

Clothing and the Fashion System in Early Modern Scotland¹

The aim of this paper will be to examine the *rôle* played by clothing in Scotland in the Early Modern period. Primarily the focus will be on actually displaying the types of clothes which were worn by the nobility in an attempt to study changes over time as well as to locate key indicators to answer the questions: what was fashionable, and when?; what constituted fashion?; what were the dictates of fashionability in Scotland?; how did notions of fashionability, and the fashions themselves, change, over time?; what caused these changes?; did this change perceptions of the surrounding world and of the architecture and construction of the body?; was there an identifiable Scottishness in dress?

It will be demonstrated that a degree of clothing solidarity was observable amongst the Scottish *élite*, as a result of its large number of *émigrés* and mercenaries. These people, returning to Scotland intermittently after periods abroad, had had a connection to the Continent and to its fashions. Furthermore, they were members of an International European-wide *élite*, whose privileges were fostered throughout the Early Modern period by governments prepared to continue the process of passing sumptuary legislation,² irrespective of whether this legislation was acted upon or not.

It will further be shown that amongst the burgesses of Scotland, and especially amongst the top group of wealthy merchants and artisans, there existed constant breaches of sumptuary legislation through the wearing and owning of costly rare and exotic clothing and textiles. It will further be argued that, although these same burgesses had a commensurate ability and opportunity to travel, and thus witness European fashions for themselves, their non-noble status nevertheless prohibited them from being on the inside of the system they abused, thus creating an image of sumptuousness which lacked the vital signifiers so necessary to noble display.

Wealth was by no means an entry to high social status. It was not, however, noble status which was sought by these burgesses (not, that is until the very end of the seventeenth century) but rather the desire to be 'fashionable' and, as the nobility was both a highly conspicuous social group, and virtually the only group with a notion of fashionability (as opposed to a general sense of clothing), it was only natural that noble fashions were aped because these were the 'only' fashions.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was delivered to the Society in December 1995. The term 'Early Modern' in history is understood to cover the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

² A sumptuary law or edict is one restraining private excess in dress, luxury and etc.

Caste solidarity was so great in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that status mobility was virtually impossible, without the evocation of divine intervention — John Knox is a good example having been born a simple the farmer's son. The pressures of sumptuary legislation, combined with internal guild policing, added to an atmosphere of prescribed clothing dependant upon social position. That tailors had the knowledge and ability to dress like lords was a constant scandal to many, but one which highlights the fact that few could create clothes of quality without professional training. Thus, there was a very real practical limitation to dressing beyond one's station, quiet apart from sumptuary laws on the subject.

It will be demonstrated that nobles had access to, and fiercely protected, the symbolic signifiers of power, position, legitimacy and social primacy; that these were used and exploited by Scottish magnates and the *élite*; that they were rigorously denied to burgesses and country folk; that they were of fundamental importance in verifying and legitimising social position as indicated through clothing; that fashionability (as opposed to 'fashion') was the largest, and most amorphous, symbolic signifier of status because it relied not on fixed 'traditional' *accoutrements*, like the sword and the coat-of-arms; but on an interrelation of the ability to buy clothes, the significance of these signifiers being the 'right' clothes, the ability to renew clothing and the ability to 'know' what to wear, and when. It is therefore in the formulation of a sense of 'taste', with all of its implications of group solidarity and opinion, which is at the heart of the fashion argument. The key questions, therefore, are whether 'taste' existed in Scotland, who had it and how was it used as a means and a tool of social differentiation, and how was it denied to the community at large.

Three key factors effected the clothing which an individual wore in sixteenth and seventeenth century Scotland: religious affiliation, bodily necessity, and identification and status. The importance of religious belief and allegiance in early modern Europe cannot be overestimated. In Scotland religion remained largely subservient to political self-aggrandisement among the kingdom's *élite*; among the common people, however, it became a powerful movement. The dichotomy, in its most general terms, between aristocratic cynicism and the genuine belief of humbler people was made flesh in the guise of John Knox. His constant tirades against Mary Queen of Scots, and the aristocratic and feminine vanity she represented, are characteristic of the most radical aspects of Protestantism in Scotland during the second half of the sixteenth century. But despite the mass adoption of Calvinism by the Scottish *élite* there was nothing of the clothes related display of religious affiliation so familiar to, for example, France in this period. In a country such as Scotland, however, where alliances, of whatever kind could often depend upon the whim of an individual magnate, any outlay of money on signs of allegiance to a faction or idea may well have been viewed as a very unstable investment indeed.

While the upper aristocracy by and large continued to wear what they liked it was the humbler folk, and especially the ministry, which carried the banner of chaste sobriety. In August 1575 in the *Domestic Annals of Scotland* it is recorded that the General Assembly of the Kirk stated:

We think all kind of broidering unseemly; all begares of velvet, in gown, hose or coat and all superfluous and vain cutting out, steeking with silks, all kind of costly sewing on passments ... all kind of costly sewing, or variant hues in sarks [shirts]; all kind of light and variant hues in clothing, as red, blue, yellow and such like, which declare the lightness of the mind; all wearing of rings, bracelets, buttons of silver, gold or other metal; all kinds of superfluity of cloth in making of hose; all using of plaids in the kirk by readers or ministers, namely in the time of their ministry, or using of their office; all kind of gowning, cutting, doublingting or breeks of velvet, satin, taffeta or such like; all silk hats, and hats of divers and light colours.³

What the clergy felt to be acceptable for themselves and for others was that their 'whole habit be of grave colour, as black, russet, sad grey, or sad brown; or serges, worsset, chamlet, grogam, lytes worsset, or such like ... And their wives to be subject to the same'.⁴ It must not be forgotten that when the General Assembly of the Kirk made this pronouncement the Covenant was only 15 years old. For a full seven of those fifteen years Mary Queen of Scots had provided a great (if largely symbolic) challenge to that Covenant by adhering to the Catholic religion and having the mass conducted in Scotland. The near riots which broke out as a result of these the private masses of the monarch, acting not as a head of state but as a private individual, give some indication of the fear-inspired virulence of the 'lunatic fringe' of Protestantism in mid-sixteenth century Scotland.⁵

Religious prudery was one of the strongest 'fashion factors' for those not of the upper aristocracy. So much was this so that the (above) call for a plaid-ban amongst the clergy was, by 1636, extended to all of the women of Edinburgh. It was said that women had become so addicted to the wearing of the plaid there that 'the same is now become the ordinar habit of all women within the city, to the general imputation of their sex, matrons not being able to be discerned from loose-living women, to their own dishonour and scandal of the city'.⁶ Almost a century of Protestant austerity was beginning to have its effect, even upon great Catholic paladins; Henry Peacham, writing in 1622,

³ R. Chambers, ed., *Domestic Annals of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1861), Vol. I, p.103.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.103.

⁵ A. Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London, 1969), p. 74.

⁶ Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, Vol. II, pp. 54-55.

made the point of addressing the entire *noblesse* of Europe on the subject of vanity; namely 'so that you see what a pitifull ambition it is, to strive to bee first in a fashion, and a poore pride to seeke your esteeme and regard, from wormes, shells, and Tailors'.⁷

In an Early Modern environment the necessity for identification went far beyond a simple noble/commoner demarcation of Scottish society. In concert with the rest of Europe, it consisted of a number of sub-groups and strata which possessed their own jealously guarded marks of difference. Sir William Brereton's, *Soldier with a Notebook*, is a catalogue of these distinctions. In the early seventeenth century he wrote:

Touching the fashion of the citizens, the women here wear and use upon festival days six or seven habits and fashions; some for distinction of widows, wives and maids, others appparelled according to their own humour and phantasy. Many wear (especially of the meaner sort) plaids which is a garment of the same wolloen stuff whereof saddle cloths in England are made, which is cast over their heads, and covers their faces on both sides and would reach almost to the ground, but that they pluck them up, and wear them cast under their arms. Some ancient women and citizens wear satin straight-bodied gowns, short little cloaks with brows, and going out with a corner behind their heads; and this boun-grace is, as it were, lined with a white stracht cambricsitable unto it. Young maids not married all are bare-headed; some with broad thin shag ruffs, which lie flat to their shoulders, and others with half-bands with wide necks; either much stiffened or set in wire, which comes only behind 8

Thus age, rank, marital status and sex could all be indicated and understood, through the medium of clothing, even by foreigners.

The allegorical symbolic potential of clothing was very well understood by the early modern mind, especially by players and actors. Generally speaking, white and black represented grief; white and blue courtesy; white and green virtuous youth; white and grey hope of perfection; white and purple grace; white and red honesty; white and tawny patience; blue and violet loyalty in love; red and purple strength; red and tawny unholiness; red and violet wanton love; red and yellow cupidity; incarnate and grey hope of riches; incarnate and tawny misfortune; incarnate and violet hope of great things; incarnate and yellow riches not tempered.⁹ Such a finite catalogue is evidence

⁷ H. Peachham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (London, 1622), repr. (Amsterdam, 1968), p. 191.

⁸ W. Brereton, 'Soldier with a Notebook', in M. Lindsay, ed., *The Discovery of Scotland through Foreign Travellers* (London, 1964), p. 56.

⁹ M.C. Linthicum, *Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Oxford, 1936), p. 18.

of the extreme minisculeism of the early modern mind and its need to catalogue define and compartmentalise anything which it thought to be of importance.

France, through its long association with Scotland, was an obvious and accessible source of much needed sumptuary guidance. Throughout the sixteenth century this kingdom was constantly allied to Scotland through marriage, formal political alliance and the exchange of men and ideas.¹⁰ Thus, it was natural that Scottish sovereigns, nobles, and merchants should be influenced by French fashions and clothing, and the corresponding French attitudes. It is equally understandable that France should have taken nothing from Scotland, save its manpower; in other words the only thing Scotland ever actually had to give was its people. But by the seventeenth century it was the Low Countries which occupied Scottish attention. With the increasing importance and efficiency of Scottish staples in the Netherlands an increasing number of Scottish nobles and merchants were being drawn there.¹¹ Equally, the ongoing religious wars, and the general animosity caused by these, were an excellent reason to abandon France as a fashion-guru and adopt the safely Protestant habits of Geneva.¹²

Scotland had since the middle ages been as involved in European politics and culture as any other kingdom.¹³ This meant that great Scottish nobles and monarchs were as well dressed as any in Europe. What the preceding paragraphs have been at pains to demonstrate, however, is Scotland's lack of indigenous creative power in the field of clothing style and development. Scotland was never a strong country, economically or culturally, and this meant that it never developed the confidence or the ability to ignore fashion developments on the continent. The increasingly compulsive/proscriptive nature of dress amongst the élites of sixteenth century Europe caught Scotland at a time when it most desired recognition as a political and social power. The efforts of James V to contract a politically advantageous marriage, and those of his father, James IV, to make a name for himself in Europe,¹⁴ and include Scotland on the world stage, coincided with a time in France in which clothing was becoming increasingly complicated.¹⁵ Not only the styles of clothes being worn were increasingly complicated structurally, compared to those which had been worn one or two hundred years before, but they were also more

¹⁰ Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, pp. 17-20.

¹¹ M. Rooseboom, *The Scottish Staple in the Netherlands* (The Hague, 1910), p.33

¹² F.M. Kelly and R. Schwabe, *A Short History of Costume & Armour*, Vol. II, 1480-1800 (London, 1931), pp. 5-7.

¹³ Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, pp. 17-20.

¹⁴ At one time James IV even advocated a new crusade against the Infidel Turk. Thus becoming one of a long line of self-aggrandizing monarchs who had turned to the historical precedent of religious war as a means of solidarity and self-promotion.

¹⁵ C. Koehler, *A History of Costume* (New York, 1980), pp. 232-40.

complicated symbolically.¹⁶ A monarch could no longer throw on some ermine robes and hope for the best. A genuine change had taken place in the way in which *élite* clothing was perceived. One of the most important aspects of this change was that a sovereign's clothing which was now as open to interpretation and 'judgement' as was that of any noble person.¹⁷ For this reason sceptres and crowns yielded to cloth of gold and eye-dazzling sumptuary magnificence. In this atmosphere the sovereign became not only the ultimate legitimator of fashion, but also its pre-eminent arbiter.

The many portraits of Elizabeth I of England, François I^{er} and Henri IV of France, and the Emperor Charles V, all attest to the displacement of medieval signifiers of sovereignty (the sceptre, crown, royal arms, and orb) by Early Modern symbols of social pre-eminence. But to have one's position defined and then displayed by reference to a notion of fashionability, no matter how magnificent, placed a monarch at the head of a system which eventually extended right down to the lowliest servant aping his master's newly acquired Stovepipe breeches. This meant that monarchs were now firmly part of 'the game' of fashion.¹⁸ A sovereign like James V of Scotland, anxious to impress on the 'world stage', needed to call into use all of the indicators of cultural, intellectual and political willingness and worthiness that he could find. For him to dress in the French style and marry a French wife indicated that he was not only willing to co-operate but, by that very willingness, actually was involved in an on-going and constantly changing fashionable aesthetic.

An extant marriage portrait of James V of Scots and Marie de Guise displays a monarch who could, for all intents and purposes, be a slim version of Henry VIII, so much does his beard and clothing resemble that displayed on the shoulders of Henry VIII in his portrait by Holbein. Marie's appearance, however, is the perfect compromise of French fashionability and medieval sumptuousness.¹⁹ A new system of visual signifiers had come into existence by the beginning of the sixteenth century. Traditional royal and noble symbolism had been relegated to heraldic manuscripts and triumphal progresses. When these are actually viewed it becomes immediately apparent how vast were the changes in clothing-style, symbolic weighting and the subtlety of new signifiers.

¹⁶ Linthicum, *Costume in Drama*, p. 18.

¹⁷ R. Strong, *Van Dyck; Charles I on Horseback* (London, 1972), pp. 90-91.

¹⁸ At this point it is important to note that clothing, especially that of the nobility, had always been subject to assessment and criticism, for its aesthetic qualities etc. What is being suggested here is that a 'new' notion of change had evolved, which eclipsed an older static medieval notion of clothing and its significance to the identification of rank; a system formerly held in check by sumptuary laws, was now controlled by *élite* public opinion.

¹⁹ Marriage portrait of James V of Scots and Marie de Guise, R.K. Marshall, 'Hir Rob Ryall; The Costume of Mary of Guise', *Costume*, 12 (1978), pp. 1-12.

This conflict also exists in, for example, two etchings of James VI and I and Anne of Denmark. In the first by Wierix, James is displayed partially as a military commander, partially as a fashionable country gentleman, as well as a king. In fact he was all three, but an etching which is clearly a supposed to advertise the new king of Great Britain can be so schizophrenically confused, and which is littered with numerous social signifiers, must give cause for speculation on the nature of the conflict between medieval signifiers and their new fashion-centred rivals. As in the Daniel Mytens' portrait of Charles I, the traditional tool of representation of James's position, the quartered arms of Great Britain and the Imperial crown, has been relegated to the bottom left hand corner of the picture; perhaps an attempt to not infuriate his new English subjects, or perhaps a loser in the battle of fashion over heraldic display patterns?²⁰ If Wierix' etching represents the fashionable monarch the second, by Elstracke, represents the traditional 'symbolic-overload' so familiar in the studies of Roy Strong. In this piece both monarchs are almost crowned by their own coats-of-arms. Both are also displayed in the height of fashion but, significantly not the more accessible fashions shown in the Weirix etching, which theoretically would have been available to the upper aristocracy and could have been worn on a daily basis, for the fashions of the Elstracke etching are those of a symbol-conscious world. In this etching James and Anne play the roles of stick figures draped in the trappings of majesty. They wear clothes which would only have seen the light of day on the finest of state occasions. The very weight of embroidery and jewels being worn in this etching stand testament to the continued use of Renaissance symbolism in a fashion dominated Early Modern world; the very archaism of this image is evidence of how alien such display conventions now were to the lives of the Early Modern British *élite*.²¹

One of the most potent forces in the maintenance of status and position throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and on into the eighteenth century, was the creation of a culture of aesthetic appreciation. In its most extreme form this is visible in the court of Charles I, and portraits from this period and this court, support the notion that rough medieval symbolism was, in the best social circles, virtually dead by the mid-seventeenth century. It was replaced by a finite symbolism which combined cultured good taste with subtle representation. As the trappings of power-holding within a court-like social structure became increasingly removed from the physically measurable, and became increasingly centred in venal offices, fiscal privileges and 'access' to the person of the monarch, so methods of visually representing that power came increasingly to rely upon the use of non-physical symbolism.

When Daniel Mytens painted Charles I in 1631, he did not depict the king crowned, holding a sceptre and waving a banner with the royal arms.

²⁰ Etching by Jan Weirix, H.K. Morse, *Elizabethan Pageantry* (London, 1934), p. 66.

²¹ Etching by R. Elstracke, *Ibid*, p. 67.

Mytens painted the king as a paragon of good taste and aesthetic sensibility. The fact the Charles I was a cultured aesthete, who probably would have refused to be painted any other way, should not detract from the fact that Mytens decided to portray him as a gentleman, not as a monarch. There can be no mistake that the sitter is indeed a king. There is a crown in the picture, as too is there a sceptre, but these have been placed, humbly (almost obscurely), upon a table-top. This is not a state portrait, but it is a portrait which represents the king. To say that this portrait was painted in the finest of humanist traditions, and therefore depicts the person of the king as a man, and therefore a mortal being, is to miss the point. Mytens has represented Charles as a great leader of fashion, a man who stands at the head of an elaborate system of social and cultural refinements, not as a despot who clings to the rude symbols of medieval subjection, as represented by the royal regalia.²²

These questions are further highlighted when posed in the context of Scotland. Though called the 'arse end of the world', Scotland did have an international presence through the many nobles and merchants who interacted and travelled throughout Europe.²³ Thus it was possible for the Scottish *élite* to be fashionable, while at the same time living so far from the centres of those fashions. It would seem from the above-mentioned examples that the one system of power/status signifiers had clearly triumphed over the other, but this is not totally the case. What the Mytens portrait, and others from the same period, really represent is the conscious, visual articulation of a status system which placed a heavy reliance on the esoteric, as opposed to the physical. Good taste, and aesthetic sensibility, was far removed from the traditional signs of rank and position like land and fiscal advantage. In this sense taste was a means of enforcing social demarcation through restricted knowledge. In England and France this was important as feudalism and feudal relationships dwindled in importance and land and titles were increasingly open to purchase. This, combined with the fact that court cultures had witnessed, and fostered, an increased sophistication in interpersonal relationships, meant that those rude symbols of power that were the royal regalia, and other symbols of medieval potency, were now inadequate for stimulating the appreciation of high nobles and royals.

What should be obvious by now is that portraits, such as those painted by Mytens, were not meant to be for the edification of the common people. They were exercises in good taste, and a physical means of displaying that

²² Portrait of Charles I by D. Mytens, 1631, A. Ribeiro and V. Cumming, *The Visual History of Costume* (London, 1989), p. 110.

²³ In 1529 John, 3rd earl of Athol, entertained King James V and the papal Nuncio by having built a feasting hall on his estate which even had glass windows. Wine and meat of all sorts were served on the days of entertaining in a never ending supply and, after the event finished, the entire structure was torched, to the amazement, at least, of the Nuncio who commented that it was a 'great marvel that such as thing could be in Scotland, considering that it was named the arse end of the world in other countries', Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots*, p. 168.

taste, which combined medieval heraldic traditions with a newer, admittedly humanistic, trend towards the revelation of the self as an individual. The fact that these came together in the portrait as a means of also expressing another status system: fashion, which also combined the purely physical (the body/fabric) with the purely representational (implied meaning), cannot have been wholly accidental. Early Modern portraits catalogue the creation of an understanding of the private world, and with it the division between outward public statements of rank and position, and inward private acknowledgments of peer-status and peer-relations. There can be no doubt that Early Modern Scottish portraits demonstrate that an understanding of fashion as a system of something regulated, readable and legitimised, existed at least amongst the very highest sections of Scottish society throughout the sixteenth century, and increasingly through the seventeenth. This may well have been fostered by ambitious portraitists, or simply by slavish imitation, without understanding of continental, specifically French, traditions. But if this is indeed the case, why are there so few portraits of non-royal Scottish women?

Throughout the rest of 'civilised' Europe women were as much part of the fashion system as men. Understandably they were as much possessed of status, and as much status symbols/vehicles, as were their husbands, sons, fathers, and brothers. They were clearly part of the system because they were part of the *élite*. Fashion belonged to the *élite*, and the *élite* were fashion conscious. Scotland therefore presents an interesting case; a system of fashion seemingly without women.²⁴ This situation has no connection to questions of the legal status of women in Early Modern Scotland. What it highlights is a situation in which a system for indicating rank and status had been lifted, in its supposed entirety, from various continental centres where it had evolved naturally, and been placed in a society which itself never displayed any natural predilection towards the creation of such a system. This made it possible for clothes to remain the same, and for their significance to remain unaltered, while some basic tenets of the system itself were ignored, forgotten or overlooked.

If we look at who instigated the fashion system in Scotland, and how in fact the system came to be in Scotland in the first place, we will see that it was very clearly individual monarchs and noble males who were the original exponents; and so they remained. Portraits of Scottish noble women do not appear until after the 1660s during the Restoration period. These portraits, often painted in London, or by London portraitists in Scotland, should be seen as the product of a growing Anglicisation of the Scottish court *élite* rather than the final inclusion of noblewomen into a system which had by then been

²⁴ There are, of course, surviving portraits of female monarchs of Scotland, but these occupy an entirely different position to portraits of lesser personages, as they are expressions of statecraft rather than of personal values.

operating in Scotland for some two hundred years.²⁵ The production of portraits in Scotland is therefore intrinsically linked to the creation of a private sphere in *élite* life; itself indicative of a more introspective aristocracy, increasingly aware of itself and its place in the context of a wider European *élite*. It also demonstrates the Scottish *élite's* attempts to enter into the aristocratic life of a Europe so much more advanced in the field of mark signification than itself, by the adoption of a system which identified and legitimised *élite* separateness from the rest of society. As this system was primarily adopted by Scots for the benefit of those outside of Scotland it was thus used to justify and support Scotland's insistence on diplomatic and political power in its external relations with considerably more powerful and wealthy centres in Europe. It was therefore portraits of soldiers, statesmen, lawyers, administrators, and magnates, the very people who presented Scotland's 'face' to the world, which were painted.²⁶

The division between domestically defined status and externally defined status is in no way as clear in Scotland as, for example, it was in Wales in the same period where Celtic language and culture represented the existence of a relatively autonomous society.²⁷ In Scotland the divisions between Highlands and Lowlands, Catholics and Protestants, rich and poor, the travelled and the untravelled, made for a considerably more complex situation. Added to this complexity was the existence of native systems of rank signification. Although such traditions as clan affiliation, as expressed through plant badges and regional plaids, clearly belong to the earlier public sphere of blatant and static signifiers, these retained a place in the mentality of many Scots well into the eighteenth century. Thus it was not until the Highland proscription act of 1746 that the common people of the northwest were forced to participate in an actual fashion system for the first time.²⁸ Yet even then many Highland nobles continued to wear 'traditional' tribal costume. Sometimes they combined this costume with actually fashionable clothing, thus bringing the traditional within reach of the sphere of the fashionable, but this remained a purely internal trend. Even the clothing of those Highlanders who emigrated to the continent, or who did military service there, was looked upon as an oddity or novelty, and was not incorporated into *Haute Couture* until an unrelated revival occurred in the nineteenth century. This is therefore further evidence of the mass survival of unfashionability in Scotland.

²⁵ A notable exception to this rule is the portrait of the Henwife of Castle Grant. Though painted six years after the end of the period covered by this paper it is useful because the woman is clearly very old, and is dressed in the clothes of the late seventeenth century. Her portrait is not particularly remarkable as might be expected, coming as it does among a whole group of Grant family retainers painted at that time. Portrait of the Henwife of Castle Grant, N. Tarrant, *The Development of Costume* (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 13.

²⁶ The is precisely why portraits of royal women cannot be included as general portraits of women; because these were not 'women' but 'monarchs'.

²⁷ G. Morgan, 'Women's Wills in West Wales, 1600-1750', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (London, 1992), pp. 95-99.

²⁸ M. McDonald, *The Clans of Scotland* (London, 1991), p. 65.

By importing an alien status system (good taste as expressed through clothing) into Scotland the Scottish *élite* exposed itself to the lifestyle which was intimately connected with the system of dressing. Specific clothing imposed a certain amount of restraint upon the body and its actions which could not be ignored. The exposure, however, was not complete for Scotland's *élite*. It was only from the second quarter of the seventeenth century onwards that there was any evidence to suggest that clothing of fine quality was actually worn on a day to day basis. Throughout most of the sixteenth century fashionable clothing, like its counterpart of medieval rank-signifying robes of office, was worn for very specific occasions. Attendance at court, paying court upon others, and visiting peers all called for a display of commensurate status. Native habits continued to be observed throughout much of this period. But what gradually occurred was the displacement of the system of signifiers which had been used to display rank by the kind of lifestyle which had created that system in the first place. So by the mid 1620s and the reign of Charles I (and in the latter stages of that of his father), Scottish nobles stopped consciously using the tool of fashionability and adopted an all-encompassing fashionable lifestyle. This change went far beyond dress sense to a full encapsulation of a fashionable *mentalité*. A way of dressing had become a way of thinking.

Notions of 'the fashionable', and a system which fostered the creation of a sense of fashionability, were forerunners of a wider, and perhaps deeper, change in the thought-patterns and attitudes of an European *élite*. Changing one's appearance through a change of clothing was a relatively simple activity. But a consequent change in attitudes to accompany the change of attire was considerably more involved. This attitudinal change was not the product of clothing change, rather they were both connected to a more deep-seated desire to escape the constraints of the statically medieval. In this sense the Early Modern understanding of fashion systems were a clear creation of the Renaissance. So it should be clear that at the beginning of the sixteenth century fashion was being used as a vehicle and/or tool, and in many ways as a sounding board, in the creation of a new, post-Renaissance, semi-humanist, *mentalité*. Thus an aspect of life became the forerunner of an entire lifestyle.

Fashionability in Scotland was transformed from a rigid, if new, system of rank differentiation into a means of displaying taste, as well as position, until it finally evolved into a system which encompassed not simply the *élite*, but all aspiring sectors of Scottish society. Thus merchants and burghers, and their wives and daughters, gained an appetite for fine clothing. But these people, divorced from the original and ongoing rationale for such clothing, fell prey to accusations of vulgarity and over-display because of their lack of comprehension of the purpose of the complicated system which they were attempting to emulate. A significant factor which operated to limit this dress system was the difficulty sometimes experienced in supplying individuals with

textile products. To an isolated magnate, especially those in the north of Scotland, this was no small problem. As the following examples will demonstrate, however, this posed a by no means insurmountable difficulty.

The considerable amounts spent on clothing by the *élite*, especially for festive occasions, demonstrates how the overall clothing system had disseminated throughout Scotland. Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy, for example, a son-in-law of the earl of Athol, spent 40,000 marks²⁹ on his daughter's dowry and a further 6,000 marks on the bride's dress and those of the bridesmaids, when his daughter married another earl of Athol in 1612.³⁰ The disparities in the amounts payed by nobles for their clothes were often marked. The Earl of Leven, for example, never payed more than 15 shillings for cloth for his servants, but would often pay £3 to £5, or more, for 'an ell Holland stuff' or 'ane ell fine tafted Holland' for himself in the late seventeenth century.³¹

During the early reign of James VI and I, Sir Anthony Weldon made a comment which could easily have been made of a Scottish or English nobleman: 'there are no gentlemen, as soon as come off their mother's breast they're sent to France ... there they gather new flesh, new blood, new manners; there they learn to put on their cloathes, and they returne into their country to wear them out; there they learn to stand, to speak, and to discourse'.³² For Scots this same process had been occurring for a hundred years and it is exactly this knowledge, gained in France and brought back to Scotland, which gave Scotland's *élite* its ideas and its sartorial vision, limited though this might ultimately have been in its scope.

The importance of royalty to an overall fashion system has been mentioned already, but the practical considerations of a monarch's wardrobe have not. James VI and I, while famously ill dressed, was at least never cheaply dressed.³³ James' son, however, was both splendidly, and expensively

²⁹ 1 mark was worth a third of a Scottish pound which was worth a twelfth of an English pound by the mid to late seventeenth century.

³⁰ D. Matthew, *Scotland under Charles I* (London, 1955), p. 112.

³¹ T.C. Smout, *Scottish Trade on the Eve of the Union* (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 191.

³² J. Nichols ed., *The Progresses, Processions and Magnificent Festivities of James the First* (New York, 1828), Vol. III., p. 342.

³³ An inventory of the yearly charges on James' English royal wardrobe for the year 1606-7 includes the following:

For the Watch Liveryes for the Gards,	£336/0/0.
For the Maundie,	£244/0/0.
For the velvet for the Guard's Coats,	£520/0/0.
For H.M.'s fine linnene, for his shirts, sheets and other uses,	£1,360/0/0.
Liveryes and Robes,	£231/8/10.
The Lord Chamberlane's Fee,	£16/0/0.
Fees and Wages for the Master of Officers of the Wardrobes,	£150/2/6.
To the Footmen and Littermen,	£383/0/0.
The Arras-men and Taylors, for stuff and workmanship,	£940/0/0.

dressed. Roy Strong has estimated that Charles I spent up to three times as much money *per annum* as his father had during his reign; much of this was on clothing. An inventory of Charles clothes for the years 1633 to 1635 show that he lavished money on a diverse range of clothing. In 1633/4 Charles had thirty six suits made, two tennis suits, four coats, three pairs of hose, three riding coats and two cloaks.³⁴ While the vast majority of his suits were for day wear, and therefore not expensively embroidered, those that were embroidered could cost a small fortune. For a black satin suit embroidered with gold and silver 'works' Charles paid £146:11:10¹/₂, and for a watchet (light blue) satin suit embroidered in gold he paid £226:18:8¹/₂.³⁵ Of the many suits which he already owned their colours were astoundingly diverse; 'lead three, cinamon seven, minume one, gredline one, heere one, white three, black ten, wormwood one, straw one, faun six, grass one, peach one, green or green parrachito four, sand three, willow one, lemon one, flesh coloured one, sage one, dove one, marble one, musk one, dear two and honey one'.³⁶ This went beyond simply being well dressed and lurched dangerously towards the unhinged.³⁷

Charles' ancestors had been equally adept at acquiring the right clothes for every occasions, as can be seen from the accounts of James V's wardrobe purchases for his stay in the Highlands. Among these are the following: 2¹/₄ ells of 'varient cullorit velvit' to be 'ane short Heland Coit' at £6 the ell; 3/4 ells 'green taffatys [taffeta] to line the said coit with' at 10/- the ell; 3 ells of 'Heland tertane to be hoiss [hose]' at 4/4 the ell; 15 ells of 'Holland cloth to be syde [long or hanging low] Heland Sarkis [shirts]' at 8/- the ell; 2 'Unce of silk to sew the same', 10/-; 4 ells of 'rubanis to the hands of thame, [who sow it] 2/-, and 'for sowing and making the said sarkis', 9/-.³⁸ Purchases such as these, to a throne perennially hard put for cash, represent the essential importance of clothing to the Early Modern monarch, just as to the Early Modern nobleman.

Great family events provided, for the Early Modern monarch, a chance to display and impress on an international scale. The marriage, in 1612, of Princess Elizabeth of England, Scotland and Ireland, daughter of James VI and

The necessarie Expenses of the wardrobe,
Nichols, *Progresses*, Vol. I, p. 125.

£13/9/0.

³⁴ R. Strong, 'Charles I's Clothes for the Years 1633 to 1635', *Costume*, 14 (1980), p. 73.

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 73-74.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 74.

³⁷ Even the clothes of a second son, James Duke of York, had, of necessity, to be magnificent. The wedding suit for his marriage to Mary of Modena, even though the marriage took place by proxy, was made of fawn coloured cloth, lined and faced on the cuffs with scarlet Sarcenet and expensive applique embroidery; vertical bands of flowering scrolls in silver and silver-gilt thread, purl and flat braid, which lent the garment a distinctly Eastern feel. C. Beard, "King James II's Wedding Suit", *Connoisseur*, July, 1928, Vol. LXXXI., No. 323, p.140.

³⁸ H.F. McClintock, *Old Irish and Highland Dress*, (Dunkeld, 1950), Part II, p. 5.

I, to Frederick of the Palatine was a sumptuous affair. The description of the ceremony begins with a languid consideration of the cloth involved; 'first came the bridegroom arrayed in cloth of silver, richly imboydered with silver, with all the younge gallants and noblemen of the Courte'.³⁹ The description continues with the bride whose 'traine, which was of cloth of silver as her gowne was, her hayre hanginge doune at length dressed with ropes of pearl'.⁴⁰ Even James VI and I could not escape the weight of cloth employed on this occasion, as he was observed 'in a Cheyer most royally and richly arrayed', and 'on the other side sate the Queene in a chayer most gloriously attired in a white sattin gowne'.⁴¹ James VI and I, ill dressed and ill living as he may have been, was in no position to oppose the sartorial expectations placed upon him as king: But while these duties had not altered since his childhood, their fashionable outer shell had.

The importance of sumptuary laws cannot be underestimated in a Scotland so seemingly unfettered by law enforcement and the dictates of 'good reputation'. Yet in the larger burghs and at court there was a keen observance and much comment upon what was and was not acceptable and fitting clothing. Although primarily of a religious nature it was not unknown for this to be of the strictly status-driven kind. As early as the reign of James III an Act was passed in 1471 to the effect that,

considering the gret powite of the Realme the gret expens and cost mad upon the brynging of silks in the Realme that therefor na man sal weir silks in tyme cumyng in gown doublate or clokis except knychts mestrallis and herralds without that the werar of the samyn may spend a hwdrecht pundis worth of lands rent under the payn of amerciamment to the king of X lib. als of as thai ar fundyn and escheten of the samyn to be given to the herralds or menstrallis ... and at manis wiffs within a hundreth pounds wer na silks in lynyng but alanly in colar and slevis.⁴²

As much an economic imperative as an act against undue assumption of rank this act reflects one of the most important aspects of all Scottish sumptuary legislation; the actual cost of cloth and clothing. The same complaints about

³⁹ E.F. Rimbault, *The Cheque-Book or Book of Remembrance of the Chapell Royal, 1561-1744* (New York, 1966), p. 164.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 164.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 164-65.

⁴² Considering the great poverty of the Realm and the great expense and cost made upon the bringing of silks into the Realm that therefore no man shall wear silks in time to come in the form of gown, doublet or cloak except knights, minstrels...and that no mans wife within a hundred pounds [of earnings] wear no silk in lining but only in collar and sleeves. F. Warner, *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom; Its Origins and Development* (London, 1921), p. 344.

the costliness of clothing were still being aired towards the end of the sixteenth century. An act of the 1570s stated,

that sen the realme in ilk estate is gretumly purvyt throu sumptuose clothing baith of men and wemen, and in speciall within burowis and commonys to landwart, the lordis thinkis speidfull that restrictione thereof be maid in this maner. That no man within the burghe that levys be merchandice bot gif he be a persone constitute in dignite as aulderman, bailye or uther gude worthi men that ar of the console of the towne and that wifis, weire clothis of silk nor costly scarlettis in gownys nor furringis of mentrikis ... on their hedis schort curches with litill hudis as ar usyt in Flanders, Inglande and uther countreis ... that no labouers or husbandis wear on the werk day bot grey and whit, and on the holiday bot lycht blew or grene or rede ... and at it excede nocht the price of 1 pence the elne.⁴³

The Kirk was a constant complainer against clothing of too costly type. Already in the fifteenth century it was traditional for holders of Bachelors of Arts to wear a hood, and for Masters of Arts to wear scarlet hoods.⁴⁴ In 1610 James VI and I ordered all Doctors of Laws to wear black gowns faced in front and on the collar with black velvet, and all undergraduates at St. Andrew's University were to wear scarlet robes (so that they could be better detected at night).⁴⁵ But by 1635 Sir William Brereton stated that he saw students wearing scarlet, grey or other colours as they pleased.⁴⁶ By 1664 the situation had been rectified, with students ordered to wear their scarlet robes in the streets.⁴⁷ With the strong connections between Universities and the training for the clergy there can be little wonder that a sense of befitting clothing was an early development of the University system.

⁴³ That since the Realm in each Estate is greatly impoverished through sumptuous clothing both of men and women, and especially within the [royal] burghs close by, the Lords think it necessary that restriction thereof be made in this manner. That no man within the burghs that lives by merchandise, but if he be a person constituted in the dignity of alderman, baillie or other good and worthy men that are of the council of the town and their wives, wear cloths of silk or costly scarlet in gowns or the furrings of mantles...on their heads short caps with little hoods as are used in Flanders, England and other countries... that no labourers or husbandmen wear on a working day anything except gray and white, and on holidays but light blue or green or red...and that it exceed not the price of 1 pence the ell [length]. R. Renwick, *Ancient Laws and Customs of the Burghs of Scotland*, Vol. II, 1424-1707 (Edinburgh, 1910), pp. 26-27.

⁴⁴ W.H. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress in Europe until the end of the 18th century* (Oxford, 1963), p. 138.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141. Undergraduates at St Andrews University still wear scarlet gowns today for all formal University occasions.

It is clear that the transformation of Scotland from a small, poor but ambitious medieval nation, with occasional glimpses of brilliance on the world stage, and occasional shocking errors of judgment, into a still small and still impoverished Early Modern state was not in fact much of a transformation at all. The significant difference between these two eras, however, lies in the fact that Scotland attempted to follow and adapt social, political and economic developments which were occurring in the rest of Europe. Unlike the rest of Europe, however, Scotland had few of the indigenous mechanisms so necessary to the natural operation of many of these new systems. The result was that Scotland often borrowed social, political and economic systems wholesale, only to find that they struck a discordant note in a country where they really did not belong. It should have been no surprise to anybody that economic, political and social systems, all of them essentially borrowed, hardly grew at all on Scottish soil, and if they did, it was often only a faltering, stunted growth at best.

One of these borrowed systems was that of fashion. For nobles operating in a wider European context there was absolutely nothing wrong with them wearing and operating within a system of clothing signifiers where those systems obviously existed as evolutionary outgrowths of previous sartorial patterns. The problems started when these people brought their experience and practices home to a country where there was no indigenous tradition of sartorial elegance. The nobility therefore introduced a system which required constant external support in order to continue its existence.

While clothing had always important, and while clothes had always been recognised as signal-givers, the fashion system which began operation in the Scotland of the sixteenth century was primarily an aristocratic, and a political institution. It was used both to express social standing and to emphasise the political and economic superiority of one social group. In the seventeenth century fashionability also began to signify the aesthetic judgement of individuals, as opposed to the previously faceless members of a savage corporate group. Prompted by the invention of the private sphere of life, fashionability became part of a larger orbit of aesthetic values. These initially had the effect of emphasising the individual from the group, but from the outside there was never any doubt about who was a high court noble and who was not. It was primarily those within the group, those in the know, who used fashionability and aestheticism as a means of emphasising individuality within a system which had remained fixed. This strategy of individualism must itself be viewed as yet another tool of social and political advancement employed by the Scottish *élite* at this time.

The importance of the removal of the Scottish court south to London cannot be underestimated. In one sense it showed how reliant Scotland's dress standards were upon foreign and aristocratic leadership. It also demonstrated, however, how ingrained the new signifiers of dress had become. The

importance of the nobles and the absence of a real sumptuary legitimator for much of the sixteenth century in Scotland clearly placed the nobles in a supreme position from which to arbitrate fashion. The importance of monarchs and their personal tastes therefore rests in the influence (during the short times for which most of them personally reigned in Scotland) which they managed to exert over their countrymen. The Charles look (the cavalier style created by Charles and adopted by his followers) is the strongest single example of royal influence upon the modes and manners of the necessarily fashionable *élite*. Its widespread influence is clearly indicative of power and the importance placed upon pleasing the monarch when attempting to secure office.

The only genuine, and effective, means of combating the fashion system in Early Modern Scotland was to plead religion. John Knox was not famous for his fashion sense, but he was famous for his condemnation of Mary Queen of Scots. Statesmen, right up to the time of the Interregnum, continued to have among their ranks those individuals who did not dress for influence, or for worldly position, but for humility, gravity and dignity. With the gravitation of the Scottish upper nobility to London after 1603 fashionability became the sole preserve of those who had links to London, and by extension to the court. Thus it is clear to see the importance of the nobles, plus the lingering power they retained, and the essentially exclusivist nature of the fashion system in Scotland, even after a century of its existence there.

In the end the adoption of concepts of fashion and fashionability in Scotland, like the aestheticism of Charles I's courtiers, can be seen as simply one more means for an avaricious aristocracy to acquire and display wealth, position and status within a social structure where there was very little possibility for advancement by the mass of the people.

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