct literature from the period served as prescriptive tools to designate appropriate behaviour according to one's social standing. Traditionally, historians have focused on women's dress. However, the sumptuary legislation and the moralising texts that we have seen indicate that the ways in which men chose to dress was of great concern to medieval contemporaries, perhaps even more of a concern than how women were dressing. The male body on display was a source of anxiety, as sexually suggestive styles came in fashion in England from the mid- fourteenth century onwards. Clothing, as a representation of the self, played an important role in social negotiations. Dress could also be used aspirationally as a tool of social advancement. Wearing fashionable and suggestive clothing had the power of accentuating masculinity, and provocative displays in dress demonstrated one's status and wealth. Clothing was being used as an expression of individual temperament, in a period that the male body was more on display than ever before because of the recent changes in fashion. Therefore, attempts to regulate dress can be seen as an attempt to restore normalcy in an age of anxiety-inducing transition. Concerns about dress were demonstrative of deeper anxieties about gender, class, status, the interrelationship between medieval contemporaries, nationhood and morality. Conversely, the lack of evidence of the enforcement of sumptuary legislation and the limited scope of this type of legislation demonstrate a certain ambivalence towards the formal regulation of dress. People whose livelihood depending on the cloth trade would not necessarily been enthusiastic about restrictions imposed on the clothing market. For this and other reasons, medieval people may not have fully supported strict controls over what individuals should wear.

Late medieval society was extremely hierarchical and yet there was a certain fluidity that was both of source of confusion and opportunity. Clothing played an important role in these complicated social negotiations.

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