AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

M. Lucille Spinder   for the   Master of Arts

in English   presented on   July 27, 1981

Title: PROBLEMS IN DETERMINING

                 CHAUCER'S USE OF COSTUME

Abstract approved: _James F. Hoy_

Chaucer does not often refer to costume in his poetry,
but he occasionally does use it as a means of characterization,
of advancing a plot, or of further describing the setting of
a story. For the most part, critics have ignored these refer-
ences because costume is considered to be a peripheral aspect
of any artistic work. However, the costume and other social
customs of late fourteenth-century England are implicit in
Chaucer's fictions. If we ignore this social milieu, we may
assume that the fourteenth century adhered to the social atti-
tudes of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, even if the
realm of social customs is narrowed to a study of the costume
of Chaucerian women, a researcher can discover very little to
contribute directly to Chaucerian scholarship at this time.
We must know the fashions of Chaucer's world and the values
attached to them before we can understand fully the meanings
of the references which Chaucer makes to costume. But current
fashion histories describe costume in very general terms, make

little effort to place the garments in their social and moral climate, and seldom document the facts they do present. This inadequate scholarship is not caused by a lack of primary sources, but by a too shallow use of these sources.

If we turn from external sources to an internal comparison of the costumes of Chaucer's ladies and his common women, we find that the physical appearance and moral righteousness of a lady are described, but her costume seldom is; the physical appearance and costume of a common woman are described, but her moral laxity is shown by her actions. The comparison of ladies and commoners has been made in an effort to discover if Criseyde's costume could contribute toward solving the problem of whether Chaucer intended her as a victim or an accomplice in her love tangles. The problem remains unsolved because the answers to questions such as the appropriateness of the dress that she wears when she makes her plea to Hector (TC 1.106-126) cannot be answered until more thorough historical research of four-teenth-century costume has been completed.

PROBLEMS IN DETERMINING

CHAUCER'S USE OF COSTUME

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Emporia State University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

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July 27, 1981

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PREFACE

When I began my study of costume references in
Chaucer I hoped to be able to offer at its end an
analysis of at least one Chaucerian character based
on that character's costume. Instead, I can offer
only questions for further investigation because the
information currently available on costume of the
fourteenth century is insufficient for a thorough
study of the costume of any Chaucerian character.
During my research, I learned that Chaucerian criticism
has almost completely neglected Chaucer's literary use
of costume as well as his literary use of other social
conventions of his time. This neglect is regretable
because unless we understand the social conventions
of a story we will miss some of its meaning. Thus,
although I have not offered any definite conclusions
in the following discussion regarding Chaucerian
costume, I have tried to offer proof that the social
conventions on which Chaucer's poetry is based merit
more thorough and more serious investigation than
they have so far received. My proofs may remain
unconvincing to someone who does not yet quite
accept that the social milieu of a writer directly

influences his work. I will be able to give such
proof only when I have had time for research sufficient
to produce a paper which conclusively shows a direct
link between an author's work and the social practices
of his time.

I would like to express my grateful thanks for
their help, interest, and patience throughout this
project to Dr. Melvin Storm and Dr. William Cogswell.
Thanks also are due to my friend Olaf Bexhoeft who
translated an article discussing the miniatures in
British Museum manuscript Harleien 4431 from German
to English for me. A final thanks goes to my husband,
Frederic, who supplied me with encouragement and
support through all my research, writing, and revising.

M.L.S.

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Introduction

In his introduction to Rene König's book discussing the social psychology of fashion, Thomas Wolfe notes that novelists have used fashion "as an essential ingredient of realistic narration . . . a symbolic vocabulary that offers a sub-rational but instant and very brilliant illumination of the characters of individuals. . . ."[1] He notes, too, that while novelists have viewed fashion as essential, most scholars have treated it as "comic relief," separating discussion of it from the rest of the discussion.[2] Wolfe cites Richardson and Fielding as the first novelists who used fashion as part of their narrations. However, Wolfe need not have stopped at Richardson and Fielding. Authors before the eighteenth century were using costume as a means of characterization. Chaucer was among these authors and, as they have done for others, scholars have ignored almost completely his references to fashion. This study, through an examination of late-fourteenth century fashions and the manner in which Chaucer referred to these fashions in his tales, demonstrates that this aspect of Chaucer should not be ignored.

A storyteller cannot compose a tale which is independent of his culture. Implicit in anything he writes are his social and moral standards, standards which he has absorbed, often subconsciously, since childhood. The implicit nature of these standards does not hinder his contemporary audience from understanding his meaning, because they have absorbed similar standards. However, this implicitness can hinder the understanding of a later audience, because it has absorbed different standards. This problem of understanding is present when a modern audience reads Chaucer, who wrote for a fourteenth-century English audience whose life centered around the king's court, an audience whose modes of life and habits of thought were different from the modes and habits of modern life. If a modern reader wants to appreciate fully Chaucer's poetry and prose, he must reconstruct this fourteenth-century world. Much reconstruction already has been done on medieval life and thought, but most studies in reconstruction approach the problem from a strictly historical viewpoint. For example, McKisack discusses the political events of the entire fourteenth century,[3] Steele concentrates on the political events of the reign of Richard II.[4] Coulton discusses the social life of the century,[5] Powers concentrates on life in the convents.[6] Some studies in reconstruction trace the influence on Chaucer of a particular aspect

of medieval life. Muscatine explores the influence of
French literature,[7] Robertson emphasizes the influence
of Christian doctrine,[8] Curry points out the influence
of the sciences.[9] Most of the studies that trace
influences on Chaucer are based on the objective that
Curry expresses as follows:

> Chaucer's poetical and dramatic conceptions
> were inevitably determined in some measure
> by the mediaeval outlook upon life, and his
> artistic execution of them was consummated
> with a fourteenth century audience in mind.
> Consequently, if the modern reader would
> understand Chaucer's work at its best, he
> must learn to think in terms of mediaeval
> customs and manners, mediaeval philosophy,
> religion, and science; these are the outward
> trappings of an inward reality.[10]

Of course, not every critic agrees that medieval
society must be reconstructed in order to understand
Chaucer.[11] Some critics declare that modern interpret-
ations of Chaucer are sufficient, especially since we
can never hope to understand Chaucer's works as his
original audience did. It is true that we cannot
reconstruct totally the medieval way of living and
thinking, but to say, for that reason, that we should
not try the reconstruction at all is to limit unneces-
sarily what we can learn about both Chaucer's world and
ours. In addition, not even these critics can avoid
some reconstruction, for they must recreate at least
enough of medieval thought to understand Chaucer's
English. My present study, based on Curry's objective,

approaches the reconstruction by way of a question which has not been explored adequately, the question of Chaucer's use of fashion (or costume) in his tales.[12] Costume, as used throughout this study, is defined as the total appearance of a person, including his hairstyle, makeup, garments, accessories, and physical shape and features. The discussion occasionally steps into the area of mannerisms, which reinforce costume in creating a character. The study begins with the assumption that Chaucer obviously did not mention costume details as a handy reference for future reconstructions of his era. Like any other author, he included details of costume to add to a character- ization or to further the story's plot, basing the details on the costumes worn in his society. Unfortu- nately, most fashion and social historians have used Chaucer as if he wrote as a historian rather than a poet. They also have claimed that Chaucer's works provide a finely detailed picture of medieval garments and mannerisms when, in fact, he provides very few details. In her study of English domestic life as recorded by Chaucer, Whitmore makes a claim which is typical of these historians's conviction of Chaucer's detailed accuracy. She claims that "Chaucer's portraits appear as clearly as those of the illumi- nations in old manuscripts, having the finish which only a master artist can obtain."[13] Perhaps it is a

proof of Chaucer's mastery that when we have read one
of his descriptions we are convinced that we have
been given a detailed picture when we have not. The
descriptions do contain details — very vivid details —
but the picture is not complete. Working solely from
an illumination in an old manuscript, I could recon-
struct any of the garments shown, although the tailor-
ing techniques would probably differ from the tech-
niques of a medieval tailor. Working solely from one
of Chaucer's descriptions, I could not reconstruct any
garment, not even the Prioress's wimple.[14] "Wimple"
supplies me with only a name. To discover its style,
or even that it is a garment rather than a hairstyle
or part of her horse's harness, I must go to another
source. In fact, I must refer to an outside source
to reconstruct any costume to which Chaucer referred,
a fact which belies the assertions of Chaucer's
completely detailed accuracy. Apparently, then,
Chaucer did not include costume details to provide
a fashion show. The reasons he did include these
details are the subject of this study.

　　To learn why Chaucer included certain costume
details, we first must learn what costumes were worn
by Chaucer and his contemporaries, because these
styles are the ones on which Chaucer based his costume
descriptions. Learning about these styles includes
more than learning what shapes they had and how they

were trimmed. Styles influences values. For example,
was a given style considered the proper style for a
man, or for a woman to wear? If it was considered
suitable for a man, was a man who wore it viewed as a
dandy or was he viewed as a conservative dresser?
Styles influence movement, also. For example, if I am
wearing high-heeled shoes, my stride will be short and
running will be very difficult. If I am wearing tennis
shoes, my stride can be much longer and running will
be much easier. However, moral values become attached
to movements just as they do to styles. Short steps
are considered proper for a lady, so even wearing
tennis shoes I will keep my stride short if I want to
appear ladylike. All of these values attached to
costume are tools which an author can use in bringing
a character to life. Chaucer mentioned certain details
of costume and his audience understood, but his meaning
may not be so clear to us. Even if we think we under-
stand a reference, we must be sure we are not reading
our values of dress back into an age which held other
values. An example is the Wife of Bath's Sunday hat
(Gen Prol 453-455). Chaucer may have been pointing
to its shape and mocking its style, a target which
seems obvious to us; but, on the other hand, he may
have been pointing out its extravagant amount of
delicate, expensive material, mocking the Wife's
pretensions to wealth and gentle breeding, giving no
thought to the style.

To understand Chaucer, we must go back to an England where both courtiers and their ladies wore skirts and both courtiers and ladies wore bright colors and moved through gilded rooms. Almost all garments were lined in a contrasting fabric or fur. Men and women who could afford them wore gemstones on their fingers, embroidered on their purses and gowns, and set in the hilts of their knives. But these gemstones were not faceted, and the bright colors and gilded ceilings were lit by sunlight or candlelight. Such details seem insignificant until we remember that it is faceting that gives gems their fire, until we consider the difference in effect between a gilded ceiling glaring in modern electric lighting or dimly glimmering in candlelight. The world to which we are returning recognized class distinctions and expected each person to dress in a costume appropriate to his class. However, the world I have just described did not include all of medieval England; it was only a small segment, composed of the nobility living in the courts of Edward III and of Richard II. Other segments of society did not agree that a person should dress in a manner defined as appropriate by the nobility. Many of these people (enough, at least, to cause the nobility to pass sumptuary laws in an attempt to enforce their ideas of appropriate costume) preferred garments and fabrics assigned to classes

above their own.[15] The sumptuary laws are evidence
that the members of the court accepted costume as a
manifestation of social status. The flouting of these
laws attests that members of the lower classes also
believed that fine clothing was indicative of social
position although factors such as comfort and a
preference for decorated garments over plain ones
probably contributed to the breaking of the laws, also.

Garments could relay messages other than the
message of social rank. The devices of heraldry on
garments and shields, as most people today know,
identified the family heritages and marriage affili-
ations of the nobility and, on the battlefield, identi-
fied ally and foe. In addition to family heritage,
details on garments could identify occupation. When
the Canon joins the Canterbury pilgrims, the narrator
determines this man's occupation by the way his hood
is sewn onto his cloak:

> And in myn herte wondren I bigan
> What that he was, til that I understood
> How that his cloke was sowed to his hood;
> For which, whan I hadde longe avysed me,
> I demed him som chanoun for to be.
> (CYT 569-573)

Finally, garment details could contribute to one
person's moral judgement of another person. For
example, at least one early fourteenth-century man
thought that only unchaste women wore sleeves fastened
with buttons; chaste women fastened their sleeves

with needle and thread.[16]

Fourteenth-century England was not the only society to identify a person's social rank and moral standing by his costume. The process has continued through the centuries. In each era, fiction writers have used these rules of costume as one method of characterization. Unfortunately, a discussion of how any author uses costume to portray character can become confusingly nebulous because such a discussion deals with social mores, subjective and constantly changing rules known by everyone in a particular culture but seldom written down. Because these rules change, leaving no record of previous usage, the significance of a hairstyle or shoe style is the element of a literary work least likely to transcend time. The loss of the meaning of a costume reference usually is not noticed because the hairstyle or shoe included by the author is ignored by the critics, partly because the daily use of costume as a manifestation of character and social status is so subconscious that these critics are not aware of it.[17] The subconscious association of character and costume is, however, only part of the reason that literary criticism in general has ignored costume in fiction. Another factor is the conscious rejection of the idea that a person should be judged by something so changeable, so apparently peripheral to his character.[18]

Occasionally, however, an author details costume in a
manner which insists that these details be noticed,
as Chaucer did in his Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.
Critics usually approach these instances with the
assumption that the values placed on costume have not
changed over the centuries. The discussion about the
Wife of Bath's Sunday hat is representative of this
approach; debate has been concerned so far only with
whether the style of this hat was of the latest fashion
or was outdated.[19] This emphasis on style appears to
be based on the assumption that the style of a garment
was the main criterion by which Chaucer and his audi-
ence evaluated a person's costume because style is the
main criterion we use today. Unfortunately, the
standards by which costume is evaluated have changed,
and we should consider whether Chaucer had in mind
other factors than the style of the hat. Chaucer's
statement that the Wife's "coverchiefs ful fyne weren
of ground" (Gen Prol 453) suggests that he may have
been pointing to the fabric of which the hat was made
rather than or in addition to its style. The idea
that Chaucer was referring to the fabric gains support
from the frequent references he made elsewhere in his
works to the fabrics of which garments were made. The
type of fabric appears to have been an item of major
importance rather than the minor detail it is today.[20]
That they "ful fyne weren of ground" could mean that

the coverchiefs had been made of a delicate, sheer
fabric, which, in Chaucer's opinion, was too elegant
and expensive to be worn by a woman of low rank.
This conjecture gains support from the sumptuary laws
of the last half of the fourteenth century, which
emphasize the type of fabric (rather than the style
of garment) suitable for each rank of the social
hierarchy. However, even though the fabric of the
hat may be one item included in its censure, and
even though the sumptuary laws indicate that the
condemnation may have been directed toward the
extravagance of that material, we cannot conclude
yet that the Wife's extravagance was being condemned.
The poet further stated his certainty that these
coverchiefs weighed ten pounds. This weight may or
may not be an exaggeration, but it does suggest
another reading of "ful fyne weren of ground." Perhaps
Chaucer intended his audience to understand the
opposite meaning, that the coverchiefs, of which the
Wife seems so proud, were actually made of a fabric
which was coarse and heavy in comparison with that
used by the aristocracy, a meaning which would have
caused more laughter than condemnation. The possibility
that the Prologue was intended to be heard rather than,
or in addition to, being read by its audience lends
some support to this idea. The poet would have had no
need to write a clearer indication of opposite meaning

into the text, relying on his tone to convey this
meaning as he read the poem aloud. There may be other
possible answers to the riddle of the Wife of Bath's
Sunday coverchiefs. I have mentioned the problem not
to offer a solution but to demonstrate the fact that
we must beware of unthinkingly assuming that modern
standards are the same as the standards of past eras.

 The assumption that rules of costume as well as
other social rules have remained unchanged is incorrect
but common, so common, in fact, that it itself is the
one ever-present, never-changing social rule. The
people of all cultures have considered their dress
and their manners to be the proper expressions of
natural laws. Each generation learns the current
rules, holds these rules to be natural and immutable,
and judges what it sees, hears, and reads by these
rules, assuming that all peoples, of all eras and
cultures, have held the same values. Are these rules
not natural rules, each generation reasons, and
therefore the only possible rules? This assumption
of immutable social rules is reinforced in historical
research by the recurring complaints of the moralists.
Their complaints of moral degeneration repeat the
same words generation after generation because they
name only the social values being eroded and the
names of the values have not changed. What has changed
is the behavior that calls forth these names. In

interpreting the complaints of moralists, we must
first learn what the common practice was at the time
the complaint was written. Only then can we begin to
know what action was meant by labels such as "immodest"
or "effeminate." We must remember, also, that moral-
ists usually have decried every new fashion that has
appeared, whether the fashion has been in costume or
in other areas. The following two examples, one from
eleventh-century Italy and one from eighteenth-century
England, amply demonstrate the range of their denunci-
ations. The first example concerns the table fork, a
dining tool not used by medieval Europeans. In the
eleventh century, a Byzantine princess, betrothed
to the future Doge of Venice, traveled to Venice to
celebrate the event. At one of the many feasts, she
carried her meat to her mouth with a golden fork, an
act that shocked her fellow diners, who were using
their fingers, as overly fastidious and resulted in
a diatribe by one of the clergy attending the feast.[21]
The second example concerns the umbrella, a convenient
article introduced into English life in the eighteenth
century, imported from the Far East. Moralists of
the time were appalled to see everyone carrying this
device to ward off the rain. Such a practice, they
reasoned, thwarted God's purpose, for did the Bible
not say that the rain was to fall on the just and
unjust alike? Yet in their corrupt age, both the just

and unjust were circumventing this purpose under the protection of these devilish umbrellas.[22]

Two other problems which appear repeatedly in discussions of social practices must be noted in relation to this study of Chaucer's use of costume. The first problem applies to all areas of cultural study and can be acknowledged only, not corrected. The second problem applies to the study of the practical arts. Unlike the first, this one can be avoided with a little effort on the part of any researcher.

The first problem is our inability to recreate totally the social rules of a past era. This problem is tangled in the social rules which we learn so thoroughly and accept as so normal that we often do not consider that other lifestyles are based on different premises. Even when we recognize and make every effort to understand the differences, our best efforts inevitably are colored at least slightly by our standards. The television series LaVerne and Shirley, which started its run in the mid-nineteen seventies, demonstrates the disparity between the actual attitudes of an era and the attitudes portrayed in a later, artistic recreation of that era. This show recreates the nineteen fifties, a time within the memories of the actors, writers, and many of the viewers of the show. Yet a comparison of this show with a show actually filmed in the nineteen fifties

reveals a rather surprising area of change. The women
in the nineteen fifties films move with a stiff
primness which contrasts sharply with the more relaxed
movements of the actresses in <u>LaVerne and Shirley</u>.
I have mentioned that styles can influence movement,
but in this instance the change does not result from
different styles because the costumes of <u>LaVerne and
Shirley</u> are duplicates of the styles of the nineteen
fifties. Instead, the change is a result of changing
attitudes about the conduct of respectable women.[23]
Social rules are continually in a process of modi-
fication, usually by stages so small that we do not
notice them. Because of these continual, minute
changes, contemporary attitudes are often discernable
in even the most painstaking of recreations. The
problem cannot be eliminated, but it should not be
forgotten; an awareness of this limitation is one
guard against falling back on the assumption that
social rules have never changed.

The second problem is much less complex and
subjective. In studying materials concerning a
practical art, many researchers appear to believe
that everything about anything can be learned from
books, eliminating any need for practical experience.
This notion is erroneous. Books can describe a
practical art, such as goldsmithing or tailoring,
only in general terms, perhaps made slightly more

specific by diagrams or photographs. However, only
experience in working gold or fabric or any other
medium can teach a person the limitations as well
as the potentials of the medium, enabling him to
assess with greater accuracy any information written
about that practical art. The couching stitch used
in medieval embroideries is one example of how practice
can disprove theory. By mentally reconstructing the
working of this particular stitch, some researchers
concluded that it was so intricate that a team of two
was required to work it. But one researcher, also
an embroiderer, sat down at her embroidery frame to
reconstruct the actual stitch and discovered that
working the stitch required only one person.[24] This
particular example is of a small detail that probably
does not much affect our concept of life in medieval
England. But a researcher's lack of practical knowl-
edge can drastically alter our view of that England.
I take for an example Mead's English Medieval Feasts,
which is the secondary source most often cited in
discussions of medieval food. After examining several
fifteenth-century cookbooks, Mead concluded, among
other things, that many medieval dishes contained
unpalatable, highly-spiced mixtures of ingredients,[25]
an opinion which has found common acceptance. Mead
may have been a scholar, but he was not a cook, a
regretable lack which several scholars who are also

cooks make very clear.[26] Working from their knowledge
of how modern food is prepared, these women demonstrate
that the medieval recipes were not the unpalatable,
highly-spiced mixtures of Mead's fancy. In fact,
they totally alter Mead's viewpoint, demonstrating
the difference that practical as well as abstract
knowledge can make in learning how another era lived.
Learning a craft for ourselves is not always possible
or practical, but at the very least we should ask
questions of people who practice that craft.

With the preceeding limitations in mind, we can
turn our attention to discovering why Chaucer described
the costumes of various characters. The first step,
as I mentioned earlier, is to discover what the English
wore during the reigns of Edward III and Richard II.
This reconstruction should be made as independently of
medieval romances and other fictional sources as
possible. Social history and the history of costume
cannot be reconstructed accurately from fiction,
although many such attempts have been made.[27] Further,
reconstruction based on fiction followed by criticism
based on that reconstruction cannot be anything but
circular. A novelist mentions a costume detail in
order to focus attention on it; it is something that
is in some way unusual and therefore stands out from
all the unrecorded ordinary details of a character's
costume. Definitions of ordinary and extraordinary

are based, of course, on the costumes of the novelist's
era. If the women of his day wear floor-length skirts
and his characters wear floor-length skirts, he
probably will not mention this detail because it is
an ordinary detail which his contemporary audience
will take for granted. If, however, the women of his
day wear knee-length skirts and his characters wear
floor-length skirts, he will mention this detail
because it is extraordinary in comparison to his
audience's experience. Since we should not rely on
fiction for historical reconstruction, we must study
other documents of the time, such as household accounts,
wills, and handbooks of manners. The visual arts such
as sculpture and painting can be useful, also, although
here, as with fiction, we cannot assume automatically
that every picture represents the costumes and
practices of the era in which it was painted. In
addition, comparisons should be made among the fiction-
al works of various authors to discover how each
portrays character through dress and manners. For an
author not only draws from the life around him, he
borrows also from literary tradition, continuing
stereotypes which may bear little resemblance to
actual people but which his audience will recognize
because they know the same literary tradition. Here
again, art works aid in relearning the literary
tradition, for, as several scholars have demonstrated,[28]

medieval literature as well as actual life influenced
the sculptor and painter in their works. A total
reconstruction of all the costumes, including armor,
of late fourteenth-century English life is outside the
scope of this discussion. My purpose here is to
reconstruct, as far as possible, the civilian costume
of the aristocracy of England from 1350-1400 and then
to examine how Chaucer made use of this costume in
his poetry. The examination of Chaucer's use of
costume begins with the question of what we can learn
about Criseyde's character by comparing her costume
with the costumes of other Chaucerian women. The
discussion presented in the next several chapters is
not conclusive, for reasons explained in the next
chapter. It is, rather, an exploration, suggestive
of the possibilities for further study concerning
Chaucer's use of costume.

The Current State of Fashion Scholarship

Before analyzing why Chaucer included certain
costume details in his stories, we must learn about
the styles on which these details were based. A
knowledge of fourteenth-century costume is necessary
to a modern researcher even if Chaucer was endeavoring
to recreate the atmosphere of an earlier court in
some of his tales, because the garments that Chaucer's
audience accepted as fashionable determined what
garments they would have judged as either old-fashioned
or avant-garde. A complete study of Chaucer's use of
costume would require reconstruction of the costumes
of both rich and poor people in medieval England.
Since costume, like literature, is influenced by other
countries, the study ideally should include comparisons
of English and European costumes and perhaps Oriental
costumes, also.[1] The current study, limited both by
time and by the fact that, to my knowledge, a reliable
history of costume has yet to be published, is confined
to the costumes worn by the aristocracy in the English
court in the last half of the fourteenth century. But
the aim of any costume study, limited or not, should
be to know the costumes of an era as the people who

wore them did. How many garments were worn at one
time? How did the garments restrict movement? How
did a garment move and reflect the light as its wearer
walked or danced? Among the many costume styles worn,
which ones were considered fashionable and which were
worn by the people who ignored fashion? Early in the
twentieth century, Dion Calthrop witnessed an English
pageant in which an attempt was made to dress the
actors in authentic medieval costumes. Considering
the attempt to be "perfectly successful," Calthrop
described the visual effect in his history of English
costume. His description summarizes the necessity of
recreating any garment as totally as possible (the
quotation is divided into the paragraphs given in the
original):

> Until the performance of the Sherborne
> Pageant, I had never had the opportunity
> of seeing a mass of people, under proper,
> open-air conditions, dressed in the peasant
> costume of Early England.
> For once traditional stage notions of
> costume were cast aside, and an attempt was
> made, which was perfectly successful, to
> dress people in the colours of their time.
> The mass of simple colours--bright reds,
> blues, and greens--was a perfect expression
> of the date, giving, as nothing else could
> give, an appearance of an illuminated book
> come to life.
> One might imagine that such a primary-
> coloured crowd would have appeared un-English,
> and too Oriental or Italian; but with the
> background of trees and stone walls, the
> English summer sky distressed with clouds,
> the moving cloud shadows and the velvet
> grass, these fierce hard colours looked
> distinctly English, undoubtedly of their

> date, and gave the spirit of the ages, from
> a clothes point of view, as no other colours
> could have done. In doing this they attested
> to the historical truth of the play. . . .
> It was interesting to see the difference
> made to this crowd by the advent of a number
> of monks in uniform black or brown, and to
> see the setting in which these jewel-like
> peasants shone--the play of brilliant hues
> amid the more sombre browns and blacks, the
> shifting of the blues and reds, the strong
> notes of emerald green--all, like the
> symmetrical accidents of the kaleidoscope,
> settling into their places in perfect harmony.
> The entire scene bore the impress of the
> spirit of historical truth, and it is by
> such pageants that we can imagine coloured
> pictures of an England of the past.
> Again, we could observe the effect of the
> light-reflecting armour, cold, shimmering
> steel, coming in a play of colour against
> the background of peasants, and thereby one
> could note the exact appearance of an
> ordinary English day of such a date as this
> of which I now write, the end of the thir-
> teenth century.[2]

My reconstruction of the costumes of late four-

teenth-century English courtiers and their ladies

begins with a study of fashion histories in order to

discover the general outlines as well as the details

of these costumes. The fashion histories I have relied

on for the following descriptions are the Handbook of

English Mediaeval Costume, written by C. Willett and

Phillis Cunnington and the Cyclopaedia of Costume,

written by J. R. Planché.[3] According to these histo-

ries, the courtier wore a hat, a closely-fitted, hip-

length jacket, hose, and pointed shoes (figure 1).

This body-revealing costume was worn in the courts of

both Edward III and Richard II. A second style,

introduced during Richard's reign, contrasted sharply
with the first. This style replaced the hip-length
jacket with a loose gown, knee-length or longer, belted
at the waist (figure 2). The court lady wore a gown
which was fitted to the hips and flared into a skirt
that swept the floor. This gown might be worn under
another gown either fashioned like the first (figure 3),
or else resembling a modern jumper with very large
armholes (figure 4). Her hair, bound in front of her
ears, was covered with a more or less elaborate combi-
nation of veils and goldsmith's work. A researcher
could use such general descriptions with their accompa-
nying illustrations to construct copies of the garments
in order to study fabric drapery, restriction of move-
ment, and any other effects that a given style would
have had on a person either wearing the garment or
seeing it worn. Making and wearing one or more of
these garments would teach us about the visual effect
of fourteenth-century English costume but could tell
us little about the values attached to the garments
Chaucer mentions in his tales.[4]

For an analysis of the connotations of the
garments worn by Chaucerian characters we need details
other than the visual and physical effect of a garment.
These details include such things as what style was
identified by a particular garment name in fourteenth-
century England, what accessories were considered

appropriate to each style, and what styles were considered appropriate for various social functions. For example, in the Miller's Tale, Alison wears the equivalent of the modern belt, an accessory first identified as a "ceinte" (MillT 3235) and later as a "girdle" (3250). Karuth and Kuhn, in their Middle English Dictionary, gloss these terms as synonyms,[5] but Chaucer's use of two different terms implies that there is at least a small difference in meaning. Is a ceinte a particular style of girdle as today a shirt is a particular style of blouse? Or do ceinte and girdle refer to two distinct styles, both adorning Alison's waist? The general costume descriptions I provided in the preceding paragraph obviously do not contain the details necessary for answering such questions and, unfortunately, the fashion histories from which I derived the descriptions do not contain such details either. The descriptions given in Cunnington's Handbook and Planché's Cyclopaedia are representative of the kinds of descriptions provided by other histories of costume, also. Fashion historians describe the general outlines of fourteenth-century English garments, but offer little information about colors, fabrics, and trims, and even less about the occasions for which a garment or accessory was appropriate. The details which are provided differ from fashion history to fashion history and seldom are

documented adequately. The lack of details in fashion
histories, the disagreement over the details which are
provided, and the lack of documentation which would
enable a researcher to trace disagreements to their
sources prevent me, at the present time, from making
a thorough analysis of Chaucer's use of costume.
Therefore, it is necessary for me to present these
problems in greater detail. Since Criseyde is the
character I am most concerned with in my discussion of
Chaucer's use of costume, I will use her also as the
starting point for my examination of the fashion
histories currently available. My discussion begins
with the incident which contains the first reference
in Troilus and Criseyde to Criseyde's costume - her
visit to the Trojan court (TC 1.106-126).

When Criseyde finds that her father's treason
has turned the townspeople against her, she dresses
herself in a "widewes habit large of samyt broun"
(TC 1.109) and hurries to Hector to plead for mercy.
On reading this line, one may immediately ask why
Chaucer dressed a widow in brown instead of black.
To answer this question, we first must learn what
widows were expected to wear in the late fourteenth
century. Phillis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas begin
their discussion with medieval customs of mourning
in their Costume for Births, Marriages, and Deaths,
so it appears that this book will describe the garments

worn by widows in the Middle Ages.[6] However,
Cunnington and Lucas provide only a few details
about the proper garments for a widow. According
to them, a pleated throat covering called a barbe
(figure 5) became formalized as the prerogative of a
widow in the fifteenth century.[7] Regarding the rest
of a widow's costume, they say only that widows
usually wore old-fashioned styles. Whether these
styles were outdated by ten or by one hundred years,
the authors do not say. They claim that fourteenth-
century custom had not obliged widows to wear black
yet,[8] but they cite as evidence, unfortunately, the
source of our original question: the brown dress
which Criseyde wears to court, compared with the
black one she wears to the temple (TC 1.170). Using
this last piece of evidence obviously would make
circular any argument concerning Chaucer's intent.
As Cunnington and Lucas provide only a small part
of the answer we are seeking, we must turn to histo-
ries that deal with everyday costumes as well as
costumes for special occasions. But a study of these
fashion histories shows that most ignore the question
of color completely, mentioning widow's wear only
in connection with the barbe, a garment whose various
definitions exemplify the confusion existing in
fashion research. The disagreement exists, of course,
from one fashion historian to another, but,

unfortunately, a fashion historian sometimes disagrees
with himself, also, as Herbert Norris's Costume and
Fashion illustrates.[9]

In the second volume of his work, Norris says that
by the thirteenth century the barbe was the distinctive
garment of a widow and that, until the end of the
fourteenth century, this throat covering was referred
to as either a wimple (figure 6) or a barbe (p. 191).
Sometime in the fifteenth century, the widow's barbe
(or wimple) was transformed into the pleated version
described by Cunnington and Lucas, lost its name of
wimple, and was referred to only as a barbe. However,
Norris continues, wimples in the form of unpleated
throat coverings were worn throughout the reign of
Henry V by "matrons and elderly women" (p. 439).
This information contradicts the information given
by Cunnington and Lucas about the century in which
the barbe became widow's wear, a problem compounded
by the fact that Norris contradicts himself, also.
The wimple, he claims, was introduced at the end
of the twelfth century to fill in the scandalously
low necklines of women's gowns (pp. 120, 231).[10]
To fashion this decorous garment, a woman draped a
piece of linen under her chin and across her neck
and pinned the ends to her hair. She then draped
a veil over her head, covering both her hair and the
ends of the wimple. Norris claims that this garment,

worn through the reign of Henry V, was not always
high fashion. In the reign of Richard I (1189-1199)
it was the fashion (p. 98). By the reign of Henry III
(1216-1272), wimples and veils were no longer fashion-
able but were worn occasionally (p. 162). (Presumably,
widows wore them on all occasions.) In the reign of
Edward I (1272-1307), the wimple returned to high
fashion (p. 168). Norris does not explain how, during
the reign of Edward I, the wimple, synonymous with
the barbe, could be both a high-fashion garment and
a garment which characterized a widow. However, he
does say that the newest headdress in Edward's reign
was the gorget, which was a wimple worn without a
veil (figure 7 [pp. 169, 180]). This definition adds
another unmatching piece to the puzzle. If a throat
covering worn without a veil was called a gorget and
the same throat covering worn with a veil was a
wimple, does the term wimple mean only the throat
covering or does it mean the throat covering plus
the veil? The definition of gorget implies that
wimple includes both throat covering and veil, but
Norris does not use wimple without saying veil, also.
He complicates things further by stating that "a
detail worth remembering is that the gorget or wimple
was always worn tucked inside the neck of the dress.
The GUIMPE hung outside the top of the gown" (p. 269).
However, as an illustration for an earlier discussion,

Norris includes a figure of a woman whose throat
covering, hanging <u>outside</u> the neckline of her gown,
Norris calls a wimple: "The elaborate headdress is
described on p. 268, and as is usual with this type
of wimple it is worn outside the cyclas" (p. 215).
This statement implies that wimple was the general
term for a throat covering and that gorget and guimpe
were specific wimple styles, but such a conclusion
is guesswork because Norris never clearly defines
the terms he uses. The practice of failing to define
the terms they use is followed by most fashion histo-
rians.

Although Norris and Cunnington and Lucas disagree
on dates, the authors of both books use the mourning
etiquette instituted by Margaret Beaufort during the
reign of her son Henry VII as evidence that the barbe
was worn as a sign of widowhood. But Cunnington
and Lucas cite the document containing this etiquette
as evidence for their claim that the barbe was not a
distinctive widow's garment until the fifteenth
century.[11] Norris cites this document in order to
furnish additional details about a widow's headdress[12]
and mentions no evidence supporting his claim that
from the beginning of the thirteenth century the barbe
was a distinctive garment for widows. Margaret's
rules of mourning detail the weeds of a widow at the
end of the fifteenth century and do not allow the

inference apparently taken by Norris that for many years widows had worn the garments it decrees. For example, the rules prescribe that a surcoat was to be worn by specified gentlewomen of the king's household and by widows of knights and of men of all higher ranks, but the surcoat was a garment so old-fashioned that Margaret was obliged to describe it.

Norris does not offer any other evidence for his statements concerning widow's weeds and wimples, gorgets, and guimpes. But, as noted earlier, Cunnington and Lucas do, offering the quotation from Chaucer as proof that black was not mandatory for widows in the fourteenth century. In other words, these historians rest their case solely on a literary work, assuming that clothing descriptions in medieval literature are the equivalent of those in modern fashion magazines. They assume, also, that Chaucer is describing the costumes as well as the customs of his day, a view shared by some critics of Chaucer.[13] However, Chaucer, like most authors, directed his words to his contemporary audience, not a possible future one, mentioning details of clothing to deepen the audience's understanding of a character or to further the plot, not to accomodate future curiosity. In the instance of Criseyde's dress, four possible interpretations suggest themselves.

The first possibility is suggested in the apology

Chaucer offers at the beginning of Book II:

> Ye knowe ek that in forme of speche is chaunge
> Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
> That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
> Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,
> And spedde as wel in love as men now do;
> Ek for to wynnen love in sondry ages,
> In sondry londes, sondry ben usages.
>   (TC 2.22-28)

This stanza implies that Chaucer may have seen himself
as recreating the customs of an older court. The
failure of both critics and fashion historians to
consider the possibility that Chaucer, in writing of
olden times, is describing customs and costumes of
a century earlier than the fourteenth seems, so far,
to have been based on a common twentieth-century
belief that people in medieval times had no concept
of history. Medieval ideas of Trojan customs may
have differed from our ideas of these customs, but
a disagreement about the evidence supporting a concept
does not imply that one of the parties has no notion
of the concept. And it does seem odd that Chaucer
would have apologized for the strange customs in his
story if he were presenting the customs practiced by
his original audience. If the setting is historical,
the brown worn by Criseyde may be a historical touch,
a contrasting of old practices with new ones.

Of the remaining three possibilities, any one
could be true whether or not the setting is intended
to be historical. If custom (either old or new)

dictated that brown was the proper color for a widow
to wear when appearing at court, Chaucer could be
demonstrating Criseyde's tendency to conform, a
tendency directly stated in lines 127-133 of Book 1.
On the other hand, if black was required for all
occasions, Chaucer could be indicating early in his
tale that Criseyde does not always conform to social
customs, preparing his audience for her later, more
blameworthy, disregard for social rules. The final
possibility is that "broun" is intended to mean simply
"of a dark color,"[14] a medieval usage that is no
longer current. Chaucer's original audience would have
known, based on customary practice, which dark color
was meant.

None of these suggestions is offered as a proven
interpretation of line 109, Book 1. Rather, they are
all evidence of the fallacy of accepting literature
as straightforward historical reporting, a practice
which becomes more than a nuisance to someone studying
fourteenth-century English costume. Primary sources
for this period are few and, to fill the gap, many
fashion historians use Chaucer, turning any study of
Chaucer's costume references into the circle demon-
strated by the comments on Criseyde's brown and black
dresses. Fashion historians tighten the circle by
refusing to elaborate on the portions of Chaucer which
they quote, quotations which sometimes are modernized

in spelling and syntax and usually have no notation
concerning which edition of Chaucer has been used.[15]
But after reading the quotations from Chaucer presented
by historians as clear pictures of fourteenth-century
fashions, I am no less puzzled than before over such
things as how stockings can be "[f]ul streite yteyd"
(Gen Prol 457).[16] Since we cannot learn the shapes
and details of fourteenth-century costume from second-
ary sources, we must search for them in primary
sources.

The primary sources available for learning about
fourteenth-century costume include (among other things)
sculptures, paintings (including manuscript miniatures),
wills, letters, legal records, and wardrobe accounts.
Each of these sources requires that the researcher
have background knowledge in different fields in order
to use it intelligently.[17] Some of these fields are
obvious. Studying medieval wills, for example, requires
knowledge of medieval Latin, French, and English as
well as of the legal meanings of the words used in
wills. Less obvious fields which can affect interpre-
tation include a study of modern wills, of modern and
medieval economics, and of the positions in society
of the testators of the wills being examined. I do
not yet know exactly how such knowledge would influ-
ence the interpretation of clothing bequests in
medieval wills because I have not had either the time

or the resources to make such a study. However, fashion and social historians do not appear to have considered economics, social position, or equivalent modern wills when they cite wills as evidence. For example, a frequent assertion is that garments were much more expensive in the Middle Ages than they are today. Gervase Mathew, in his study of the social life of the court of Richard II, goes so far as to claim that clothing was so expensive that it was viewed as portable capital.[18] Such claims rest in part on the fact that garments were frequent bequests in wills, the implication being that people do not make bequests of clothing today, and therefore, clothing was more valuable then. This claim may or may not be true, but proof would require more evidence than the fact that garments were frequent bequests. First we must determine the social position of the testator and then study equivalent modern wills to see if the types of bequests actually do differ. For example, a modern equivalent to the will of John of Gaunt probably would be the will of Nelson Rockefeller. The will of a blue collar worker would not be. Once we have determined a medieval person's social position and its modern equivalent, we can study the economics governing the bequests in equivalent medieval and modern wills. How did the medieval price of clothing compare with that of other goods? How does the modern price of

clothing compare with that of other goods? In such a comparison, social status, again, must be considered. The price of the clothing of John of Gaunt's wife cannot be compared to the price of modern ready-made garments which can be bought in department stores such as J. C. Penney or Macy's. Rather, the price should be compared with its modern-day equivalent, that of the haute couture houses of Paris.

The various factors that the researcher must consider when using a will for evidence in a study of costume are typical of the wide range of knowledge necessary for using each primary source. The time necessary for me to acquire such knowledge has forced me to push a direct study of Chaucer's use of costume into some indefinite future time. The example of Criseyde's dress typifies the lack of useful inform-ation provided by fashion histories, but I have included a few more examples in the following para-graphs to prove that this case is not an isolated one, to show more fully why the final chapter of my discussion is not more conclusive, and to alert others to the inadequacy of the authorities they are relying on when they attempt to determine the significance Chaucer attached to a detail of costume. Much has been written, especially in regard to the Canterbury pilgrims, about the import of Chaucerian costume. But the conclusions reached, based on the very questionable

authority of current scholarship on fashion, can be
regarded only as questionable themselves. The fashion
histories I will use for these examples are Historical
Costumes of England from the Eleventh to the Twentieth
Century by Nancy Bradfield,[19] Fashion in History by
Marybelle Bigelow,[20] English Costume of the Late
Middle Ages by Iris Brooke,[21] the Handbook by the
Cunningtons, English Costume from the Second Century
B.C. to 1967 by Doreen Yarwood,[22] and Costume and
Fashion by Herbert Norris.

Bradfield's history demonstrates the format
generally used by fashion historians. Bradfield's
book is a slim volume whose "Foreward" and "Preface"
promise careful, detailed scholarship. In the
"Foreward," James Laver, himself the author of several
fashion histories,[23] praises the book's "accuracy,
its grasp of fundamental lines, and its clear and
logical arrangement."[24] In her "Preface," Bradfield
observes that research on fashion requires that the
researcher study both the social and political histo-
ries of a nation in order to comprehend its fashions.
She points out, also, that the researcher must study
primary as well as secondary sources.[25] Unfortunately,
the text following this preface shows little evidence
of the three points commended by Laver or of much
study regarding England's social or political history.
Nor does the bibliography list primary sources older

than the seventeenth century.

Segmenting fashion periods to coincide with the reigns of the English monarchs, Bradfield discusses in four brief pages what people wore during the reign of Richard II. These four pages, subdivided neatly into men's fashions and women's fashions, consist of a left-hand page of text and a right-hand page of line drawings for each sub-division. The promise of the first sentences describing men's fashions is not fulfilled:

> Though the fashions of the preceding reign were still worn, great changes took place between 1380-90 when there was a new eccentric cut of men's garments with a definite German influence. There were also Franco-Burgundian novelities of folly-bells and jewelled collars.[26]

A description of this new, eccentric cut and of its development should follow, along with details of the folly-bells and jewelled collars. However, neither subject is continued. The text abruptly picks up another fashion and continues, granting only a sentence or two to each garment or accessory mentioned. The result is a dictionary arranged in short paragraphs with no documentation except a very brief bibliography to verify the facts presented. No effort at all is made to put the fashions in their political and social contexts.

This pattern of a paragraphed dictionary of

undocumented claims is followed in the works of most
fashion historians. They briefly mention many styles
without discussing the styles in relation to each other
or to the social contexts in which they were worn.
Each style described usually is mentioned only once in
a fashion history (depicted, presumably, as it was
at the time it was worn as high fashion) and is
described as if, for a period, no one wore any other
style. The impression given is that fashion existed
in a vacuum in which every twenty-five or fifty years
one style, worn as a sort of uniform by everyone,
whether rich, poor, young, or old, was discarded and
a different style was adopted as a uniform. The social
and political contexts can be found in other sources,
but the economic and moral values attached to a style
of garment cannot be found elsewhere. Because fashion
historians do not define clearly the terms that they
use, the information provided in their books is of
little value for learning facts such as the name
given to a particular style by the people who wore it,
the evolution of a particular style, and what other
styles were worn at the time it was fashionable. This
problem was demonstrated above by the example of the
wimple, guimpe, and gorget. I will offer a further
example, based on a garment called a houppelande, to
demonstrate that eliminating this problem would be
relatively simple.[27]

Fashion historians agree on the general shape of the houppelande, describing it as a long-sleeved, unfitted dress, gathered to the body with a belt (figure 2). Differences between men's and women's houppelandes were slight. A woman fastened her belt directly under her breasts; a man fastened his at his waist. A woman's collar could be high or form a low V; a man's collar was always high, sometimes reaching to his ear lobes. A woman's skirts were always floor-length; a man's might reach only to mid-thigh or might be knee- or floor-length. When a researcher attempts to learn further details from histories of fashion concerning the houppelande, he finds either contra-dictions or else a total lack of information about the detail under investigation. For example, although most fashion historians consider the years in which the garment was worn, the dates they assign to it vary widely. Six of the answers about when the houppelande was worn are summarized below.

Bigelow, whose Fashion in History begins with ancient Egyptian and ends with twentieth century European fashions, says that the houppelands was worn in Western Europe, by both men and women, from the beginning of the fourteenth century.[28] Historians concentrating on the fashions of England disagree with this dating, but fail to agree on another. Brooke says that men and women began wearing

houppelandes in the 1380's.[29] According to the
Cunningtons, men appeared in houppelandes in the
1350s or 1360s; women did not adopt this garment
until 1400 or shortly thereafter.[30] Yarwood agrees,
approximately, with the Cunningtons, asserting that
houpplandes were introduced for men shortly after
Richard II became king and for women shortly before
Richard II ceased being king.[31] Bradfield, on the
other hand, supports either Brooke or Yarwood, depending
on which page of her history one reads. On page 43
of Historical Costume, Bradfield claims that the newest
fashion for both men and women in the 1380s was the
houppelande; two pages later she claims that women
did not wear this garment until 1399. And finally,
Norris suggests a reason for the disagreement regarding
dates. Although he claims that English women did not
wear houppelandes until the second decade of the
fifteenth century,[32] Norris includes an illustration
of a woman, identified as a contemporary of Richard II,
who is clad in a long, full, high-collared gown
resembling an unbelted houppelande. According to
Norris, the woman is wearing "a gown cut on the old
style" to which a fashionable high collar has been
added.[33] Citing the high collar as one of the marks
identifying a houppelande, other historians probably
would classify this garment as a houppelande. In
other words, perhaps the confusion over dates and

about details arises from how each historian choses
to define a garment. But unscrambling the confusion
is impossible because not one of the six historians
explains why he or she called the garment a houppelande
or cites even one source to verify his or her dating.
Norris fails even to say where his drawing originated.
The failure of most fashion historians to provide
proof to support their claims is the main hindrance
to an investigation into Chaucer's use of costume.
Because of the lack of documentation, a researcher
has no method, other than faith, of deciding whether
or not a fashion history is reliable.

Primary sources used for a study of fashion are
subject to differing interpretations, based on the
knowledge of the fashion historian using them. But
primary sources are subject, also, to modifications,
sometimes deliberate, sometimes unconscious, made by
the fashion historian using them. Yarwood is an
example of a historian who has deliberately modified
a primary source without indicating that she has done
so. Yarwood provides clearly detailed drawings
throughout her book. She was the artist for all of
them, but if one compares the slightly dumpy figures
she presents wearing modern costume with the slender
figures wearing fourteenth-century costume, it becomes
evident that both sets cannot be original drawings by
Yarwood. The extremely slender lines of the fourteenth-

century figures suggest that they have been copied
from medieval illuminations and paintings. This
possibility cannot be verified because Yarwood gives
no hint, either in the caption to each drawing or in
the text, of what source she was copying or even that
any of her figures is a copy. A glance at the
bibliography section devoted to "Principal Sources of
Illustrations" is no more helpful. Two entries from
this section illustrate the type of information
supplied. The first one at least limits the researcher
to one building. The second dooms him to wander over
two countries:

> VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM Actual costumes,
> fashion plates, miniatures, embroideries,
> jewellry, pottery, sculpture and reliefs.
>
> Sculpture, carving, monumental brasses,
> effigies, stained glass and mosaic work
> from Churches and Cathedrals in England
> and France. Fashion plates, drawings and
> magazines, Oil paintings, miniatures and
> drawings.[34]

Neither entry provides the source of a specific drawing
or the source of the date that Yarwood attributes
to that drawing, but the source is needed in order
for a researcher to understand how Yarwood interpreted
its details. A comparison of any original with a
copy of it will show some alterations in the copy,
even though the copy may have been intended as an
exact duplicate. These alterations may be subtle;
nevertheless, they modify the original intention.

On the basis of the one drawing among them that I
recognized, I suspect that in her copies Yarwood
made little effort toward exact replication. The
drawing is of Richard II (figure 8), copied from his
portrait in Westminster Abbey (figure 9). In the
original painting Richard is seated; in Yarwood's
copy he is standing, a change in his position that
erases the prerogative of a king to sit in the presence
of any of his subjects although they must remain
standing. The original painter represented this
hierarchy because it was a part of the painter's
daily life. Further, in the original painting even
details as large as general garment shapes are not
clear, yet Yarwood has transformed the painting into
a clearly-detailed drawing, dressing Richard in a
loose-fitting gown. Yet she gives no indication that
she has copied from an original or has changed that
original in any way. Her detailing may or may not be
accurate, but neither possibility can be explored
because she does not explain the deduction which led
her to include these details. The comment of another
historian, who states that, in the Westminster portrait,
Richard is wearing "a long tight-fitting deep-blue
gown which is embroidered all over with a pattern in
gold," shows that more than one interpretation of these
details is possible.[35]

Some of the many fashion histories are better

than the rest. But even among the best there is a
lack of adequate documentation. At times the author
does not give even a bibliography and frequently the
bibliography given is acknowledged to be incomplete.
An example of one of these better histories is the
Handbook of English Mediaeval Costume by Phillis and
Willett Cunnington.

In their "Preface," the Cunningtons make the
claim that "no positive fact has been stated which has
not been confirmed from authentic sources."[36] Whether
or not they adhered to this admirable intent I do not
know, because they fail to identify the authentic
sources which yielded the bulk of their positive facts,
such as the following description of men's sleeves
from 1350-1400:

> New Variations
>   (a) Sleeves, usually extending to the
> knuckles, expanding into a funnel shape.
>   (b) The 'grande assiette,' a form of
> sleeve much rarer in England than (a).
> This was cut so that the sleeve was inserted
> with a circular seam overlapping the front
> and back of the bodice, plate-wise.[37]

The Cunningtons cite no primary sources to verify
these claims.

Although they usually do not provide much evidence
for their claims in the text, the Cunningtons do
provide a source listing for the numerous line drawings
they provide. Unfortunately, the list is incomplete,

giving only the museum which houses the manuscript
from which a drawing was copied and the manuscript's
identification number in that museum. The date of the
text and of the illustrations and the country in which
both were done should have been listed, also. A rough
date, of course, is indicated by the section in the
text in which any drawing appears, but the rest of
the information is not available in this book. The
"Preface" states that "some foreign sources have been
preferred to English ones where they provided clearer
illustrations of identical fashions."[38] The impli-
cation is that most of the sources were of English
origin, but no method is provided for separating the
English from the foreign sources. If the foreign
examples used actually are identical to English
fashions in every detail, the Handbook has avoided
the assumption that all styles were international.
Found in most fashion histories, this assumption is
that, for any century through the fifteenth, any
example from any country represents a fashion that was
worn throughout Europe and the British Isles. This
assumption is not based on reality. In studying
medieval manuscript miniatures and other artworks,
one quickly becomes aware that some costumes are
more elaborate than others. In some paintings, for
example, the upper edges of the headbands of thirteenth-
century women resemble the fluted edging of a pie

crust. Other headbands are severely straight.
Further, fluted and straight seem never to mingle in
one picture. Depiction of elaborate costume usually
seems to have been of Germanic origin: that is, the
artwork originated in Austria, Hungary, or one of
the other German duchies. Depiction of plainer
costume, on the other hand, is of English or French
origin. These conclusions are only tentative because
I have studied far too few paintings and have only
begun to study schools of painting, another factor in
the elaborateness of the costume depicted.[39] But
Millard Meiss, an art historian, believes that the
lack of national characteristics through the fifteenth
century is apparent rather than real because it is
based on a too-scanty knowledge of medieval art.[40]
Verification that national characteristics of costume
existed can be found in various medieval written
sources. For example, around 1345, the author of
The Brut complained that the English were foolishly
copying the clothing of foreigners;[41] around 1365
John of Reading took up the same theme;[42] around 1371
a father advised his daughters not to copy the "new
fashions and guises of array of women of strange
countries."[43]

In addition to listing the sources of their
illustrations, the Cunningtons also include an
occasional source reference within the text or in a

footnote. Such references, however, often weaken

rather than strengthen one's already too fragile

confidence in the reliability of the author, a

circumstance confirmed in the following examples:

> (a) Plumes began to appear, mostly of
> dyed ostrich or peacock feathers. One or
> two fixed upright in front or behind, being
> attached to the base of the crown by a
> brooch or jewelled ornament. 'In none of
> the old romances, replete as they are with
> descriptions of dress and armour, is there
> any allusion to feathers earlier than the
> middle of the fourteenth century' (Planché's
> Cyclopaedia of Costume).[44]

> Jewellery very abundant. 'I saw a
> woman . . . her head was adorned with so
> rich a crown that even the King has not
> a better. On al her fyv fyngers fuly
> richely she rynged' (Vision of Piers
> Plowman, 1362).[45]

In both instances the Cunningtons have cited an

authority to support their claim, but in each case,

one cannot accept without question the authority

cited.

The first source quoted is a late nineteenth-

century fashion history. Although Planché is one

of the more reliable historians, providing both

adequately reasoned arguments and source listings

for many of his statements, his authority is used

here in a strange manner. The quotation does not

provide evidence of the types of feathers worn or of

how they were worn; rather, it supports the unstated

claim of why the Cunningtons have listed feathers as

accessories worn at the end of the fourteenth century.
As in this example, historians often quote other
fashion historians in support of a claim. Sometimes
the other historian is given credit, sometimes he
is not; but some sources, such as Planché, Brooke,
the Cunningtons, and James Laver, appear with astonish-
ing regularity in fashion bibliographies. After a
time, one can recognize, even if no mention of the
source is made, which historian an author chose to
agree with and which he chose to ignore. The use of
such sources does not lend credibility to the author's
claims of reliability when we remember that most of
the secondary sources being used are documented
inadequately themselves and therefore we ought not
to fully trust them without further study.

The second quotation from the Cunningtons's
Handbook goes back to the fourteenth century for
evidence, even if the authors do not cite the edition
of Langland (with its strange mixture of modern and
archaic spelling) from which they took the quotation.
The quotation is excerpted from Langland's description
of Luxury, and, as in the instance of Criseyde's
brown and black dresses, this source is literary,
and hence, is unacceptable as straight fashion
reporting. Even a historian should sense that the
description of Luxury could not have been intended
as a description of a typical woman. Langland's

Luxury is as far from typical as Shakespeare's
Cleopatra reclining in her barge rigged with purple
sails. Fashion researchers cannot use the costumes
of fictional characters as representative of garments
that were actually worn during a historical period
because authors seldom describe typical garments.
Their fictional characters usually wear clothing
which either is exaggerated from the typical or else
is incorrect for the situation in which it is worn.

It should be noted that fashion historians are
not the only ones who speak authoritatively about
past styles without presenting enough evidence to
warrant our acceptance of their authority. Costume
(and social history in general) seems to be an area
in which most researchers assume that the facts are
such common knowledge that they do not need to present
supporting sources. For example, in her study of
costume in relation to the Renaissance theater, Stella
Newton makes continual comparisons of theater costumes
to the everyday costumes of the time, but never
describes these ordinary costumes or supplies the
reader with a source for finding them described.
Lucie Schaeffer, in her study of the miniatures of
British Museum manuscript Harleien 4431, makes many
claims that the miniatures represent the manners and
costumes contemporary with the time the miniatures
were painted, but makes no reference to sources

substantiating these claims.[46] With reference to both fashion histories and to other works which consider fashion, I do not present this lack of documentation as proof that these claims are incorrect; rather, I present it to show that there is no way of determining whether they are correct. Therefore, in a study of costume, we must begin at the beginning and form an idea of the styles of the fourteenth century (or of any century) solely from the primary sources; we cannot build on previous research. Research supplying the silhouettes and details of ordinary costume is necessary before we can hope to determine the significance in Chaucer of such things as the Wife of Bath's Sunday hat, or her wimple, or the black and white color scheme in which the wife in the Miller's Tale is presented (MillT 3233-3270).[47]

The primary sources which a student of costume must examine are too numerous for one or two people to study adequately. References to costume are scattered through all the remnants which have survived from a past age. A single work cannot be a complete study, but it should be a base on which others can build. If the majority of fashion historians had followed this plan, we would have fashion histories which list all the primary sources used. The student of costume could then study the secondary sources and, when he turned to the primary sources, he would

be able to examine some new ones, thus adding to our
information about historical costume. Instead,
fashion historians have been content to repeat the
same general descriptions of costume and, for the
most part, have not bothered to document their
sources. Often they do list a few sources, offering
some form of the excuse given by Max Wykes-Joyce
as the reason that their bibliography is not more
complete:

> A bibliography in the normal sense would
> be quite out of place here. For it is
> evident from the range of volumes listed,
> that scraps of information about cosmetic
> habits and customs may be culled from
> many sources.[48]

Admittedly, complete lists of the sources for any
fashion history would be lengthy, but without such
lists a researcher cannot check the reliability of
an author nor can he know what sources have been
studied so that he can investigate at least a few
new ones. Fashion history should not be exempt from
the scholarly obligation to provide sources which
substantiate the assertions made even though it is
tedious to keep track of the many sources consulted.

The fashion historian traces the general rather
than the specific, a fact which makes documentation
even more difficult because a researcher must cite
more than one source to prove that an accessory or
sleeve style was the rule rather than the exception.

A few scholars have proven that such documentation of general trends is not impossible. For example, in tracing the various schools in his studies of French and Italian art, Meiss does not neglect to list several of the specific paintings which led to each conclusion.[49] In books such as <u>English Art</u>, <u>1307-1461</u>[50] and <u>A History of Jewellery: 1100-1870</u>,[51] Joan Evans presents her reader with an almost over-whelming number of details, all clearly connected to their sources. Planché proves that even in fashion history such accuracy can be accomplished For example, in the discussion following the entry "headdress" in his <u>Cyclopaedia</u>, he writes a careful argument in support of his position in the controversy over whether women donned tall headdresses (sometimes called hennin) before the mid-fifteenth century. Not only does Planché explain why and from where he concludes that these headdresses were not worn before the mid-fifteenth century, he gives the opposing view also, and explains where the evidence has been misinterpreted.[52] If Dion Calthrop had listed his sources, the following quotation, from his description of costume between 1307 and 1327, would add another piece toward solving the puzzle of the hennin. Instead, it stands as a summary for all the frustration experienced by the person who ventures into fashion research:

> Very rarely a tall, steeple head-dress was
> worn over the wimple, with a hanging veil;
> but this was not common, and indeed, it is
> not a mark of the time, but belongs more
> properly to a later date. However, I have
> seen such a head-dress drawn at or about
> this time, so must include it.[53]

And he left not a footnote even as general as

"Sherborne Pageant" to help rediscover this treasure!

Interpreting Primary Sources for Fashion Research

Since fashion histories provide only a general
impression of late fourteenth-century costume and are
thus not complete enough to be used in literary
analysis, the next step in my study of Chaucerian
fashion was to examine some of the available primary
sources to learn what details they could provide
toward learning why Chaucer mentions a particular
costume in one of his poems. During this part of
the study, I concentrated on medieval paintings and
manuscript miniatures, first noting the details of the
costumes as well as who is wearing each style, and
then comparing costumes from the various artworks.
Because of the time limit on this particular study,
I further narrowed my study of medieval paintings to
concentrate first on the representation throughout
the fourteenth century of one woman and then on the
contents of a single, early fourteenth-century, English
manuscript. As with all research, the tedium of
listing country of origin, artist, character's name,
sleeve lengths, skirt length and width, collar
height, and the shape of the bodice ultimately is
rewarded, providing evidence which indicates that
further study would yield a more substantive view

than we have at present of how Chaucer and his audience
expected their heroes and heroines to dress and of
why Chaucer mentions a particular costume at a par-
ticular place in a tale. The following hypothesis,
starting from a look at the miniatures in a fifteenth-
century French manuscript and ending with the de-
scription of the dress Criseyde wore when she asked
for Hector's protection, can serve as a model for
this process.

The manuscript, Harleien 4431, housed in the
British Museum, contains the collected works of
Christine de Pisan, bound in two large volumes. The
first volume begins with a dedication to Queen Isabel
of Bavaria, accompanied by a miniature in which
Christine presents her book to the queen, in the
presence of several other women, presumably ladies-
in-waiting to the queen (folio 3r).[1] In this picture,
Christine wears a dress with a fitted bodice and
elbow-length sleeves over another dress with long,
tight sleeves (figure 10). With one exception, she
wears these two dresses in all the miniatures in
which she appears throughout the manuscript. The
exception is a miniature in which she offers a
written prayer to the Virgin and Child (folio 265r).
In this miniature she wears a houppelande, the style
worn by the queen and the other women in the first
miniature and by many of the other men and women

pictured throughout the manuscript. Since the queen
and her ladies-in-waiting would have been members of
the aristocracy, we will assume (for the sake of this
argument) that the other people shown wearing
houppelandes were intended to represent members of
the aristocracy, also. Christine, being an author
rather than an aristocratic woman, would have had
a lower social status and much less wealth. Based
on this evidence, we might surmise that the houppelande
was one of the newest fashions, worn only by people
wealthy enough to afford the latest styles. In the
fifteenth century this group would have consisted
largely of the richer members of the aristocracy.
Further, as the sumptuary laws of the time indicate,
the aristocrats considered themselves the only class
which had the right to spend much money on clothing.
As such, they would be the only people (ideally)
to appear in the newest styles, and their choice
of dress would thus transform the newest style—in
this instance the houppelande—into a mark of high
rank. Since Christine was not of the highest rank,
she is portrayed throughout the manuscript (with the
one exception) wearing a somewhat old-fashioned
costume whose style dates back to the mid-fourteenth
century.[2] In addition, in the first miniature,
Christine, asking that her book be accepted, is
presented as a suitor, a position in which she would

have been expected to dress more humbly than the
person from whom whe was asking the favor. The queen
and her ladies-in-waiting, on the other hand, wear
new-style garments, a clear mark of their superior
dignity and rank, a distinction emphasized by the
fact that they remain seated while Christine kneels.
In the one miniature in which Christine wears a
houppelande, she is a suitor still, but wears the
newer, more dignified garment because her suit is to
a divine rather than a temporal power. The Virgin
is crowned and wears a gown and cloak similar to the
one shown in figure 16. Although this costume was
fashionable at the beginning of the fourteenth century,
any connotations of low rank which its old-fashioned
style might carry are erased by the fact that its
wearer is the Virgin, Queen of Heaven. In this
instance, the suitor's dress, no matter what its
style, is automatically more humble than the clothing
of the Virgin. However, the suitor's costume must
be the one worn by people of the highest temporal
rank or its wearing would be insulting to the Virgin.
In other words, part of the dress code represented
by the miniaturist required that a petitioner dress
with a humility suitable to the person he was
petitioning. (Obviously, the evidence presented
is far too slight for such a conclusion, but the
demonstration, as noted, is hypothetical.) If we

proceed to one further conjecture, we can apply this fragment of dress code to Criseyde.

Let us conjecture, then, that the fashions and postulated dress code of Harleien 4431 and of the court of Richard II were the same. In such circumstances, when Criseyde hurries to plead with Hector (TC 1.106-112), she should be wearing a conservative costume in keeping with her status as a suitor. Chaucer describes the dress she wears as a "widewes habit large," which could mean either that it is very wide or else very long.[3] A houppelande certainly fits the first definition because it was a garment cut in a wide tent shape which must have used many yards of fabric. If Chaucer is using "large" in the sense of "wide," perhaps he means that Criseyde is wearing this newest style, an ostentatious costume at variance with her humble position before Hector. The image of ostentation may be enhanced by the fabric of the dress, which is of "samyte," a silk fabric which often had gold threads woven into it.[4] One fashion historian adds that samite was used in secular clothing when a person wished to put on a "more than ordinary display of pomp."[5] If such an interpretation is accurate, Chaucer has provided us with an early glimpse of a pride which may have contributed to Criseyde's downfall. Of course, conclusions about the meaning of a literary passage

cannot be derived from such slight evidence in a
single source. For one thing, the social positions
of Christine and Criseyde, whatever they were, would
have to be considered: a garment acceptable on a
lady may not have been acceptable on a woman of lower
rank in the same circumstances. We would have to
consider, also, whether Chaucer may have intended
"large" to mean "long" rather than "wide." If the
sense of "large" is "long," Chaucer's meaning may not
be a comment on Criseyde's character. If her skirt is
being described as being longer than was fashionable
at the end of the fourteenth century, it may be a
historical touch mentioning an old-fashioned style.
The reference to samite may contribute to the histo-
rical nature of the scene, being an indication by
Chaucer that the ancient Trojan court was more
elaborate than the fourteenth-century English court.
To verify this conjecture, of course, we would have
to learn what garments were considered old-fashioned
in late fourteenth-century England and what was its
opinion of the riches of ancient Troy. We do not yet
have enough evidence to reach any conclusion, but,
if we had sufficient information about the costumes
and social practices and beliefs of medieval England,
we could determine why Chaucer thought it necessary
to mention Criseyde's dress on this occasion.

As the example based on British Museum manuscript

Harleien 4431 has demonstrated, the aim of fashion research in relation to a study of an author's works is to understand why he included certain fashion details and excluded others. In relation to this aim, I should note that often, when critics mention Chaucerian fashion, they note that the details which Chaucer includes in a particular poem are included, also, in one or more of his written sources. There they let the matter rest, as if a faithful rendition of his originals were the only motive Chaucer could have had. But the matter should be pursued further with questions such as why the original author included the costume details and why Chaucer considered these details important enough to include in his retelling. For, as these critics also show through their comparisons, Chaucer did not always include every detail which he read in his original sources.

Before we can learn why Chaucer or that original author mentioned a character's costume, we must learn about the costume styles on which he based his descriptions. As I mentioned in chapter 2, learning about the costumes worn in fourteenth-century England requires that the researcher study written documents, such as wills, and graphic representations, such as sculpture and painting. As I also pointed out, interpreting the fashion evidence supplied by any primary source requires that the researcher acquire

background knowledge about each source. If one's
final aim is to learn the meaning of a costume
reference in a poem, the acquisition of background
knowledge can appear to lead one far from one's
literary source. Much of the background knowledge
is not directly applicable to the literary inter-
pretation being sought; that is, one may use a
piece of information to interpret a primary source
and then may use the interpretation of the primary
source to learn about the costumes actually worn in
late fourteenth-century England and finally, may
apply the knowledge gained about costume to learn the
meaning of a literary reference, but one cannot use
the original piece of information for a direct
literary interpretation. Obviously, however, the
original piece of information, being a means to an
end, is a necessary part of the process of explicating
a literary source.

The process of learning background material so
that, eventually, one can work with literary sources
is analagous to what scientists call "pure research."
Pure research must preceed applied research, although
the researcher is not always certain to what appli-
cation the pure research will lead. At present in
my study of Chaucerian fashion, I am still in the
area of pure research. As chapter 2 demonstrated,
current histories of costume are unreliable guides

for interpretating Chaucer. Therefore, I have been
forced to begin my study of Chaucer's costume refer-
ences by learning how to use the various primary
sources available for fashion research. At the
beginning of this chapter I demonstrated, using
Harleien 4431, how a knowledge of costume history
could be used to interpret the meaning of one costume
reference in Troilus and Criseyde. In the rest of the
chapter I will demonstrate how one type of primary
source available for fashion research could be used
to gain a more thorough knowledge than we now have
of the costumes worn in medieval England and of the
social and moral connotations attached to these
costumes.

Before proceeding to my discussion of the costume
of one medieval woman and of the drawings in a
fourteenth-century English manuscript, I should note
that the remainder of this chapter is primarily a
study directly applicable to fashion history. I do
not often refer to Chaucer's poetry and where I do
mention his works it is in the form of suggestions
for future studies whose final importance to Chaucerian
scholarship I have no way of determining at present.
It may be that, although we can learn much more about
fourteenth-century costume than currently has been
recorded by fashion historians, we cannot learn
enough to reach definite conclusions about why Chaucer

mentioned various costumes in his works. I do not
think so, but at present do not have enough knowledge
of fourteenth-century fashion to offer definite
proof that the meanings of at least some of Chaucer's
costume references can be discovered eventually.

As I mentioned in the opening paragraph of this
chapter, my study of primary sources for this discus-
sion has been narrowed to two items: an examination
of the costume of one woman during the course of a
century and an examination of the contents of
one manuscript. For my study of the woman, I concen-
trated on manuscript miniatures and, as a result,
had to learn how to interpret the costume evidence
presented in these miniatures. Most fourteenth-
century painters stylized their representations of
costumes as well as of scenery. Their paintings lack
perspective so that everything, including costumes,
appears flat. The flatness is accompanied by a
disregard for light reflection so that a red costume,
for example, is painted in an unvarying shade of red,
rather than containing the lights and shadows which
must have appeared in an actual garment. The painters
also ignored construction details, such as seams,
in the garments they represented. Because fourteenth-
century painters chose to stylize the costumes in
their paintings, we must remember several facts when
studying these paintings in order to learn about

fourteenth-century costume. First, garments are shaped, by assorted seams, from flat fabric, which is a fluid, not a rigid, substance. Second costume, especially fashionable costume, is concerned with the total look, not the precise method used to construct that look. Third, people accomodate their movements to meet the requirements of current styles. Because this chapter discusses the use of sources and, therefore, is concerned at least as much with methods as with conclusions, I will discuss these guidelines in greater detail. Such guidelines are important because the fashion historian seeks to learn the appearance of actual garments. If a painter chose to stylize part or all of a costume in a painting, we must learn to recognize the stylized elements so that our reconstruction of the garment from which he worked will not be a false reconstruction.

Perhaps the first consideration appears too obvious to need comment. As a matter of necessity, all garments start as a flat fabric, which then is cut and seamed to make it conform to the curves of the human body. However, artists before the late fourteenth century seldom included details of garment construction, painting garments that appear to have been cast from molds, with no plackets and closures to aid in donning or removing these garments, an omission which may make us wonder how the ladies of

Richard's court wriggled into and out of their fitted
dresses. Medieval painters also ignored the less-
than-incidental fact that fabric moves with its
wearer and in accordance with gravitational laws.
One easily can overlook the painter's practice of
ignoring the movement of fabric until one encounters
a particularly jarring example. Maseo's "Miracle
of St. Sylvester" is one such example. Among the
figures populating the picture two men in the center
foreground lie dead, their toes upturned, their
bearded chins jutting skyward, their skirts arranged
in tidy folds around their ankles, as if they were
toppled statues instead of human bodies. Inevitably,
Chaucer's Lucrece comes to mind, who, as she falls
mortally wounded, keeps her skirts tucked modestly
around her feet (LGW 1854-1860). It would be inter-
esting to know if there is a link between the literary
description and the artistic convention. Details of
construction and of the effects that the movements
of its wearer have on a garment usually are directly
applicable to a study of tailoring or painting rather
than to a literature. But such information can lead
indirectly to a better understanding of an author's
works. For example, the narrator identifies the
occupation of the canon who joins the Canterbury
Pilgrims by the seam joining his cloak and hood
(CYT 571). Discovering the technique used in making

this seam would increase our knowledge of Chaucer's
everyday world, but it probably would not add any
additional information about the character of the
canon, for we know already from Chaucer's comment
that this churchman conforms to the church's rules
at least in matters of dress.[6] Once we have noticed
this costume detail, however, it might suggest a
comparison of the costumes worn by all of Chaucer's
clergy, a study that probably would add to our
understanding of Chaucer's art.

The second point we must remember when studying
the costumes represented in medieval paintings is
that, as a rule, the total effect of a costume is
more important than its details. Few paintings and
other artifacts have survived from early periods,
and these show us only a few costume variations. In
their discussions, fashion historians treat these
surviving variations as if they were the only ones
that existed during these periods. But, considering
the scarcity of surviving evidence from the Middle
Ages, it is unrealistic to assume that all the details
of medieval costume have, somehow, survived. People
conform to fashion by wearing an accepted, general
style; they mark their individuality by varying the
details within that style. These details change
fairly rapidly, some remaining for only a month,
others for one or more years. The general styles of

costume, however, change much more slowly. The
rapid change in details adorning the more stable
general shape is confirmed by Waugh in his study of
the construction of women's garments:

> Each century, with short transition
> periods between, has produced its own
> distinctive style, the fundamental cut
> remaining constant over a number of years.
> Changes in details, such as trimmings,
> draping, accessories, etc., followed one
> another incessantly. They were used to
> emphasize the fashion line and to give
> variety, and they reflected personal taste
> and the social and artistic background of
> the period. Changes in cut were much
> slower, each one evolving from the previous
> style, and were influenced to a great
> extent by new textures in materials.[7]

A study of nineteenth century fashion, with its many
surviving details, or a study of current changes in
fashion would confirm this method of change, also.
For the fourteenth century, only some of the styles
and fewer still of the details remain for us to
examine. But the changing details and various styles
must have been there, or costume would have remained
static and everyone would still be wearing aprons
like the ones God made for Adam and Eve. Furthermore,
given a total uniformity in dress, Chaucer would have
had no reason to mention an item such as the Wife of
Bath's Sunday hat because the hat would not have
been the extraordinary creation it obviously was.

That it is the general shape of costume that is
important rather than the minute details of the

shape's construction also can be verified if we compare several representations of a particular medieval style of sleeve. One method by which women of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries might vary a style and yet still follow it can be seen in a comparison of the sleeves in figures 11 through 15. In all the figures, the sleeve is fitted tightly around the wearer's forearm. In other words, the general style included the natural shape of the forearm. But figure 11 shows the sleeve outlining this shape by means of a row of fourteen, closely-spaced buttons and buttonholes, figure 12 by means of lacing on the wrist band and one button further up the forearm. The sleeve in figure 13 is fastened in some manner only at the wrist and its total opening is shorter than the openings in the first two sleeves. The sleeve in figure 14 employs two sets of buttons. In all four, the sleeve of the chemise worn under the gown can be seen through the opening, a detail which became more prominent throughout the fifteenth century until it became a required part of the general style. The sleeve in figure 15, however, shows no trace of the chemise. This sleeve shows only the slim outline of a forearm, with no indication of the opening which allowed it to go over the wrist or of the fastenings which then smoothed it snugly around the forearm. This sleeve was sewn closed at the

wrists after the garment was on and removed by
cutting the stitches.[8]

The final point to be remembered in studying
the costumes represented in medieval paintings is
that people accomodate their movements to whatever
style is in fashion. Moreover, the movements dictated
by these styles are accepted at the time as being
properly natural and graceful. The paintings which
provide much of our data about fourteenth-century
fashion are, as I have pointed out, stylized in some
respects. Unless we remember that people learn how
to move in whatever garments they choose to cumber
themselves, we are likely to dismiss as stylized
exaggerations some details which are represented
realistically. For example, we might view the long
points on the men's shoes in the fourteenth century
as an exaggeration, thinking that walking in such
shoes would be impossible. However, modern circus
clowns move easily, albeit ungracefully by our
standards, wearing shoes of a similar style. An
example of how people learn new forms of "graceful"
movement to accomodate each new fashion is given in
the following excerpt, written by a nineteenth-century
woman learning to cope with hoops:

> About this time the hoopskirt began to be
> seen above the horizon. On it came, like
> the nightcap and the hair oil, again
> disgusting my father. Well, then, all the

women had them. San Francisco and the
other towns were quite small then and
everybody knew everybody else. The women
had to solve the problem of how to seat
themselves gracefully with the hoops.
They learned by dear experience that if
they sat down too suddenly the hoops would
fly up. Woman's ingenuity came to the
rescue. She sat down sidewise, as she
did so giving a delicate little hitch up
behind. Hoops ever afterwards were manage-
able in that respect, but they developed
an unpleasant tendency in a new direction.
They would occasionally come in contact
with the lighter furniture, tipping stands
over. But constant use overcame all this;
a scarcely perceptible swing and hitch
here and there protected most gracefully
all intervening obstacles.[9]

A similar tale of mastery undoubtedly could have been

told in the late fourteenth century as women learned

not to stumble over their long skirts and men learned

not to trip over their pointed shoes.

As the guidelines discussed in the preceeding

paragraphs show, we must interpret the costume

evidence provided by medieval artworks in a realistic

manner if we wish to know the actual appearance of

fourteenth-century costume. First, although medieval

painters chose, usually, to represent garments as if

they had been made of a rigid substance, we must

remember that actual garments were constructed from

cloth, which would have behaved in a manner quite

different from the artistic representation of it.

Second, although medieval painters included some

stylized features in their paintings, we cannot assume

that every feature is a stylization. The styles

represented (as distinct from the behavior and light-
reflecting qualities of the fabric of which they
are made), no matter how fantastic they appear, are
probably realistic representations of actual garments.
Finally, we must remember that the surviving evidence
is not a complete record of the costumes worn; each
person in the Middle Ages would have added his own
details to the prevailing style just as each modern
person does. With these guidelines in mind, we can
begin to study medieval artworks in order to fill
in some of the details of fourteenth-century English
costume.

Because using the same example should make my
discussion easier to follow and because the question
intrigues me, I will begin this search once again
with the question of when the wimple became a required
part of a widow's costume. This time we will examine
the Wife of Bath, who jounces along to Canterbury,
her face "ywympled wel" (Gen Prol 470). Is her
wimple mentioned as a sign that she is a widow or
as an indication of her vanity? That is, is she on
the pilgrimage to find her sixth husband or has she
almost covered her face to protect her delicate skin
from the dust and sun of travel? Perhaps both reasons
apply? The first step in solving why she wears the
wimple is to determine what women actually were
wearing at the time the Prologue was written, because,

as I have pointed out in a previous chapter, we cannot
know what was improper until we know what was proper.

One way to reconstruct what was proper is to
study the clothing of a particular woman as she was
depicted over a number of years and then to compare
her costume with that of other women over the same
time span. For the following study using this method,
the initial woman I chose was the Virgin, because,
quite simply, she is the one woman who can be counted
on to appear and reappear through the centuries.
Concentrating mainly on manuscript miniatures, I
traced her appearance through, roughly, the first
years of the fourteenth century to the first years
of the fifteenth century. I then compared her costume
with the costumes worn by other women, both in the
manuscript miniatures and in the descriptions offered
by fashion historians.[10]

In the course of the study, I discovered that,
although styles changed during the fourteenth century,
the number of garments worn one over the other remained
constant. To avoid the confusion that arises when
garments are defined by style only, rather than by
function and style both, I have defined the garment
layers in the following manner. The innermost garment
was a long-sleeved, unfitted dress, which I have
called a chemise, the medieval equivalent of the
modern slip. Until the early years of the fifteenth

century, this garment was invisible once a woman was completely dressed.[11] The second garment, which I have called an innergown, was, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, a loose, floor-length dress, which changed to a fitted dress by the beginning of the fifteenth century. Both styles had long sleeves. How much of the innergown was visible depended on the style of the third garment, worn over the innergown, which I have called an outergown. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the outergown usually was a cloak; by the beginning of the fifteenth century, it might be one of the several styles, including the houppelande or the jumper-like style shown in figure 4.

Throughout the century under study, the Virgin usually is depicted wearing a costume that varies little in style. Her innergown has a high, round neckline, long sleeves that are full from shoulder to elbow and tightly fitted on the forearm, and a skirt which trails on the floor. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the body of the innergown is unfitted and bloused at the waist (figure 16). As the century progresses, the bodice becomes fitted and the sleeves lose their top fullness, but the neckline and skirt length remain constant. The Virgin's outergown is a cloak, which partially, sometimes wholly, covers her innergown and, at times,

also covers the veil draped over her hair. Although
it is seldom totally uncovered, her hair appears
to be always unbound, because the veil hangs smoothly
on each side of her face rather than bulging out to
accomodate bound hair, as the veilings worn by other
women sometimes do (compare figure 16 with figure 17).
Her feet are seldom visible; when seen, they are
never visible above the instep and always are shod.

When this costume is compared with the costumes
of other women from the fourteenth century, the
differences are greater than the similarities. In
addition, as we approach the year 1400, the differ-
ences increase in number. For example, the Virgin
seldom wears a wimple until the fifteenth century,
although other women in the early fourteenth century
covered their necks with wimples. The exceptional
cases in which the Virgin was depicted wearing a
wimple before the fifteenth century were rendered,
usually, by Italian painters, who also depicted other
costume details which differ from the details depicted
by French and English artists. Nevertheless, even
the Italians seldom show a wimpled Virgin before
the fifteenth century, when, for a number of years,
a wimple was added to the Virgin's costume although
it had not returned as a fashionable garment in
everyday wear. The late addition of the wimple to
the Virgin's costume strongly suggests that the

artists added what was by then an old-fashioned
widow's garment to satisfy some perception of
historicity or perhaps, when the scene is the
Crucifixion, to suggest a sort of widowhood. The
addition of a wimple to the Virgin's costume long
after it had passed out of fashion also suggests
that, when wimples were fashionable, the Virgin did
not wear one because, in her humility, she would not
have adopted the latest fashions, wearing instead
the older, already accepted styles that, by common
consent, are always considered more modest.

The other variances between the Virgin's costume
and the costumes of other women should be mentioned.
The Virgin's unbound hair covered only with a veil
remains while the headdresses of other women, with
their bound hair, jewelled ornaments, and veilings,
are the parts of their costumes that appear to have
changed the most rapidly. Again, the Virgin keeps
her cloak: at the Nativity it serves as a blanket;
at the Crucifixion she pulls it around her in
mourning; at the other times it serves as the
outergown that all women wore, at least for formal
occasions. But while the Virgin's outergown remains
a cloak, the outergowns of other women change. They
discard the cloak for a sideless gown (figure 4),
and then discard this garment, except for very formal
occasions, such as a court appearance,[12] for a fitted

one (figure 3) or for a houppelande. All of these
changes would have marked the newest fashion. Women
probably had two or more styles in their wardrobes;
which style they wore depended on the occasion and
on their desire to impress their peers. The neckline
of the fashionable outergown was cut ever lower as
the fourteenth century progressed. The necklines of
the innergown and the chemise were hidden by the
outergown until, roughly, the second quarter of the
fifteenth century. The neckline of the Virgin's
innergown, as has been noted, remained high. Sleeves
are sometimes shown extending to the knuckles or
turned back into a cuff; the Virgin's sleeves always
end at her wrists. The fit and length are the only
details in the Virgin's costume that seem to have
changed with fashionable styles. By the early
fifteenth century even this fashionable concession is
doubtful, for she is sometimes dressed in a fashion-
able, fitted innergown which is bloused, unfashion-
ably, at the waist, as if the artists were trying
to evoke an earlier style.

My study of the Virgin's costume is not complete,
but even at this early stage, the results question
the assumption implicit in fashion histories that
artists dressed all their characters only in contempo-
rary styles. Whether the Virgin's relatively static
clothes were the result of conscious historicism,

the inertia of copying coupled with reverence for the subject, or some other reason, only further study can determine.[13] My study has also demonstrated some of the major style changes, especially the differing styles of the outergown, but it has given no indication of who could wear these styles or of the occasions on which a particular style was acceptable. To get this information, one must compare the details of the costumes depicted in various manuscripts and paintings. This comparison can be bewildering in the variety of details which appear in the garments, but the examination of even one manuscript shows how much can, with patience, be learned. The manuscript I studied is the Holkham Bible Picture Book, drawn in England around 1325 or 1330 by an East Anglian.[14] The styles this artist drew are not necessarily representative of those worn elsewhere in England, but the differentation of regional variations is far outside the limits of this study and, for a comparison of styles within one manuscript, exactly where the styles were worn need not be considered. The conclusions given here, I cannot stress strongly enough, are tentative; one example is not proof. But the results from this one example indicate that more specific information on fashion than is yet contained in secondary sources can be sifted from the available primary sources.

The Picture Book contains thirty-nine folio-sized
sheets with, usually, two or four pictures on each
page, showing various Biblical stories beginning with
the Creation and ending with the Last Judgement.
The women represented are few in number, especially
in comparison with the number of men. Several of
the women, such as the Virgin, Elizabeth, and Herodias,
appear several times. In most cases in which a
woman appears more than once, she is dressed in the
same costume each time, a practice which provides us
with another factor to consider when we are recon-
structing actual garments from manuscript repre-
sentations. Because medieval manuscripts were
illustrated for a society that did not take literacy
for granted, the characters drawn had to be identi-
fiable without recourse to the text. Therefore, a
given character was dressed in a uniform, as it were,
throughout a manuscript. The practice appears to
have been carried out, to a limited extent, between
manuscripts, also. Quite obviously, this practice
would have limited the number of styles and amount
of detail depicted, but it should not be taken as
evidence that variety did not exist.

In the Holkham Bible Picture Book, the innergown
worn by all the women is of the same style as the
innergown worn by the Virgin Mary in manuscripts
from the beginning of the fourteenth century (figure 16).

It has a modestly high (by the standards of the 1980s)
and rounded neckline, is unfitted, and has sleeves
that are full at the top and fitted from the elbow
to the wrist. The fullness at the waist is gathered
in with some kind of belting, the style of which is
always hidden by the blousing. Aristocratic women's
skirts trail on the ground;[15] the skirts of the
poorer classes stop at their ankles. The shorter
length may have been the result of using less material
in fashioning the garment, or it may have been the
result of the wearer's pulling a wide fold of material
over her belt to free her feet, thereby making move-
ment easier as she worked.

    With only a few exceptions, the women wear
outergowns, also. The exceptions are women engaged
in some fairly strenuous activity, such as the Virgin
doing the family laundry (folio 15v), Salome dancing
before Herod (folio 21v),[16] and the women selling
doves in the temple (folio 26r).

    Perhaps in these instances the outergown was
laid aside because it hindered the woman as she worked.
Two other possibilities suggest themselves, also.
First, women such as the sellers at the temple may
have been unable to afford outergowns, although this
conjecture is weakened by the fact that the widow
with the mite (folio 26r) and the woman with the
bloody issue (folio 25r) both wear outergowns in spite

of their poverty. But eliminating poverty as a reason
suggests the second possibility: that the outergown
was required for modesty. With the exception of
the temple sellers, the women dressed only in
innergowns are inside their homes, a place where one
can be informal because no strangers are present.
In such a place, less formal dress, even partial
undress, is permissible. Outside the home, a properly
modest woman would have worn the requisite outergown,
innergown, and chemise, no matter how poor she was
or how patched the garments. Such reasoning does
not account for the temple sellers, unless the
painter thought of them as prostitutes as well as
dove vendors. As prostitutes, the women would have
had sufficient reason to dress immodestly. If this
assessment of wearing layered garments to indicate
modesty is correct, a rereading of the description
of the carpenter's wife (MillT 3233-3270) suggests
that Chaucer does not describe more than one garment
because Alisoun does not have on an outergown. In
fact, the description rather sounds as if she wore
only her chemise, additional confirmation of her
immodesty and an example of how the description of
the clothing can reinforce a characterization.

Having learned from the Picture Book when an
outergown is not worn, we can now examine the style
of the outergown when it is worn. The outergown is

much more diverse in style than the innergown. The

Virgin and Elizabeth always wear floor-length cloaks.

The shape of the cloak and how a woman secured it

on her shoulders is never clear.[17] Herodias (folios

16v, 17r, 21r, 21v) and Salome, when she presents

John's head to Herodias (folio 21v) wear sleeveless

outergowns (figure 17). Some of the poorer women,

such as Anastace (folio 12v), wear outergowns whose

sleeves end about midforearm (figure 18). The

outergown of the widow with the mite has sleeves

which end in short trains at her elbows (as shown

on Christine's outergown, figure 10). Openings other

than the sleeves and necklines are not visible on the

outergowns, except for buttons that extend halfway

up the side of the outergown of the woman of Samaria

(folio 24v). The outergowns of the poor women are

shorter than their innergowns; those of the rich

completely cover the skirts of their innergowns.

This difference in length may have been governed by

the amount of material each woman could afford to

buy or it may have been dictated by the amount of

work each woman had to do. The shorter length would

have given more freedom to the movements of a worker.

With so many styles on so few women, it is impossible

even to speculate about whether a given style was

worn exclusively by aristocratic or by lower-class

women. But the combination of the reputation of

Herodias and the fact that the banquet shown is a
court banquet suggests that her sleeveless outergown
was one of the newest styles known to the painter.

The coiffures of the women are more varied than
their outergowns and so offer even less chance for
any general conclusions. However, although the
manuscript offers too much variety for me to make any
generalizations, a comparative study of the hairstyle
and headdress on each woman in the Picture Book with
the feminine hairstyles and headdresses pictured in
other manuscripts might eventually show the signifi-
cance of the braid bound with gold that falls down
Criseyde's back (TC 5.809-812). Was it the newest
fashion at court, thereby emphasizing her inconstancy,
her willingness to adopt what was newest at hand?
Or was it a style no longer worn, which Chaucer had
seen on a statue or in a painting and included to
add a touch of history to his story? Was it, perhaps,
the hairstyle sported by London streetwalkers?

I began my discussion of the Virgin's costume
and of the costumes depicted in the Holkham Bible
Picture Book with the question of why the Wife of Bath
wears a wimple on her pilgrimage and have ended with
a question about Criseyde's hairstyle. Neither
question can be answered with the evidence currently
available for the history of costume. However, the
brief study that I have been able to carry out and

have discussed in my description of the costumes in
the Picture Book indicates that patient research may
lead to the answers to these questions. In this
chapter I have been concerned only with sources
external to Chaucer's works. My next chapter will
discuss how we can use internal evidence from these
works to learn part of the meaning behind his costume
references. In using clothing as an indicator of
character, an author often uses the same garment
to carry the same connotations throughout his work.
Perhaps a comparison of the garments worn by different
Chaucerian women would add something to our knowledge
of Chaucer's use of costume. I will explore such a
comparison in the next chapter, using the character
of Criseyde as the center of the comparison.

The Costumes of Chaucerian Women

Among the women in Chaucer's poetry are the
aristocratic women, such as Emilye of Knight's Tale
and the Duchess of the Book of the Duchess, who are
idealized beauties, ever constant in love. There
are the lower class women, also, such as Alisoun,
of the Miller's Tale, and May, of the Merchant's
Tale, ever ready to sleep with men other than their
husbands. Most of Chaucer's company of secular,
mortal women fit into one of these two categories.
Criseyde, who is numbered among the ladies but who
also is numbered among the inconstant, does not.
This contradiction of Criseyde's rank and actions
has caused much debate about Chaucer's intentions in
his presentation of Criseyde: is she presented as
a victim or an accomplice; is she a person or only
a symbol?[1] In all of these discussions, no one
seems to have considered the possibility that her
costume might be a pointer towards Chaucer's inten-
tions. The oversight is understandable; Chaucer
mentions costume infrequently throughout Troilus
and Criseyde, and if we consider these references
by themselves they indicate very little, either about
Criseyde's character or about Chaucer's use of

costume in general. But if we compare Chaucer's
references to Criseyde's costume with his references
to the costume of other of his women, we can learn
something of Chaucer's general use of costume. Such
a comparison does not help much in the debate over
Criseyde's character, however. So far as I can
determine, the costume Chaucer gives her coincides
with the costume of his other ladies; in this area,
she does not step over the social bounds.

The following comparison of Chaucerian costumes
is an exploratory one, intended only to show the
possibilities of such a study. In making this study,
I am aware that I risk being accused of practicing
a method of research after having strongly criticized
it in chapter 2 of my discussion. Not only will I
speculate about social practices from a literary base,
but I will cite as authorities some of those fashion
historians and critics I have so severely criticized.
In addition, some of my claims may not be adequately
documented because they are based on knowledge I
have absorbed over the years from sources now forgotten.
I can only plead that this discussion is not a defini-
tive study and that, at present, I have no other
resources.

My discussion of Criseyde's costume begins with
an examination of her formal portraits, which Chaucer
provides in several places throughout Troilus and

<u>Criseyde</u>. The complete formal portrait in medieval
rhetoric included a head-to-toe description of a
character's physical appearance, followed by a
description of his or her costume, followed by a
catalog of his or her moral qualities.[2] Neither in
<u>Troilus and Criseyde</u> nor elsewhere in his poetry does
Chaucer use the complete formal portrait, but the
pieces of it that he does include usually contain
one or two references to the character's costume.
The formal portrait of a character is thus the most
promising place to begin a study of that character's
costume. In the case of Criseyde, Chaucer scattered
parts of her portrait throughout his tale, beginning
with three sections in Book 1.

The first description of Criseyde occurs immedi-
ately after we are told that her father has deserted
to the Greek camp:

> Criseyde was this lady name al right.
> As to my doom, in al Troies cite
> Nas non so fair, for passynge every wight
> So aungelik was hir natif beaute,
> That lik a thing inmortal semed she,
> As doth an hevenyssh perfit creature,
> That down were sent in scornynge of nature.
> (<u>TC</u> 1.99-105)

The second picture is given as she stands in the
temple:

> Among thise othere folk was Criseyda,
> In widewes habit blak; but natheles,
> Right as oure firste lettre is now an A,
> In beaute first so stood she, makeles.

> Hire goodly lokyng gladed al the prees.
> Nas nevere yet seyn thyng to ben preysed derre,
> Nor under cloude blak so bright a sterre
>
> As was Criseyde, as folk seyde everichone
> That hir behelden in hir blake wede.
> And yet she stood ful lowe and stille allone,
> Byhynden other folk, in litel brede,
> And neigh the dore, ay undre shames drede,
> Simple of atir and debonaire of chere,
> With ful assured lokyng and manere.
>   (TC 1.169-182)

Then Troilus sees her, giving Chaucer an opportunity

to add to her description:

> She nas nat with the leste of hir stature,
> But alle hire lymes so wel answerynge
> Weren to wommanhod, that creature
> Was nevere lasse mannyssh in semynge.
> And ek the pure wise of hir mevynge
> Shewed wel that men myght in hir gesse
> Honour, estat, and wommanly noblesse.
>   (TC 1.281-289)

The next portrait is given on the first night she and

Troilus are together:

> Hire armes smale, hire streghte bak and softe,
> Hire sydes longe, flesshly, smothe, and white
> He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte
> Hire snowisshe throte, hire brestes rounde
>   and lite. . . . (TC 3.1247-1250)

She is described for the last time after she has moved

from Troy to the Greek camp:

> Criseyde mene was of hire stature,
> Therto of shap, of face, and ek of cheere,
> Ther myghte ben no fairer creature.
> And ofte tyme this was hire manere,
> To gon ytressed with hire heres clere
> Doun by hire coler at hire bak byhynde,
> Wich with a thred of gold she wolde bynde.

> And, save hire browes joyneden yfere,
> Ther nas no lak, in aught I kan espien.
> But for to speken of hire eyen cleere,
> Lo, trewely, they wreten that hire syen,
> That Paradis stood formed in hire yën.
> And with hire riche beaute evere more
> Strof love in hire ay, which of hem was more.
>
> She sobre was, ek symple, and wys withal,
> The best ynorisshed ek that myghte be,
> And goodly of hire speche in general,
> Charitable, estatlich, lusty, and fre;
> Ne nevere mo ne lakked hir pite;
> Tendre-herted, slydynge of corage;
> But trewely, I kan nat telle hire age.
>   (TC 5.806-825)

Although these descriptions take up a number of
lines, little specific information is provided. We
know, quite definitely, that Criseyde is unsurpassed
in beauty, except for her flawed eyebrows. She is
feminine, knows the social graces, and has soft,
white skin. The problem is that most of the terms
do not evoke precise images. For example, what does
the phrase "goodly of hire speche in general" mean?
Does it mean she had a pleasant voice, that she
knew how to make polite conversation, or only that
she usually did not use profanity? Chaucer's audience
would have had a better idea than I have at present.
Descriptive phrases such as "[s]o aungelik was hir
natif beautee" give an impression only, which each
reader fills in with his own ideal, as the discussion
of the Duchess will demonstrate. Even phrases which
seem specific, such as "armes smale," leave much to
individual imagining.

The only information about Criseyde's costume
given in the portraits is that she dresses as a widow
and that, during her stay in the Greek camp, she
wears her hair in a braid hanging down her back.
Little else is said about her clothes in the rest of
the poem. She puts on silk widow's garments to call
on Hector; she gives a ring and brooch to Troilus
(TC 3.1368-1372) and a brooch and sleeve to Diomede
(TC 5.1040-1043); Diomede takes a glove from her
(TC 5.1013). At one point while he is describing
Troilus's love for her, Pandarus urges Criseyde to
take off her widow's barbe (TC 2.110) and widow's
weeds (TC 2.222). Perhaps she followed his advice
because, when she learns she has been ransomed she
vows (in the privacy of her bedroom) that, henceforward,
she will wear black in token of her sorrow (TC, 4. 778-
779), a decision that implies that she has not been
wearing black. But we can only guess whether Criseyde
has been wearing black, because Chaucer does not
describe her clothes when she dines at the house of
Deiphebus, on her first or last night with Troilus,
or when she rides to the Greek camp. Not all of his
sources for the story of Troilus are so reticent.
For example, in the Roman de Troie, Benoit de St. Maure
describes in great detail the costume that Briseida
wears when she rides to the Greek camp.[3] Perhaps
Chaucer included fewer costume details because his

original audience was familiar with his sources and
he expected them to supply the details he omitted.
Some evidence that Chaucer expected his audience to
supply settings from their own knowledge can be found
in his poetry. For example, the Squire, rather than
interrupting his story with a lengthy account of a
feast, tells his audience that they know the details
already:

> What nedeth yow rehercen hire array?
> Ech man wot wel that at a kynges feeste
> Hath plentee to the meeste and to the leeste,
> And deyntees mo than been in my knowyng.
> (SqT 298-301)

Romances such as <u>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</u>
usually include extensive descriptions of clothing,
feasts, and tournaments. Comments such as the one
from the Squire's Tale imply that Chaucer knew his
original audience was expecting such a description,
but thought it unnecessary to repeat what had been
rehearsed so many times before.

As a rule, Chaucer ignores a character's costume.
When he does mention costume, the reference does not
always have a dramatic place in the story but is
part of the tradition of the costume descriptions in
romances. One example is the description of Dido
as she sets out with Aeneas on a hunt:

> Upon a thikke palfrey, paper-whit,
> With sadel red, enbrouded with delyt,

> Of gold the barres up enbosede hye,
> Sit Dido, al in gold and perre wrye;
> And she as fair as is the bryghte morwe,
> That heleth syke folk of nyghtes sorwe.
> (LGW 1198-1203)

With such descriptions, the poet and, presumably,
his audience appear to have been concerned as much
with the marvelous riches of the world of the story
as they were with the plot of the story.[4] However,
Chaucer's mention of costume frequently does have a
dramatic place in his tale, furthering the plot or
emphasizing a person's characteristics. In Troilus
and Criseyde, costume references usually help the
action along, although their meanings are not all
evident today. Sometimes the meanings implicit in
a reference to a garment are complex, even though
the reference seems, on first reading, to be incidental.

Included among the costume references related to
Criseyde is the incident in Deiphebus's house in
which Criseyde is led by means of a "lappe" of her
clothing to see Troilus (TC 3.59). Later, in a
parallel incident, Troilus is led by means of a
"lappe" into Criseyde's bedroom (TC 3.742). In both
cases, it is Pandarus who catches the "lappe," leading
each one, on a sort of leash, to meet the other. The
Oxford English Dictionary defines "lappe" as a part
of a garment loose enough to be raised, folded, or
seized, either the lower part of a skirt or shirt;
a loose, hanging sleeve, or the tippet of a sleeve.

Whatever part of their garments Pandarus seized, it
served to get each participant into the room where
Pandarus wanted her or him, the action thus high-
lighting Pandarus's rule as an eager, even aggressive,
go-between, helping to set the stage for the physical
force he has to use to get Troilus into Criseyde's
bed at last. (TC. 3.1097) That each one had to be
led accents his or her reluctance to meet the other,
a reluctance which could be either a proper lover's
shyness or coy dissimulation. If "lappe" is to be
understood as referring to the skirt of Criseyde's
dress or Troilus's shirt, the reference may be a
sexual innuendo, also.

Some references to costume have much simpler
meanings than the references to "lappe". The glove
which Diomede takes from Criseyde, for example,
probably functions as no more than a gift, presumably
not beyond the degree of intimacy allowed at this
stage of the game (TC 5.1050). But if the glove is
an improperly intimate gift, the action shows an
indecorous haste on the part of Criseyde that
contradicts the narrator's protests of her reserve
(TC 5.1086-1092). Such an interpretation assumes
that Diomede takes a glove he is offered by Criseyde
rather than one he steals without her knowledge, a
point which the text of the poem does not make clear.

Answers to the questions of whether the gift

of the glove and whether Criseyde's reluctance to see
Troilus at the house of Deiphebus are proper would
help in answering the question of whether Chaucer
has presented Criseyde as a victim or an accomplice.
The implications of the other gifts Criseyde offers
to her lovers would help determine Chaucer's attitude,
also. Pandarus clearly considers the blue ring
Criseyde offers to moderate the woe of Troilus as
an inadequate gift (TC 3.885-893). Whether the reader
is to consider it inadequate is not clear. The
narrator clearly disapproves of Criseyde giving
Diomede the brooch Troilus gave her. But whether
he disapproves because the brooch had been a gift
from Troilus or because Criseyde should not have
given Diomede any gift at all is not clear. Nor is
it clear whether the reader, as well as the narrator,
is to disapprove of the nature of the gift. All these
actions by Criseyde are part of the medieval ritual
which today we call courtly love, a conceit so
entangled with our fancies of what it should have
been that we may never understand its position in the
Middle Ages. Until we do know its position and rules,
we cannot know whether Criseyde's actions are proper
or whether Chaucer, when he wrote Troilus and
Criseyde, was writing a poem which lauded or derided
a convention.[5] Since reliable research does not yet
exist, I must leave the question of the propriety of

Criseyde's gifts and shyness unanswered for the present.

My inability so far to find reliable secondary studies on a particular area of medieval society also has prevented my investigation into the meanings of several costume references concerning marriage and widowhood. The first reference occurs during the first night Troilus and Criseyde spend together. Sometime during these hours, they playfully exchange rings (TC 3.1368), a reference which has been construed to mean that they were secretly married.[6] This interpretation may or may not be true, but the line does, for some reason, evoke the marriage ceremony. Chaucer also emphasizes the fact that Criseyde is a widow. When he first introduces her, Chaucer mentions that Criseyde is a widow (TC 1.97); when she flees to Hector, Chaucer refers to her widowed state again (TC 1.109); three times in Book 1 he refers to Criseyde's black garments (TC 1.170, 177, 309); Troilus refers to her black garments in his prayer to the god of love (TC 2.533-534); when he first tells Criseyde of Troilus's love for her, Pandarus urges her to take off her widow's barbe (TC 2.110) and widow's dress (TC 2.122). This emphasis on her widowed state may mean, in the context of the story, that the only woman who properly can have an extra-marital affair is a widow. On the other hand, the

significance may lie in the color black, rather than
the fact that she is a widow. But the significance
of the exchange of rings and of Criseyde as a widow
cannot be determined at present because both require
knowledge of the marriage customs of the Middle Ages.
The studies of medieval marriage practices that I
have found offer a tangle of conflicting opinions.
Each author appears to have approached his sources
with a preconceived idea of medieval marriage customs,
usually based on a nineteenth- or twentieth-century
ideal of romantic love. Working from his preconceived
idea, each author has noticed in the primary sources
only those laws or other references which support
his idea. Discussions stemming from such research
claim to present a complete view of medieval marriage
customs, but do not. More balanced studies must be
available before anything new on Criseyde's widowhood
can be added to Chaucerian scholarship.[7] It is also
possible that Chaucer is referring to what he believed
were practices of ancient Troy, contributing a touch
of historical authenticity.

Although present outside sources are of little
help in studying Chaucer's use of costume, we can
learn some details if we confine ourselves to his
poetry only, comparing the costumes of different
characters. The remainder of my discussion, therefore,
concentrates on this aspect, comparing Criseyde's

costume with the costumes of the other women in Chaucer's tales.

The final portrait of Criseyde contains a description of her hair, bound with a gold thread, hanging down her back (<u>TC</u> 5.810-812). This hair style is worn by only two other women in Chaucer's poetry. In the <u>Parliment of Fowls</u>, Venus lies in bed:

> Hyre gilte heres with a golden thred
> Ibounden were, untressed as she lay. . . .
>   (<u>PF</u> 267-268)[8]

In the Knight's Tale, Emilye walks in a garden one day in May with her blond hair:

>   broyded in a tresse
>   Bihynde hir bak, a yerde longe, I gesse.
>   (KnT 1049-1050)

One of Chaucer's sources for both the Knight's Tale and <u>The Parliament of Fowls</u> was Boccaccio's <u>Teseida</u>. whose Venus wears a similar hairstyle.[9] Chaucer uses the hairstyle from the <u>Teseida</u> for his Venus and transfers it also to Emilye, providing a direct connection between the goddess of love and Emilye, who, although a follower of Diana, is the cause of a battle for love. Chaucer wrote <u>The Parliament of Fowls</u> around 1382. Around 1386, he wrote <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>.[10] Remembering the hairstyle from the <u>Teseida</u>, he gave it to Criseyde in a description which immediately precedes her infidelity to Troilus,

once again providing a direct link between his heroine
and the goddess of love. How many members of his
audience would have recognized the connection would
have depended on how many were familiar with the
sources he used.

In addition to emphasizing their role in the love
game, Chaucer may have given Emilye and Criseyde the
long braid as a touch of historical authenticity for
tales set in ancient Athens and Troy. Various lines
in his poetry demonstrate his awareness that customs
of different times and countries are not the same.
For example, there is the apology at the beginning
of Book 2 of <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u> in which he notes
that both speech and courtship customs have changed
(<u>TC</u> 2.22-49). Diomede, in the first conversation
recorded between him and Criseyde, asks if the "Grekis
gise" is strange to her (<u>TC</u> 5.860-861). In the Knight's
Tale, Emilye and her maidens prepare for the sacrifice
to Diana "as was the gyse" (KnT 2279) and Emilye
walks in the funeral procession:

> With fyr in honde, as was that tyme the
> gyse. (KnT 2911)

The fire is for Arcite's funeral pyre, a custom which
was not a part of a fourteenth-century English funeral.[11]
Finally, Lucrece, after she has been raped, sits in
her house:

> In habit swich as women used tho
> Unto the buryinge of hire frendes go. . .
> (LGW 1830-1831)[12]

In addition to his awareness that customs change,
Chaucer may have regarded Boccaccio as an accurate
historical source. The Teseida was not written until
around 1339,[13] but Chaucer may have known that
Boccaccio had based his story on more ancient sources
and thought the hairstyle came from one of these
sources. Chaucer also may have seen the hairstyle on
an old statue or in an old painting, a visual record
of a style from a bygone era. When he set the Knight's
Tale and Troilus and Criseyde in olden times, he may
have added the old hairstyle to make the setting
more authentic.

Other critics, notably Bloomfield, have also
recognized some of the references in Chaucer's poetry
that indicate a sense of history. In his discussion
of Chaucer's historical perception, Bloomfield asserts
that Chaucer was far ahead of his contemporaries in
his comprehension that customs change from century to
century. Bloomfield also points out that, because
Chaucer's historical knowledge was incomplete, he
included anachronisms in his tales set in ancient
times.[14] Although I agree that Chaucer added authentic
historical touches to some of his tales, I cannot
agree with Bloomfield's other two points. Chaucer's
historical perspective cannot have been that far in

advance of his contemporaries. He would not have
included phrases such as "as was that tyme the gyse"
(KnT 2911) if he had not thought that at least some
of his original audience would have understood them.
Additionally, when he included descriptions of
customs such as the funeral pyre of Arcite, surely
all his audience recognized that these customs differed
from the ones they practiced. I doubt that the
medieval sense of history was the same as ours (which
is sometimes obsessive in its demand for authenticity),
but Bloomfield's discussion of anachronisms in
Chaucer's work, with its implication that modern
writers are historically accurate, is misplaced. Our
use of historical settings is not so accurate as we
pride ourselves that it is. We tend to place King
Arthur in a fifteenth century setting, when Mallory
collected the legends, rather than in the more
appropriate sixth century. In her discussion of
historical costume in the theater, Hollander notes
that, usually, only one particular part of a costume
is required to satisfy our perception of historical
authenticity. An Elizabethan without a neck ruff,
for example, will be viewed as inaccurately dressed,
even though Elizabethan costume did include styles
without ruffs. Conversely, a man with a ruff will
be viewed as an Elizabethan even if the rest of his
costume is from the seventeenth century.[15] As a

final example, scholars now tell us that they can find
no evidence that the Vikings ever wore the horned
helmets which are considered essential in any repre-
sentation of Viking costume.[16] I could add to the
list, but these few examples should adequately
demonstrate that we, as well as Chaucer, incorporate
anachronisms into historical settings.

Criseyde's hair is mentioned twice more in
addition to the reference in her final portrait.
Learning that she is to be traded to the Greeks,
Criseyde goes to her room and, throwing herself on
her bed:

> Hire ownded heer, that sonnyssh was of hewe,
> She rente, and ek hire fyngeres longe and smale
> She wrong ful ofte, and bad God on hire rewe,
> And with the deth to doon boote on hire bale.
> (TC 4.736-739)

Later, when Pandarus arrives with the message from
Troilus, he finds a thoroughly distraught woman:

> for with hire salte teris
> Hire brest, hire face, ybathed was ful wete.
> The myghty tresses of hire sonnysshe heeris,
> Unbroiden, hangen al aboute hire eeris;
> Which yaf hym verray signal of martire
> Of deth, which that hire herte gan desire.
> (TC 4.814-819)

Other women mourn in a similar manner. The women in
the Knight's Tale are "cracchynge" their cheeks and
"rentynge" their hair as they lament the death of
Arcite (KnT 2834). Ariadne, finding that Theseus

has deserted her, cries:

> "I am betrayed!" and hire her torente,
> And to the stronde barefot faste she
>   wente. . . .   (LGW 2188-2189)

Eventually, she faints, falling on a rock. Dido begs

Aneas not to leave her:

> She falleth hym to fote and swouneth ther,
> Dischevele, with hire bryghte gilte her,
> And seyth, "Have mercy! and let me with
>   yow ryde!" (LGW 1314-1316)

Lucrece sits:

> by hire beddes side
> Dischevele, for no malyce she ne thoughte;
> And softe wolle our bok seyth that she wroughte
> To kepen hire from slouthe and idelnesse. . . .
>   (LGW 1719-1722)

After she is raped, Lucrece calls her friends and

family to her:

> And al dischevele, with hire heres cleere,
> In habit swich as women used tho
> Unto the buryinge of hire frendes go,
> She sit in halle with a sorweful sighte.
>   (LGW 1829-1832)

With one exception, all these situations are ones of

deep sorrow. The exception is that of Lucrece at her

bedside. The "dischevele" in this case may mean that

Lucrece is in dishabille as well as having her hair

disarranged, but whether the word refers to garments,

hair, or both, she is in this disarray because she

is in the privacy of her own room, surrounded only by

her woman servants.[17] It is worthy of note that, as
with Susannah and the elders, evil deeds are instigated
by the sight of a woman who, in privacy, has disrobed
herself. In the rest of the situations cited, for
some reason Chaucer felt it necessary to draw his
audience's attention to the manner in which these
women mourn. All the women, including Criseyde,
are from classical times, so the descriptions of
mourning may be historical touches - scratching of
cheeks and tearing of hair suggest customs more
primitive than those of fourteenth-century England.
Perhaps the point is that Chaucer considered these
mourning customs to be superior to the customs
practiced in his day. Of course, some of the women
may be following the correct ritual and some may not.
Almost all of the women are brought to grief by their
husbands: Dido supplicates a husband who is in the
act of deserting her; Ariadne mourns a husband who
has already deserted her; Lucrece mourns the dishonor
she feels she has brought on her husband and, probably,
her own death; Emilye bewails the death of her husband
and the women with her are lamenting the same death.
In contrast, Criseyde sobs merely for the loss of a
lover. And, again, with the exception of Criseyde,
all the women mourn publicly. Perhaps Criseyde is
being melodramatic and her desire for martyrdom
emphasizes her overwrought condition. Whether the

privacy of Criseyde's grief is significant is unclear.
She does not want her love affair with Troilus to
become public knowledge. If she had wrung her hands,
torn her hair, and sobbed in public, people undoubtedly
would have demanded an explanation of her as they do
of Lucrece (LGW 1833). On the other hand, Chaucer
may be disapproving of both the affair and its secrecy.
A possible substantiation of the impropriety of
Criseyde's grief may be the fact that all Chaucer's
ladies, except Criseyde, faint when great sorrow
overcomes them. In Troilus and Criseyde, it is
Troilus who swoons, the only Chaucerian knight who
does so. I am not in agreement with the theory of
a role reversal between Troilus and Criseyde,[18] but
the discrepancy between their actions and the actions
of the rest of the Chaucerian nobility does suggest
the possibility that Troilus and Criseyde are not
perfect types of the hero and heroine.

Earlier, I noted that although the various pieces
of Criseyde's formal portrait add several stanzas
to the poem, they give few specific details about
her appearance, offering instead a general impression
of great beauty and a lady-like demeanor. If we
compare Criseyde's portrait to the portraits of the
other ladies in Chaucer's tales, we find that a
generalized description which seldom mentions costume
is the rule. The description of the Duchess

(<u>BD</u> 817-1041), the most complete portrait of a lady
found in Chaucer's works, is the best example from
which to work.

As both Kittredge and Bronson have observed,
the portrait of the Duchess is not in the order
dictated by the rhetorical formula for character
descriptions, which started from the head and de-
scended, feature by feature, to the toes, then to
the moral qualities of a character.[19] However, as
Scharr observes,[20] and as a comparison of the portrait
of the Duchess with any other Chaucerian portrait
demonstrates, none of Chaucer's portraits follow the
conventional order. Kiernan notes that medieval
poets other than Chaucer also deviated from the
rhetorical formula for a character's description.[21]
In view of this evidence, I doubt that the lack of
order is important to a study of the Duchess's
character, although it may be important to a study
of the literary history of medieval romances. What
is important here for a study of characterization
through costume is that the poet takes roughly one
hundred twenty-five lines to describe this woman and
never once mentions her clothing. In fact, the entire
poem does not mention any garments worn by the Duchess.
The only detail mentioned which is included in our
definition of costume is that her hair is the color
of gold (<u>BD</u> 855-858). If we compare her description

with the ideal medieval beauty,[22] we can conclude
that the Duchess probably would have been considered
a beauty. Her description continues to charm critics
today who, following the suggestion inherent in the
general terms used, fill in their own ideal of beauty.
If these critics studied medieval paintings and
illuminations, however, instead of relying solely on
mental images conjured by words, they might reconsider
their assumption that ideals of feminine beauty have
not changed. For example, the eyes of the Duchess
are described as opening "by measure," a trait which
the poet emphasizes is natural to her, not a
"countrefeted thyng." If these lines describe the
half-closed, almond-shaped eyes of the women in
medieval art, the description may charm twentieth-
century ears, but its actual form does not charm
twentieth-century eyes. Other details in the artworks
are equally at variance with the twentieth-century
conception of beauty, causing me to doubt that we
would consider the Duchess a beauty if we could see
her instead of only reading about her.

Comparing the portrait of the Duchess to those
of Chaucer's other noble women (with the exception of
Criseyde), we find that they are described in the
same manner as the Duchess; that is, if a description
progresses further than a line or two mentioning the
lady's perfect beauty in general terms, it is to

comment on her physical and mental characteristics
with little mention of her costume. Often a lady's
portrait consists of only one or two lines. Cleopatra
is "fayr as is the rose in May" (LGW 613); Dorigen
is "oon the faireste under sonne" (FrT 1734). In
both cases, the one line is sufficient description
for the purposes of the story; we hear no more of
either lady's appearance or costume. In his discussion
of medieval ideals of beauty, Curry notes that late
fourteenth and early fifteenth century poets often
impatiently dispensed with the lengthy formal
descriptions found in earlier romances so that they
could continue with the action of their stories.[23]
The shortness of most of Chaucer's formal portraits
may be, in part, a result of this practice, an effort
to follow the precept he set forth to excuse himself
from describing Cleopatra's wedding:

> The weddynge and the feste to devyse,
> To me, that have ytake swich empryse
> Of so many a story for to make,
> It were to longe, lest that I shulde slake
> Of thyng that bereth more effect and charge;
> For men may overlade a ship or barge.
> And forthy to th'effect thanne wol I skyppe,
> And al the remenaunt, I wol lete it slippe.
> (LGW 616-623)

But impatience probably was not his only reason.
He expected his audience to fill in details of the
portraits for themselves, as in the example from the
Squire's Tale given earlier. He also appears, in

most cases, to have been tailoring the lady's de-
scription to fit the requirements of plot; what
Chaucer describes of each lady depends on what the
story requires of her. For example, Emilye's physical
appearance is emphasized, including a few lines about
her costume:

> That Emelye, that fairer was to sene
> Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene,
> And fressher than the May with floures newe—
> For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,
> I noot which was the fyner of hem two—
> Er it were day, as was hir wone to do,
> She was arisen and al redy dight . . .
> Yclothed was she fressh, for to devyse:
> Hire yelow heer was broyded in a tresse
> Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse.
> And in the gardyn, at the sonne upriste,
> She walketh up and down, and as hire liste
> She gadereth floures, party white and rede,
> To make a subtil gerland for hire hede;
> And as an aungel hevenysshly she soong.
>   (KnT 1035-1055)

The physical description fits Emilye's role in the
Knight's Tale: she is a body given in marriage with
no extraordinary call made on her virtue or moral
stamina. Constance, on the other hand, requires a
vast reservoir of moral, virtuous stamina, so her
moral qualities are emphasized:

> To rekene as wel hire goodnesse as beautee,
> Nas nevere swich another as is shee.
> I prey to God in honour hire susteene,
> And wolde she were of al Europe the queene.
>
> In hire is heigh beautee, withoute pride,
> Yowthe, withoute grenehede or folye;
> To alle hire werkes vertu is hir gyde;
> Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tirannye.

> She is mirour of alle curteisye;
> Hir herte is verray chambre of hoolynesse,
> Hir hand, ministre of fredam for almesse.
> (ML 158-168)

Constance has need of all these virtues as well as of a patience surpassing that of Job as she is twice married, twice accused of murder, once assaulted by a would-be lover, and three times cast adrift on the sea.

If we study the portrait of the Duchess once again, we find that, although the description is lengthy, it, too, is tailored to suit the needs of the narration. This portrait is a tribute to a woman whom the audience will not be able to observe reacting to the various pressures of a plot because she is dead. Therefore, a full recounting of her physical, mental, and moral attributes is necessary in the portrait. In this picture, any mention of clothing is superfluous for two reasons. First, the Duchess is described as being moderate in all things (BD 881-882), so she must have dressed in moderation, also, clothing herself in a manner appropriate to her position and to each occasion, eliciting no comment. Second, as she is dead, her unchanging qualities are what are praised; clothing is ever-changeable.

As we have seen, in the formal portraits of his heroines, Chaucer supplies us with very little

information about the wardrobes of the ladies.
Throughout each tale he continues, for the most
part, to ignore their costume; apparently all of his
ladies dressed as appropriately as the Duchess.
Occasionally, the plot requires that some detail of
a lady's costume be mentioned. For example, Thisbe
hastens to her tryst with Piramus:

> With hire face ywympled subtyly. . . .
> (<u>LGW</u> 797)

This detail is mentioned because her wimple is the
bloodstained garment which convinces Piramus that
she is dead. As Constance goes to the sea to be set
adrift for the second time, we watch an act of motherly
tenderness that, while incidentally disclosing that
her costume includes a coverchief, emphasizes her
concern for others over herself:

> Her litel child lay wepyng in hir arm,
> And knelynge, pitously to hym she seyde,
> "Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee noon harm."
> With that hir coverchief of hir heed
>   she breyde,
> And over his litel eyen she it leyde,
> And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,
> And into heavene hire eyen up she caste.
> (MLT 834-840)

Cenobia is paraded, captive, before the Romans in a
costume mentioned because it emphasizes the difference
between her present and past states:

> Biforen [Aurelian's] triumphe walketh shee,
> With gilte cheynes on hire nekke hangynge.
> Coroned was she, as after hir degree,
> And full of perree charged hire clothynge.
>   (MT 2364-2366)

Earlier in her story we are told of her rich costumes
in a description of her which emphasizes her great
skill in war, her great riches, and her great learning:

> I seye, so worshipful a creature,
> And wys therwith, and large with mesure,
> So penyble in the werre, and curteis eke,
> Ne moore labour myghte in werre endure,
> Was noon, though al this world men sholde seke.
>
> Hir riche array ne myghte nat be told,
> As wel in vessel as in hire clothyng.
> She was al clad in perree and in gold,
> And eek she lafte noght, for noon huntyng,
> To have of sondry tonges ful knowyng,
> Whan that she leyser hadde; and for to entende
> To lerne bookes was al hire likyng,
> How she in vertu myghte hir lyf dispende.
>   (MT 2298-2310)

In addition to emphasizing her skills and her captivity,
there is, in both of these descriptions of Cenobia,
an echo, also, of the practice I have remarked on
earlier in regard to the description of Dido going
hunting; that is, the costumes, fighting prowess, and
learning are described to show the marvels of another
world rather than to aid in plot development.

Plot development and marvelous sights are the
usual reasons that Chaucer mentions a lady's costume.
He does not often mention it as an illumination of
her character; for character portrayal he prefers to
enumerate the points of her physical appearance and

her moral qualities. If we compare this treatment with his treatment of Criseyde, we find that much the same thing applies. The pieces of Criseyde's formal portrait emphasize her physical beauty and her virtues. She does not, to be sure, possess virtues equal to those of Constance, but they do compare favorably with those of the Duchess. In one of his discussions of Criseyde's character, Donaldson points out that Chaucer intended his audience to understand that Criseyde had only the appearance of virtue, citing as evidence Chaucer's use of the word "gesse" in relation to her character (<u>TC</u> 1.288-289). Men might think her honorable, Donaldson concludes, but Chaucer's wording in this line declares that they would be wrong.[24] The point is worth considering, but the rest of her description is so positive (except, of course, for her flawed eyebrows in Book 5) that I doubt that the use of the word "gesse" is that significant. My doubt is increased by the fact that the poem was written for a society in which one might be as likely to hear a story as to read it for one's self, a society in which large numbers of exactly-duplicated, printed texts were not available for readers to pore over, carefully weighing each word.

When details of Criseyde's costume are mentioned, they add information relevant to the plot. The main emphasis on costume, as I discussed earlier, is the

fact that she is dressed in compliance with her
widowed state, a point which appears to be important
to the story's development but which, as I pointed
out earlier in this chapter, cannot be explored at
present because of lack of evidence. Her hairstyle
in Book 5, and her brown, silk widow's dress in
Book 1, may or may not be indications of character
traits which would separate her from the ladies. Her
hairstyle links her to Venus and does so in the
narrative immediately before Criseyde's infidelity
to Troilus. The link may point only to the fact
that Criseyde is the woman in a game of love, but
it might also point to the fact that Criseyde's
nature is as wanton as that of Venus. A comparison
of the mannerisms of Chaucer's ladies and of his
common women with those of Criseyde might shed some
light on this problem. Licentiousness is a quality
of Chaucer's common women, usually shown by their
actions rather than by their costumes. Pride is
another failing of these common women, and, in her
wearing a brown dress to Hector's court, Chaucer
may be indicating that Criseyde has a pride equal
to theirs.

Comparing his treatment of his ladies to his
treatment of his common women, we find that Chaucer
treats each class in an entirely different manner.
In particular, the wardrobes of the common women

receive much more attention than those of the ladies.

Chaucer does not describe many common women. From those few that he describes I have excluded two: the Prioress and May of the Merchant's Tale. It is uncertain whether the Prioress was of noble birth or not; but her position in life if she had not entered a convent is irrelevant. Chaucer presents her as a religious, not a member of the laity. As such, she would have been expected to conform to rules of costuming that differed from the rules followed by secular women. My discussion, as I observed at the beginning of this chapter, is concerned with secular women. Although we are told that she is "of smal degree" (MerchT 1625), May is, oddly enough, described in the general, physical terms used for a noble heroine, having such characteristics as fresh beauty, wise governance, and womanly bearing (MerchT 1601-1604). Although we are left in no doubt at the end of the story that she is of common stock, her description and costume are those of a lady; therefore, I have excluded her as too atypical for my discussion. She is almost in the same class as Criseyde, except that Chaucer is not half so clear as to what opinion we are to have of Criseyde.

For a study of the typical common woman, the description of Alisoun, the wife in the Miller's Tale, is best, because it is the most complete:

Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,
A barmclooth eek as whit as morne milk
Upon hir lendes, ful of many a goore.
Whit was hir smok, and broyden al bifoore
And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,
Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.
The tapes of hir white voluper
Were of the same suyte of hir coler;
Her filet brood of silk, and set ful hye.
And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye;
Ful smale ypulled were hire browes two,
And tho were bent and blake as any sloo.
She was ful moore blisful on to see
Than is the newe pere-jonette tree,
And softer than the wolle is of a wether.
And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether,
Tasseled with silk, and perled with latoun.
In al this world, to seken up and doun,
There nys no man so wys that koude thenche
So gay a popelote or swich a wenche.
Ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe
Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.
But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne
As any swalwe sittynge on a berne.
Therto she koude skippe and make game,
As any kyde or calf folwynge his dame.
Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,
Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.
Wynsynge she was, as is a joly colt,
Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler,
As brood as is the boos of a bokeler.
Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye.
She was a prymerole, a piggesnye,
For any lord to leggen in his bedde,
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.
                                    (MillT 3233-3270)

The main difference between this description and

Chaucer's descriptions of ladies becomes obvious

from the third line. Although the woman is fair to

look upon, suddenly it is her clothing, not her body,

that receives the most emphasis. We find ourselves

looking, not at fair, white skin and a smooth, round

neck, but at a silk belt and headband, an embroidered
collar, and a beaded, tasseled, leather purse. The
emphasis on clothing is typical of the other of
Chaucer's descriptions of common women, all of whom
are disposed of in far fewer lines. To sharpen the
contrast with the ladies, Chaucer never gives us a
list of the moral qualities of common women. We see
them in action— cunning, deceiving, and unfaithful.
We see or hear of no other qualities.

 Perhaps Alisoun is described so completely
because her description is a parody of the lengthy
descriptions of noble heroines.[25] Even something
about her manners is included, although her loud,
lively singing voice lacks the sweetness of the
voice of the Duchess or the angelic tones of the
voice of Emilye. Almost every other feature is set
in opposition to the features of the noble heroine,
also. Although she is fair, as are all noble heroines,
she possesses black eyebrows which she plucks to make
them form the proper arch. Noble heroines had no
need of such a counterfeiting of nature, as Chaucer
emphasizes in his description of Lucrece:

   (And by no craft hire beaute nas nat
    feyned). . . . (LGW 1749)

Alisoun has a golden skin whose color is compared
to that of a new coin, instead of the lily-white

skin of noble heroines such as Emilye. Alisoun
frolics rather than taking part in the refined games
such as the Duchess delighted in. Finally, as noted
before, her clothing is mentioned in much more
detail than the clothing of a noble heroine ever is.
Chaucer plays on the antithesis of the noble heroine
and the common woman in almost all his descriptions
of common women, no matter how brief the latter
descriptions are. For example, after describing a
rather chunky shape of the daughter in the Reeve's
Tale, he ends with the saving feature of fair hair:

> This wenche thikke and wel ygrowen was,
> With kamus nose, and eyen greye as glas,
> With buttokes brode, and brestes rounde
>   and hye;
> But right fair was hire heer, I wol nat lye.
>   (RvT 3973-3976)

Apparently, one could look at her hair, at least,
without too much aesthetic shuddering. In other
descriptions, if Chaucer notes nothing else, he
notes the pride of the common women such as that of
the guildsmen's wives, who would not object to their
husbands becoming aldermen:

> It is ful fair to been ycleped "madame,"
> And goon to vigilies al bifore,
> And have a mantel roialliche ybore.
>   (Gen Prol 376-378)

Such thoughts are reminiscent of the Wife of Bath's
insistence that she should make the first offering

every Sunday:

> In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon
> That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon;
> And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she,
> That she was out of alle charitee.
> (Gen Prol 449-452)

The pride motivating the thoughts and the actions of the
gildsmen's wives and of the Wife of Bath is not a trait
of Chaucer's noble heroines. Ladies are born to such
rights and rich costumes as the common women covet.

When Chaucer describes the costumes of common women,
he often notes the fabrics of which the costumes are com-
posed. Alisoun, for example wears silk, leather, and
metal. Any attempt to learn exactly what Alison was
wearing uncovers the fact that, except for her smock,
Chaucer mentions accessories only. She wears a belt,
an apron, a collar, a cap, a headband, a purse, a
huge brooch, and shoes, all them easily removable
to reach her smock and the body underneath it. By
emphasizing Alison's accessories and smock, ignoring
the one or two garments which were, probably, between
the apron and smock, Chaucer certainly is directing
his audience's attention to Alison's wanton nature.
By naming the fabric of which her various accesso-
ries were made, Chaucer also is directing his audi-
ence's attention to Alison's vanity, shown by the
display of fabric which she, as a craftsman's wife,
should not have been wearing. We can infer what
she should not have been wearing from reading the

sumptuary laws, although I am not sure how far we can rely on these laws for proof. No record exists of sumptuary laws being in force during the reign of Richard II,[26] but from the ones enacted during the previous reign, we can learn what the upper classes considered it impertinent of the lower to wear. For example, neither craftsmen nor their wives were to wear anything made of silk,[27] yet Alison wears a silk belt, a silk collar, silk tapes on her cap, a silk headband, and has silk tassels on her purse, pretending to be higher on the social scale than she really is, in a manner similar to that of the guildsmen's wives. I suspect that another reason for Alisoun's acquisition of these silken accessories is that they are brighter and more delightful to touch and to wear than similar woolen articles; I doubt that Chaucer or his audience considered this aspect. When they enacted the sumptuary laws, the aristocracy carefully reserved the finest, softest fabrics for their clothing, ruling that commoners should be content with coarser materials. Since they had never been forced to wear garments fashioned from coarse fabrics, the aristocracy probably had little idea of the relative discomfort caused by such garments.

Although he probably was criticizing Alisoun's social pretentions, Chaucer may also have been mocking her provincial attire. With all of the accessories

mentioned in her description, especially the huge
brooch on her collar, Alisoun seems overdressed.
The paintings and sculptures from the thirteenth and
fourteenth centuries usually show women in relatively
simple garments, adorned with only a few jewelled
ornaments. The voluper and fillet which adorn
Alisoun's head, for example, is a combination which
I have never found mentioned in fashion histories
nor seen in artwork. This fact, of course, is not
proof that the combination was not worn; it may even
be one of the provincial details that Chaucer is
ridiculing.

The main emphasis in Chaucer's descriptions of
common women, then, is their pride, displayed by
means of their costumes, and their lack of virtue.
The description of Alisoun is unusual in that her
costume demonstrates both her pride and her easy
virtue. Usually a common woman's lack of virtue
is demonstrated only by means of her "daliance"
(to borrow from the Wife of Bath's vocabulary [WBT 565])
with some man other than her husband. In comparison
with the costumes of these women, Criseyde's costume
is firmly allied with the costumes of the noble
heroines, with two possible exceptions. The first is
Criseyde's braid bound in gold, the possible impli-
cations of which I have discussed. The second
possible exception is the dress she wore to Hector's

court. Whether Chaucer is referring to the width
or the length, his use of "large" to describe this
dress implies that this garment may be one of those
which the Parson denounces as a "superfluitee of
clothynge" (ParsT 416). The vanity which may have
motivated this display of fabric may be accented
when Chaucer mentions that this widow's habit is
made of samite, naming the fabric of which the
garment was made, a descriptive detail that he uses
for some of the common women but never for the ladies.
Although these inferences tempt one to state that
Criseyde wears the brown, silk dress out of pride,
such a conclusion may be incorrect. One flaw in the
argument is that Hector treats Criseyde as if all
is as it should be. Further, we cannot forget the
possibility that Chaucer is describing an old-fashioned
garment, thereby providing an historic touch.

In concluding that Criseyde's costume portrays
her as a lady, we must remind ourselves that this
conclusion is tentative rather than definite. Much
of the meaning of her costume still remains to be
explored. Were the gifts she gave to Diomede proper?
Why did she and Troilus exchange rings? Why is she
a widow rather than a wife or a maid? Answers to
these questions might resolve the ambiguity currently
preceived in the characterization of Criseyde.

A study of the costume of Criseyde would be

incomplete without some mention of her joined eyebrows which, in her final portrait, mar her beauty (TC 5.813). An examination of this feature does not uncover anything relevant to Criseyde's character, but it does suggest that the gap between the expectations of Chaucer's original audience and of his modern one is wider than we usually assume. Criseyde's eyebrows have perplexed a number of critics, who cannot understand why Chaucer broke the artistic unity of his poem by changing the appearance of his heroine: when we first see her, every feature is perfect; when we last see her, one feature, inexplicably, is ugly. A couple of solutions have been offered in an effort to exculpate Chaucer from the charge of being false to what modern critics conceive of as his art. Donaldson claims that in Book 1 Criseyde is seen through the eyes of an enchanted lover and, therefore, her features are idealized. But in Book 5, the enchantment is gone and, for the first time, Criseyde's actual features are described.[28] Griffin, having discovered that one of Chaucer's sources includes a mention of Criseyde's imperfect brows, concludes that Chaucer sacrificed art to historical accuracy.[29] Both solutions assume that Chaucer recognized the inconsistency as a problem, a questionable assumption. Instead, I submit, he would have considered the change as a transformation caused by Criseyde's

infidelity. That Criseyde's changed appearance is to
be accepted as a marvel rather than explained away as
the fading of an infatuation or as a historical
nicety can be substantiated by a glance at the
various costumes which adorn Griselda as she patiently
endures her various misfortunes.

Griselda is not a typical Chaucerian woman.
She is a commoner, but, unlike Alisoun or May, she
is not unfaithful to her husband; instead she is
faithful and obedient to a point that we, placing
the duties of motherhood above those of wifely
obedience, consider extreme. However, it is
Griselda's costumes, not her actions, which are
pertinent to my discussion. When Griselda first
appears, her physical appearance is merely "fair
ynough" (ClT 209); but her virtue is something more:

> But for to speak of vertuous beautee,
> Thanne was she oon the faireste under sonne;
> For povreliche yfostred up was she,
> No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne.
> Wel ofter of the welle than of the tonne
> She drank, and for she wolde vertu plese,
> She knew wel labour, but noon ydel ese.
> (ClT 211-217)

Such a characterization rivals that of Constance.
But even Constance would have scorned to wear the
"wrecched clothes" which Griselda wears during much
of the story (ClT 850).

Griselda enters the narrative dressed in clothing
so ragged that the ladies who are to disrobe her

for her wedding:

> were not right glad
> To handle hir clothes, wherinne she was clad.
> (ClT 375-376)

In spite of their aversion, these women remove
Griselda's old clothing, dress her in sumptuous
garments, and comb her tangled hair (ClT 377-380).
With her new clothes and her marriage to Walter,
Griselda assumes the high rank of a ruler's wife.
She continues in her new station, wearing her fine
garments, until Walter sends her back to her father,
clad only in a smock (ClT 895). At the end of the
story, she is once more dressed in rich apparel as
she is welcomed back to her social eminence as
Walter's wife (ClT 1116-1120). In all this disrobing
and robing, the point relevant to Criseyde's eyebrows
is the transformation of Griselda when she first is
dressed in the aristocratic clothing. Previously,
she was merely attractive; suddenly she becomes
beautiful and people have difficulty recognizing her:

> this mayde bright of hewe
> Fro foot to heed they clothed han al newe.
>
> Hir heris han they kembd, that lay untressed
> Ful rudely, and with hir fyngres smale
> A corone on hire heed they han ydressed,
> And sette hire ful of nowches grete and smale.
> Of hire array what should I make a tale?
> Unnethe the peple hir knew for hire fairnesse,
> Whan she translated was in swich richesse.
> (ClT 377-385)

This transformation is as marvelous that in the Wife of Bath's tale, where the old hag is changed into a beautiful woman. I doubt that Chaucer's audience questioned either marvel, just as they do not seem to have questioned the intermixing of the natural and supernatural in manuscript miniatures.[30] In Griselda's case, she begins the story as a commoner and, therefore, cannot be of unsurpassed beauty. She ends the story as a noble heroine, who must be beautiful; therefore, her appearance changes. The discrepancy in Criseyde's appearance follows the same logic. She begins as a lady who is of perfect character and beauty. She ends as something less than a lady (although Chaucer never quite reduces her to a common woman), with an imperfect character and, therefore, a flawed beauty. Pandarus, Troilus, and the narrator are not at first blinded to the imperfection; the imperfection does not exist when they first see her. There is, also, another possible explanation of the change in Criseyde's appearance. The poem was meant to be heard as well as read. A listener is not likely to keep tiny descriptive details in mind from Book 1 through Book 5. Even a person reading the poem would not necessarily have noticed the change, especially if he accepted marvelous transformations as a valid literary device. An author writing for such an audience might not have considered

it necessary to check back through his manuscript
for discrepencies. Once again, this problem seems
to me to be one created by modern critics studying
a printed text with the assumption that medieval art
was based on the same tenets as modern art. The
realistic explanations offered by Donaldson and
Griffin may be true if Chaucer found it necessary to
justify the change. But the possibility that the
question never occurred to either Chaucer or his
audience should at least be considered.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion in the preceeding chapter of
Criseyde's costume in comparison with the costumes of
other Chaucerian women, I have pointed out very few
points directly related to Chaucer's meaning that
were not known before. The examination of Criseyde's
costume does not settle the debate over whether or
not Criseyde is seduced by her two lovers or is the
leader in both affairs. Throughout the poem, she
dresses as a lady despite her actions. Perhaps
Chaucer has given us a suggestion of pride in one
court dress and of moral laxity in Criseyde's final
hairstyle, although I am inclined to think that both
are historical touches rather than indications of
character. However, the present evidence is insuf-
ficient for proving either side of the argument. My
discussion has pointed out, also, that Chaucer does
not describe upper and lower class women in the
same terms; he tells us about the bodies and characters
of aristocratic women and about the bodies and clothing
of common ones. In this chapter as well as in the
previous chapters of my discussion, I have not been
concerned with proving definite conclusions about
why Chaucer included a costume reference in a poem.

Rather, I have discussed the fact that, although
Chaucer does use costume in his stories, we cannot
discover the meanings of these references because
the research available on medieval costume is inade-
quate for such a study.

A study of Chaucer's use of costume must rely to
a large extent on secondary sources because the primary
sources for such a study are too numerous and cover too
many fields for one person to study adequately. But
the secondary sources that are available on costume
history lack the documentation necessary for a re-
searcher to use them with confidence. The lack of
reliable costume histories has gone unnoticed because
most critics ignore the costume references in Chaucer's
stories, just as they ignore his references to other
social practices. The failure of critics to consider
medieval social customs in relation to Chaucer's
stories appears to be based on the idea that social
trivia such as costume and mannerisms cannot have
played a part in Chaucer's meaning. This attitude,
which also underlies critical studies that deal with
the social details, is exemplified by a comment on
the use of costume in the Clerk's Tale. In his
study of the patient Griselda, Griffith, unable to
avoid some mention of costume, concludes that the
various costume changes are meant as a contrast
between the natural and supernatural worlds of the

story, not just as "medieval and folk love of personal adornment".[1] In reaching this conclusion he completely overlooks the society on which the story as based, a society which believed that each social class should dress in a manner befitting its position. When Griselda changes social rank, she must change her costume, also. It is true that Griselda's costume changes are something other than a love of fine clothing, but it is equally true that we do not have to pass the bounds of the natural world in order to find an explanation. The social world that Griffith, as well as other critics, brushes aside needs to be investigated.

In my investigation of Chaucerian costume I found that Chaucer makes very few references to costume. I had expected many more, primarily because of my familiarity with the more extensive costume descriptions of modern novelists. A ready example is Dickens, who introduces a character with a description of his garments, mannerisms, and physical appearance. Chaucer's apparent disregard of costume may be the result of his writing for an audience more homogeneous than that modern writers address. Dickens can serve again for a comparison. Because he wrote for strangers whose social backgrounds he could only guess, Dickens needed a method of ensuring that his audience reacted as he wished to a character.

Adding specific details of costume and mannerisms was one solution to this problem. On the other hand, because Chaucer wrote for an audience with whose social background he was familiar, he did not need to be as concerned that the audience would not react as he wished. If he stated that a woman was a lady, he knew that his original audience would fill in the proper details of costume. Chaucer would have been further assured that his audience would supply the proper details because he usually portrays stereotyped characters. His ladies are beautiful, presumably dress with taste, and are chaste. His lower class women are sometimes dowdy, sometimes attractive, but never beautiful. They dress ostentatiously and lack virtue. Criseyde, who does not act like a lady, and Griselda, who does not act or dress like a commoner are the only two exceptions.

My assessment of Chaucer's audience and how it influenced his writing is not definitive, a fact which points once again to the main conclusion of my study of Chaucer's use of costume: most of the current studies of medieval social customs are deficient both in objectivity and in documentation. Studies of social elements such as costume or etiquette should be carried out without the underlying assumption that social values have not changed and that medieval practices must be measured against modern practices.

Such studies also should provide proof to substantiate their claims. The acceptance of the poor scholarship usually found in costume and other histories of social customs stems from the belief that social mores are trivial matters of no concern to a serious author. But the social mores are the base on which an author constructs his poem or novel and he cannot be fully understood until his society is also understood.

ENDNOTES

Chapter 1

[1]*A La Mode: On the Social Psychology of Fashion*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 19.

[2]König, p. 21.

[3]May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century 1307-1399*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

[4]Anthony Steele, *Richard II*, 1st ed. (1941; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

[5]George Coulton, *Medieval Panorama*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939).

[6]Eileen Powers, *Medieval English Nunneries*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

[7]Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

[8]D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.

[9]Walter C. Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*, rev. ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1960).

[10]Curry, *Mediaeval Sciences*, p. xiii.

[11]Alice R. Kaminsky, *Chaucer's 'Troilus and Criseyde' and the Critics*, (n.c.: Ohio University Press, 1980) summarizes this viewpoint in chapter 2.

[12]I am using the word "costume," rather than "fashion," throughout this study for two reasons. First, although "fashion" is used normally to mean clothing, it can be used to refer to the newest trend in any area of life. Second, when "fashion" is used to refer to clothing, it usually carries with it the implication that only the newest styles, sometimes called "high fashion," are meant. In this study I am concerned with high fashion, but am concerned also

with the styles worn by the people who did not follow current trends. Use of the word "costume" rather than "fashion" should preclude the implication that at any point I am referring only to high fashion.

[13]Sister Mary E. Whitmore, Medieval English Domestic Life and Amusements in the Works of Chaucer, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University, 1937), p. 140.

[14]Gen Prol 151; all quotations from Chaucer are taken from F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mufflin Co., 1957). Hereafter, the line number and title of the work from which it is taken will be given in parenthesis within the text.

[15]F. E. Baldwin, Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1926) provides a summary of the sumptuary laws during the reigns of Edward III and Richard II.

[16]Joan Evans, Dress in Mediaeval France, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 24.

[17]The fact that we unconsciously judge people by their dress has been documented by John Malloy in two books: Dress For Success, (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1976) and The Woman's Dress For Success Book, (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1977).

[18]Costume is changeable but the reasons for its changeable nature can be traced to basic human needs, such as the need to be identified with a certain group of people. König outlines the various needs which costume fulfills, demonstrating that costume definitely cannot be regarded as peripheral.

[19]Jill Mann, Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) summarizes the debate concerning the Wife's hat, p. 266, footnote 86.

[20]To give just two examples: Chaucer notes that Criseyde goes to the Trojan court dressed in a widow's habit of brown samite, a specific type of fabric woven from silk (TC 1.109). Today we would notice only that whe was wearing a brown widow's habit. He comments that the shipman wears a knee-length gown of falding, again naming a specific type of fabric, this time woven from wool (Gen Prol 391). As with Criseyde's dress, today we probably would notice only that the shipman wears a knee-length tunic. Chaucer's mentioning

of a fabric, however, does not carry with it an automatic judgement, either of approval or disapproval.

[21]Bridget Henisch, Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society, (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1976), p. 185.

[22]T. S. Crawford, A History of the Umbrella, (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1970), p. 103.

[23]Anne Hollander, Seeing Through Clothes, (New York: Viking Press, 1978) deals more extensively with the alteration of bodily movement from era to era.

[24]A. G. I. Christie, English Mediaeval Embroidery, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), p. 23.

[25](London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1931), passim.

[26]Madeleine Cosman, Fabulous Feasts: Medieval Cookery and Ceremony, (New York: George Braziller, 1976); Henisch; Phillippa Pullar, Consuming Passions: Being an Historic Inquiry into Certain English Appetites, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970).

[27]For example, Dorothy Chadwick, Social Life in the Days of Piers Plowman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922) reconstructs the social structure of fourteenth-century England based almost exclusively on Langland's poem. Whitmore does much the same thing, using Chaucer instead of Langland.

[28]Emile Mâle, The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century, trans. Dorothy Nussey, Icon ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) deals with the iconography of thirteenth century French churches; Jean Seznec, Survival of the Pagan Gods, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) traces the appearance of the Greek and Roman gods throughout medieval literature and art.

Chapter 2

[1]Stella M. Newton, Renaissance Theatre Costume
and the Sense of the Historic Past, (New York:
Theatre Arts Books, 1975), p. 31, comments that around
the beginning of the fifteenth century two Eastern
emperors visited France and the garments worn by
them and their retinues inspired the French miniaturists
to depict some Biblical characters in Eastern-style
costumes. These garments may have caused changes in
fashionable French costume, also.

[2]Dion C. Calthrop, English Costume, (London:
A. & C. Black, Ltd., 1923), pp. 81-83.

[3]Cunnington, 2nd ed. (Boston: Plays, Inc., 1969);
Planché, 2 vol. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876).

[4]An accurate reconstruction would have to consider,
also, the fabrics and dyes used in medieval England
and the number, styles, and fabrics of the undergarments.

[5]Hans Karath and Sherman Kuhn, ed., Middle English
Dictionary, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan
Press, 1956).

[6](New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1972).

[7]Cunnington & Lucas, p. 211.

[8]Cunnington & Lucas, p. 241.

[9](London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1927), Vol. 2.
In the following paragraphs, where it was necessary
to cite page references from Norris, I have included
these references within parentheses in the text.

[10]I question this theory because fashionable
styles are not introduced for reasons of modesty.

[11]Cunnington & Lucas, p. 208. This page contains
a translation of these rules which I have used for
my discussion.

[12]Norris, p. 192.

[13]For example, William Dodd, <u>Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower</u>, (1913; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), p. 129, states "It is perfectly obvious that neither Chaucer nor Boccaccio was attempting to reproduce the life of the Trojans in the heroic age. . . . To both Boccaccio and Chaucer, Troilus and his lady were contemporary young people, and their love affair is related in terms of contemporary life." However, he offers no evidence in support of this assertion.

[14]Karath and Kuhn.

[15]For example, Iris Brooke, <u>English Costume of the Later Middle Ages: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries</u>, (London: A. & C. Black, Ltd., 1935) modernizes the quotations she takes from Chaucer and does not cite the edition that she uses; the Cunningtons sometimes modernize the language and do not cite the edition used. Calthrop and F. W. Fairholt, <u>Costume in England: A History of Dress to the End of the Eighteenth Century</u>, 4th ed. 2 vol. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1909) do not modernize the language but they fail to mention which edition of Chaucer they used.

[16]C. Willett & Phillis Cunnington imply (p. 92) that this line refers to the wearing of garters, but they do not explain how they reached this conclusion.

[17]Janet Arnold, <u>A Handbook of Costume</u>, (London: Macmillan, 1973) explains some of these considerations throughout the book.

[18]<u>The Court of Richard II</u>, (London: John Murray, 1968), p. 26.

[19]2nd ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1958).

[20](Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1970).

[21](London: A. & C. Black, Ltd., 1935).

[22](London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1967).

[23]Laver's histories, such as <u>The Concise History of Costume and Fashion</u>, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., n.d.), I might note, are usually lacking any documentation except a very brief bibliography.

[24]Bradfield, n.p.

[25]Bradfield, n.p.

[26] Bradfield, p. 45.

[27] The names of garments used in my discussion are the names used by fashion historians. They may or may not have been used by the people who wore the garments. Fashion historians do not consider this detail.

[28] Bigelow, p. 82.

[29] Brooke, p. 28.

[30] C. Willett & Phillis Cunnington, p. 82; p. 120.

[31] Yarwood, p. 80.

[32] Norris, p. 358.

[33] Norris, p. 255.

[34] Yarwood, p. xviii.

[35] Mary Houston, Medieval Costume in England and France: The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries, (1939; rpt. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1950), p. 114.

[36] C. Willett & Phillis Cunnington, p. 6.

[37] C. Willett & Phillis Cunnington, p. 78.

[38] C. Willett & Phillis Cunnington, p. 6.

[39] Millard Meiss, Painting in Florence and Sienna After the Black Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 45.

[40] French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Limbourg Brothers and Their Contemporaries, (New York: Geroge Braziller, Inc., 1974), II, p. 4.

[41] Edith Rickert, comp. Chaucer's World, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 333.

[42] Rickert, p. 333.

[43] Rickert, p. 339.

[44] C. Willett & Phillis Cunnington, p. 87.

[45] C. Willett & Phillis Cunnington, p. 97.

[46]"Die Illustrationen zu den Handschriften der Christine de Pisan," Marburger Jahrbuch Für Kunstwissenschaft, 10 (1937), 119-208, trans. Olaf Bexhoeft.

[47]The black and white color scheme is curious because primary sources, such as paintings, indicate that medieval clothing was of bright colors. We would expect Alison to appear in the red of the dresses of the Wife of Bath (WBT 559) or of the miller's wife (RvT 3954).

[48]Cosmetics and Adornment: Ancient and Contemporary Usage, (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1961), p. 178.

[49]For an example of his documentation, see his discussion of representations of Andromeda and Perseus in The Limbourg Brothers, pp. 27-28.

[50](Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949).

[51](Boston: Boston Book & Art, 1970).

[52]Planché, p. 270.

[53]Calthrop, p. 99.

Chapter 3

[1]Lucie Schaefer, p. 124. Most of the works in
Harleien 4431 are illustrated with one or more
miniatures, all of which Schaefer discusses in this
article.

[2]C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington, Handbook,
p. 72.

[3]Oxford English Dictionary.

[4]Oxford English Dictionary.

[5]Joseph Strutt, A Complete View of the Dress and
Habits of the People of England, ed. J. R. Planché,
rev. ed., (1842; rpt. London: Tabard Press Ltd.,
1970), I, p. 5.

[6]The distinguishing factor may be that hood and
cloak were sewn together. Edith Rickert in Chaucer's
World, p. 339, quotes a directive to the Benedictine
monks, issued around 1363, in which it is commanded
that "whenever monks are to ride forth they shall
be clad outwardly according to the ancient custom
of our cloister in honest capes having their hoods
sewn on."

[7]Norah Waugh, The Cut of Women's Clothes: 1600-
1930, (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1968), p. 11.

[8]C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington, Handbook,
p. 69.

[9]Christiane Fischer, ed., Let Them Speak For
Themselves: Women in the American West 1849-1900,
(Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), p. 215.

[10]Descriptions of garments are based on the infor-
mation given by the Cunningtons in their Handbook and by
Planché's Cyclopaedia of Costume. The information given
by these authors has been supplemented by my observa-
tions of the garments worn by secular women in the
artworks I studied. A list of these artworks
can be found in the "List of Artworks Consulted"

section of the bibliography.

[11]Evidence for the existence of this garment is derived from the occasional illuminations which depict women in a partial state of undress.

[12]Planché, II, p. 90.

[13]Copying does not seem to be a sufficient reason, nor does historical accuracy, for many of the figures surrounding Mary in the various pictures are dressed in fashionable costume, a change which the artist would have had to make if he were copying an older picture.

[14]W. D. Hassall, ed., The Holkham Bible Picture Book, 2nd ed., (London: Dropmore Press, 1954).

[15]Identification of the women follows the identifications given by Hassall. The division into classes is my own, but the division is fairly obvious. Women such as the Virgin, Elizabeth, and Herodias, for example, are classed as aristocracy; women such as the innkeeper's wife and the widow with the mite are classed as commoners.

[16]Salome, who dances at a banquet clad only in her innergown, complicates matters somewhat, especially since she wears an outergown when she carries John the Baptist's head to her mother. However, few rules governing costume are totally consistent. In this case, Salome, whose reputation is somewhat dubious because she caused the death of John, may have been considered immodest for as long as she was a dancer. On the other hand, there may have been a few public occasions when it was permissible for even a modest woman to appear without an outergown.

[17]I used to think that this lack of support for the cloak was an artist's idealization and that a brooch or cord must actually have held the garment on. However, Mary Gostelow, in her Complete International Book of Embroidery, (New York: Simon and Schustar, 1977), has a photograph on page 233 of an East Indian woman with a cloak covering her head, as one sometimes covers the Virgin's head. The method by which the East Indian's cloak is held in place is invisible in the photograph, ao perhaps the medieval rendering is not an idealization after all.

Chapter 4

[1]Representative of those who think Criseyde is
a victim are George Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry,
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), who
claims that her downfall is her fatal impressionability
and softness; R. K. Root, Chaucer's Troilus and
Criseyde, (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1926), who claims that her flaw lies in her 'slydynge
corage'; and David Aers, "Criseyde: Woman in Medieval
Society," Chaucer Review, 13 (1979), 177-200, who
credits Chaucer with being a modern-day feminist,
writing of a woman pushed around in a male-dominated
society. Alice Kaminsky, Chaucer's "Troilus and
Criseyde" and the Critics, on the other hand, sees
Criseyde as a sexually-emancipated woman who was a
willing accomplice in both affairs. Other critics
view Criseyde as a symbol rather than a person.
D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer: Studies
in Medieval Perspectives, and Charles Muscatine,
Chaucer and the French Tradition explicate variations
on the theme that she is a symbol of the multability
of the world. Arthur Mizener, "Character and Action
in the Case of Criseyde," Chaucer: Modern Essays in
Criticism, ed. Edward Wagenknecht, (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1959), pp. 348-365, says that Chaucer
made no attempt to make her a consistent character,
recording her infidelity because it was part of her
history.

[2]Muscatine, p. 17.

[3]Claes Schaar, The Golden Mirror: Studies in
Chaucer's Descriptive Technique and Its Literary
Background, (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1967), pp. 274-
280.

[4]Muscatine points out, pp. 26-68, that in medieval
romance monologues about morality and emotions were
not intended to contribute to the action of the story
and took precedence over dramatic probability. Much
the same rule must have applied to the lengthy
description of feasts, hunts, and costumes. It would
be interesting to learn why the setting of a story
and the thoughts of its characters were more important
than its plot.

[5]William Dodd, <u>Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower</u>, and C. S. Lewis, <u>Allegory of Love</u>, (London: Oxford University Press, 1938) are the critics most often cited for their studies of courtly love. However, neither author offers much proof for his claims regarding medieval practices.

[6]Of the critics claiming that Troilus and Criseyde were married, Henry Kelly, <u>Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer</u>, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), is the most convincing.

[7]A representative example of this type of study is H. S. Bennett's discussion of love and marriage in chapters 3 and 4 of <u>The Pastons and Their England: Studies in an Age of Transition</u>, (1932; rpt. Cambridge: University Press, 1970). Bennett's book is a narrative based on the Paston letters, which have been edited by Norman Davis, <u>Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century</u>, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). Bennett discusses several marriages mentioned in the letters. One is between John, the oldest son of Justice and Agnes Paston, and Margaret Mauteby. All that survives in the letters concerning this marriage are that the betrothal and financial settlement were arranged by the parents. There is no record of whether the pair met before the betrothal. The second marriage was between a son of John and Margaret, also named John, and Margery Brews. What survives of this arrangement are the financial settlement, some mention that Margery was in love with John, and some love letters of John to her. The third marriage was between a daughter of John and Margaret, named Margery, and the Paston's bailiff, Richard Calle. What survives in the letters concerning this marriage are the horror of the family over Margery's marrying beneath her, their efforts to dissuade her, and some letters from Calle, protesting his love for Margery and bemoaning the fact that her parents are keeping them apart. Of the first marriage, Mr. Bennett is sure the betrothed children must have objected to not being consulted on the matter and is appalled at the mercenary nature of the arrangements and total lack of any mention of other wedding plans. His opinion is that a marriage so arranged could not have been happy, although if the letters exchanged between this couple over the years give any sign of their disliking each other, Bennett does not cite any as evidence of unhappiness. The third marriage, Bennett is convinced, was a happy one. It was, after all, a love match. The fact that, according to the letters, Margery was forbidden ever to come into her mother's house after the wedding does not enter into his

consideration of happiness. The second marriage
causes him some uneasiness. On the one hand, it
clearly had its mercenary side; on the other hand,
it clearly was a love match. Bennett would have
been much happier if John, Jr. would have married
Margery Brews without worrying about finances.
Bennett's interpretation is based on the modern idea
of romantic love that conquers all. But, given the
letters which survive, his intrepetation ignores a
number of possibilities. First, in the marriage
between John and Margaret, the letters concerning the
marriage settlement were exchanged by Agnes and
Justice. Presumably (although this presumption is
based solely on men's actions today) Justice did not
care about the other wedding plans so his wife did
not bother him with them. Secondly, because no letter
survives that shows that John and Margaret loved each
other does not mean they did not. Some letters
between them may have been lost, or perhaps they were
never seperated long enough to need to supplement
actions and words with letters. The letters which
have survived from the correspondence of John and
Margery show that love and financial considerations
were not mutually exclusive. Of the third marriage,
we hear nothing after the wedding, so we cannot know
if the Paston's daughter Margery was happy or not.
Given the social step downward from mistress to servant
and the ostracization from her mother's house, she
probably had moments of regret and may have been
unhappy for the rest of her life. In short, the
letters do not provide sufficient evidence to support
Bennett's positive claims.

[8]I am a bit puzzled over how hair could be both
bound ("ibounden") and unbound ("untressed"). However,
the "untressed" may mean that Venus's hair was not
braided, the loose hair being bound together in a
single strand with the golden thread. It is possible,
also, that the comma should be placed after "ibounden"
rather than after "were," changing the lines to mean
that her hair, which had been bound, is being unbound,
perhaps by a servant, as she lies in bed.

[9]Schaar, p. 190.

[10]F. N. Robinson, ed., p. 791 for date of
Parliament of Fowls; p. 385 for date of Troilus and
Criseyde.

[11]T. S. R. Boase, Death in the Middle Ages:
Mortality, Judgement and Remembrance, (New York:
McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1972) discusses funeral customs
in the Middle Ages.

[12]Morton W. Bloomfield, "Chaucer's Sense of History," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 51 (1952), 301-313, and Sanford Meech, Design in Chaucer's Troilus, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1959) list further historical allusions in Chaucer's works.

[13]W. F. Bryan & Germaine Dempster, ed., Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 82.

[14]Bloomfield, p. 310.

[15]Hollander, pp. 294-310.

[16]Maureen Green, "A Tough People in a Tough Time," Smithsonian, 11, No. 6 (Sept. 1980), p. 62.

[17]I am assuming that the servants are women, both because they are doing needlework and because they are sitting in Lucrece's bedroom.

[18]Robert E. Kaske, "The Aube in Chaucer's Troilus," Chaucer Criticism: Troilus and Criseyde and the Minor Poems, Vol. 2, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), pp. 167-179.

[19]Kittredge, chap. 2; Bertrand H. Bronson, "The Book of the Duchess Re-Opened," Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Edward Wagenknecht, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 271-294.

[20]pp. 167-342.

[21]Kevin S. Kiernan, "The Art of the Descending Catalog and a Fresh Look at Alisoun," Chaucer Review, 10 (1975), 1-16.

[22]Walter C. Curry, The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty as Found in the Metrical Romances, Chronicles, and Legends of the XIII, XIV, and XV Centuries, (Baltimore: H. Furst, Co., 1916) summarizes this beauty on p. 3. She is blond, with sparkling, blue eyes, a rose and white complexion, a broad forehead, red lips, white teeth, long, white arms, and hands that have long, slender fingers. Her figure is graceful and slender.

[23]Curry, Middle English Ideal, p. 10.

[24]E. Talbot Donaldson, "The Masculine Narrator and Four Women of Style," Speaking of Chaucer,

(New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 46-64.

[25]Kierman, "The Art of the Descending Catalog"; Donaldson, "Idiom of Popular Poetry in the Miller's Tale," Speaking of Chaucer, pp. 13-29.

[26]Baldwin, p. 69.

[27]Baldwin, p. 47.

[28]Donaldson, "Criseide and Her Narrator," Speaking of Chaucer, p. 58.

[29]N. E. Griffin, "Chaucer's Portrait of Criseyde," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 20 (1921), 46.

[30]For example, manuscript miniatures portray devils perched on men's backs or behind bushes and souls being lifted to heaven by angels as the corpse lies below with his earthly friends clustered around his bed in sorrow.

Conclusion

[1]Quoted from Kristine Gilmartin, "Array in the
Clerk's Tale," Chaucer Review, 13, (1979), 245. Since
the tale was directed toward the cultured members of
the English court, it is somewhat out of place to
speak of a "folk love of personal adornment," as if
the audience were naive peasants.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I have divided the bibliography into four
sections: "List of Works Cited," "List of Fashion
Histories Consulted," "List of Artworks Consulted,"
and "Sources of Illustrations." The first division
lists all the works cited in the text with the
exception of fashion histories. Since my criticism
of fashion scholarship is based on a study of more
fashion histories than I have mentioned as repre-
sentative examples in my text, I have included in
the second division the fashion histories cited as
well as the additional ones studied. The third
division lists the pictoral sources used for my
study of the Virgin Mary. The fourth division
provides the necessary bibliographical data about
the sources on which the figures which follow the
bibliography are based.

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Sources of Illustrations

Figures 1-4: Composites drawn by author.

Figure 5: After drawing in C. Willett and Phillis
     Cunnington, Handbook of English Mediaeval
     Costume, Boston: Plays, Inc., 1969, plate 55c;
     drawn by Debbie Lawson.

Figure 6: After drawing in Handbook, plate 17a;
     drawn by Debbie Lawson.

Figure 7: After drawing in Handbook, plate 17b;
     drawn by Debbie Lawson.

Figure 8: After drawing in Doreen Yarwood, English
     Costume from the Second Century B.C. to 1967,
     London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1967, p. 77;
     pattern on gown has been omitted; drawn by
     Debbie Lawson.

Figure 9: After portrait of Richard II in Westminster
     Abbey, from photograph in Gervase Mathew, The
     Court of Richard II, London: John Murray, 1968,
     plate 5; pattern on gown and background of
     painting has been omitted; drawn by Debbie
     Lawson.

Figure 10: Costume shown on Christine de Pisan
     throughout British Museum manuscript Harleien
     4431; drawn by author.

Figure 11: From photograph of sculpture, "Prudence,"
     Lombard School, active 1357-1388, Samuel H.
     Kress Collection, Washington National Gallery,
     Washington, D.C.; drawn by Debbie Lawson.

Figure 12: From photograph of base relief, "Madonna
     and Child," Antonio Rossellino, Florentine
     School, 1427-1478, Samuel H. Kress Collection,
     Washington National Gallery, Washington, D.C.;
     drawn by Debbie Lawson.

Figure 13:   From photograph of base relief, "Madonna
     and Child," Cristofors Solari, Lombard School,
     c. 1460-1527, Samuel H. Kress Collection,
     Washington National Gallery, Washington, D.C.;
     drawn by Debbie Lawson.

Figure 14:   From photograph of painting, "Madonna
     and Child," Domenico Veneziano, Florentine
     School, active 1438-1461, Samuel H. Kress
     Collection, Washington National Gallery,
     Washington, D.C.; drawn by Debbie Lawson.

Figure 15:   From photograph of painting, "Expectant
     Madonna with Saint Joseph," School of Amiens,
     French, c. 1437, Samuel H. Kress Collection,
     Washington National Gallery, Washington, D.C.;
     drawn by Debbie Lawson.

Figure 16-18:   Composites of drawings in The Holkham
     Bible Picture Book, reproduction of fourteenth-
     century English manuscript, 2nd ed., W. D. Hassall,
     ed., London: Dropmore Press, 1954; drawn by
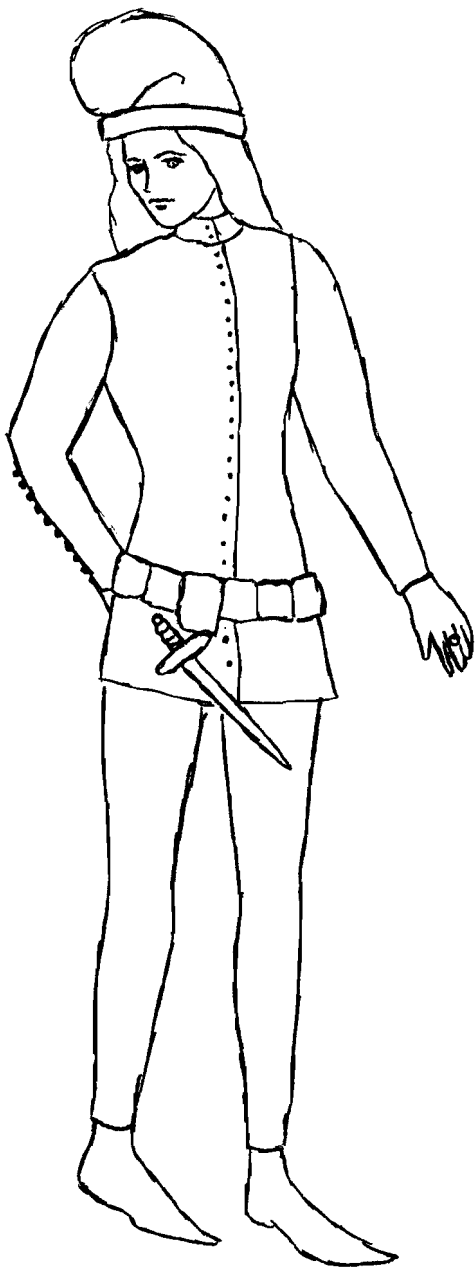   author.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6
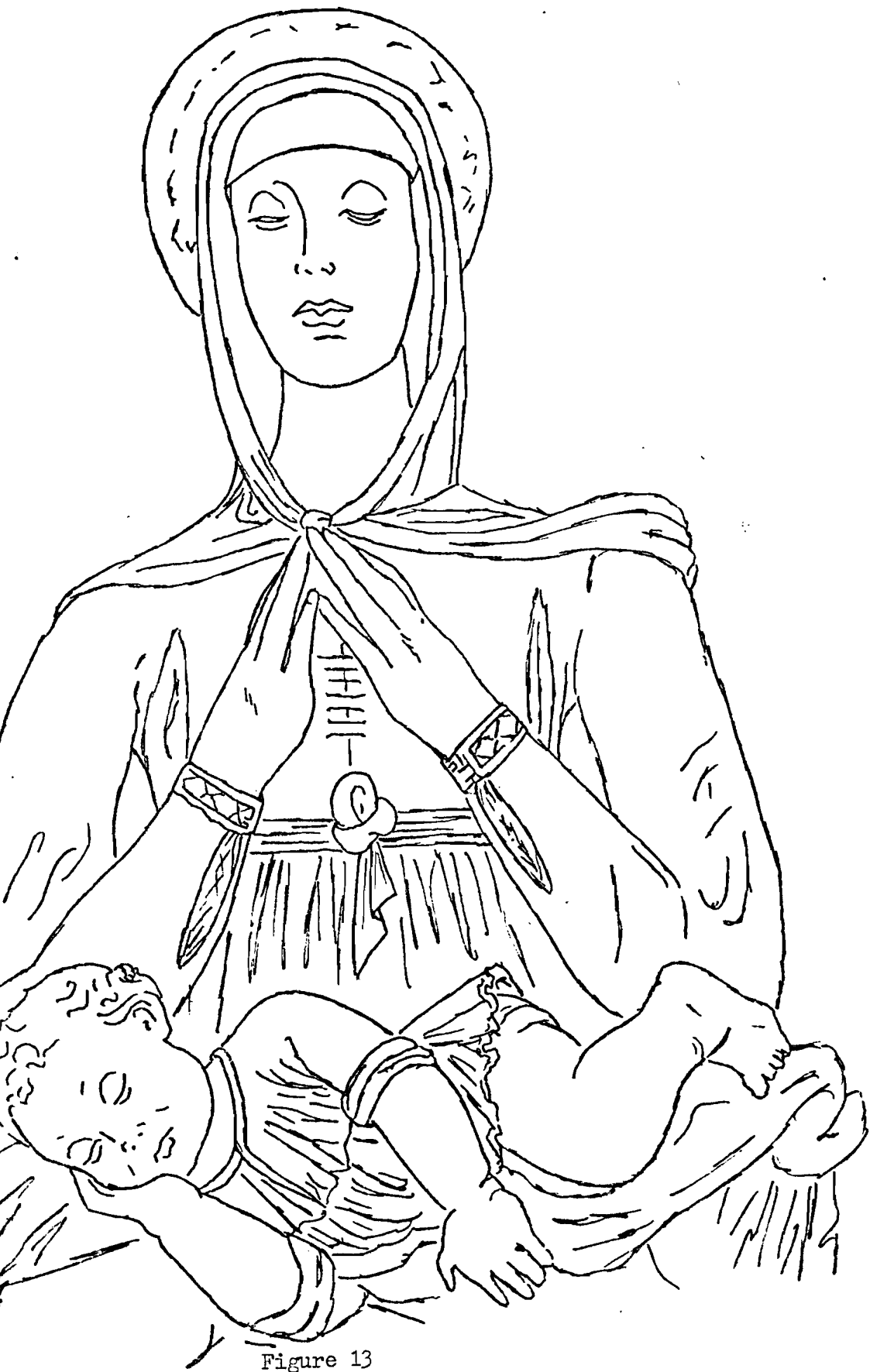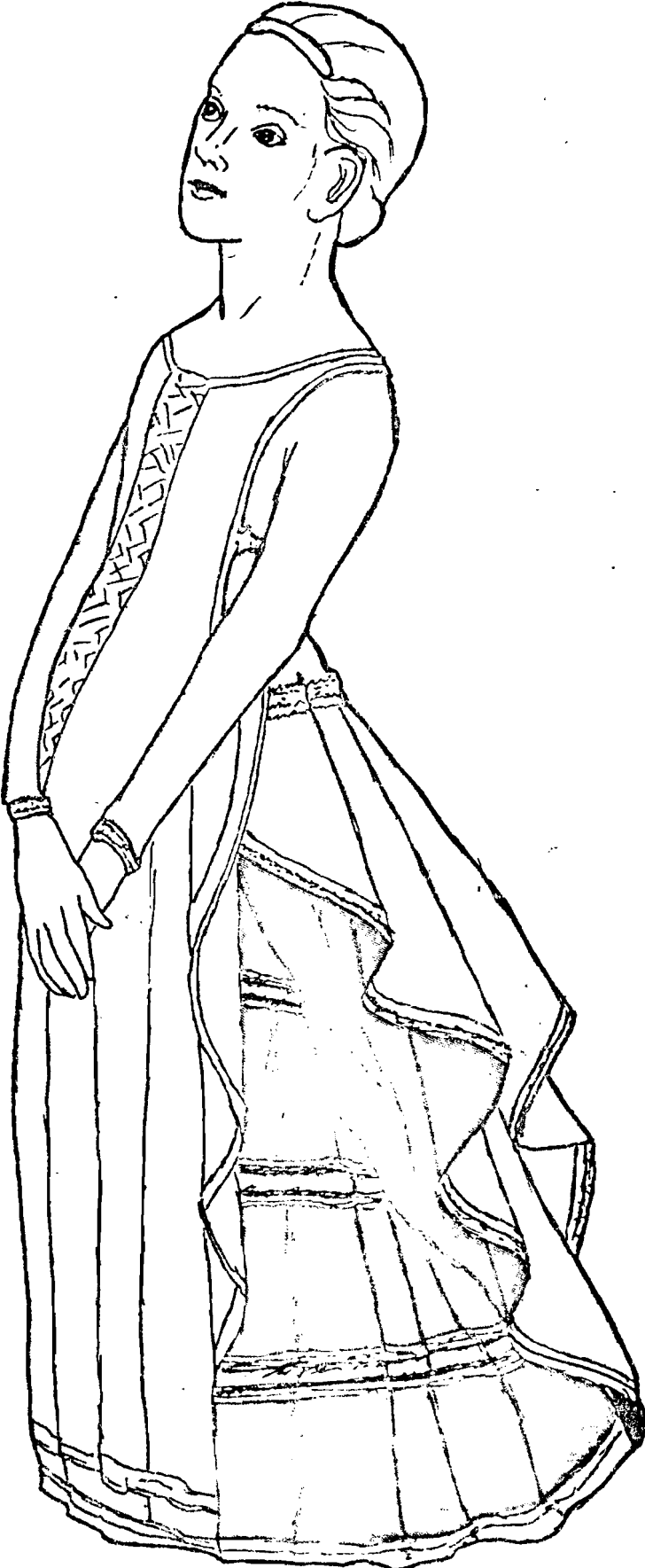
Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12
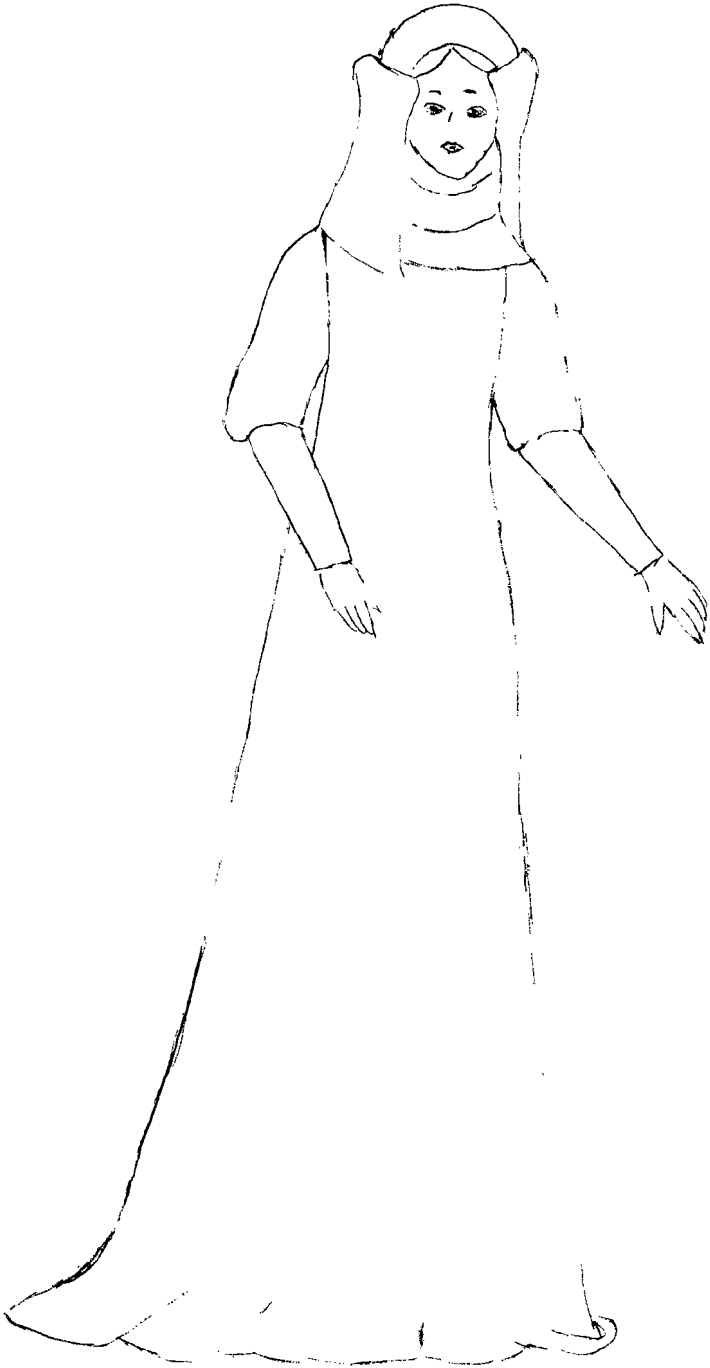
Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18