

## VICTORIAN MEDIEVALISM: REVIVAL OR MASQUERADE?

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I

In seeking to revive the spirit, culture, and appearances of medieval times the Victorians used many stratagems. Among them, and often overlooked, was their antiquarian study of medieval dress and their wearing of costumes that represented medieval clothing. Whereas the eighteenth century had expressed their interest in the Middle Ages largely through Gothic novels and through architectural research and reconstructions, the nineteenth century, although continuing to look to a medieval inspiration in architecture, enveloped themselves in the more intimate clasp of medieval apparel and, thus accoutered, sought to enact the pageantry and pastimes of the medieval ages.

The wearing of costumes and the donning of masks have a curious effect on human beings. A small child, dressing up in grown-up clothing, for the moment assumes the manners of adults and experiences the illusion of maturity. The reveler at carnival time acts in ways unthinkable in his normal life and dress. The reveler's release from the ordinary restraints of society is largely effected through the adoption of costume and mask and, through their aid, the adoption of another outward appearance and even another inner persona.

The image which one has of other persons, even of those living in another age, is largely built up from the impressions received from their dress. The many signs projected by the construction, the fabrics, and the accessories of dress define the wearer's sex, class, age, wealth, occupation, and even personality, mood, and sexual availability. By its various indications dress can affect the responses of the

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observer, but it can also affect the behavior of the wearer. If someone dresses a part, one usually plays that part. The symbolic messages of dress are also absorbed by the wearer, as well as the observer. It is not only the associations which dress suggests that encourage conformity to a role, but also the not unrelated material qualities of a garment. The constriction or looseness, the heaviness or lightness, the roughness or smoothness, the raggedness or richness of apparel affects the behavior and feelings of the wearer as well as the perception and response of the observer. The slight muslin dresses of the neo-classical period inspire a different posture and demeanor than do the stiff bustles and trains of the late nineteenth century. The stiff rigidity of armor evokes much different kinesthetic

responses and movement patterns than do the longflowing robes of ecclesiastical dress. Clothes do "make the man."

English men and women of the nineteenth century were keenly conscious of the effect clothing had on both the observer and the wearer. To Thomas Carlyle clothing did not merely function as protection and ornament, but acted as symbols of the spirit and emblems of the hierarchies within society. "Man's earthly interests," Carlyle has Professor Teufelsdröckh assert in *Sartor Resartus*, "are hooked and buttoned together, and held up, by clothes." The transformation from a poor naked creature to a civilized member of society is achieved in the dressing room each morning. "Man's Body and the Cloth," Teufelsdröckh declares, "are the site and materials whereon and whereby his beautified edifice of a Person, is to be built." Is there any one, he asks, "who can figure a naked Duke of Windlestraw addressing a naked House of Lords?"<sup>1</sup>

That dress revealed character and defined one's place was not only the insight of sage philosophers, but also the observation of the lively bluestocking and journalist Elizabeth Eastlake. "Dress becomes a sort of symbolical language - a kind of personal glossary," she asserted in the *Quarterly Review* in 1847, "a species of body phrenology, the study of which it would be madness to neglect." Furthermore, "to a proficient in the science," she continued, "every woman walks about with a placard on which her leading qualities are advertised."<sup>2</sup> Writers in the nineteenth century were aware not only of the contemporary effects of dress but of their importance in a historical context. "The costume of any given period indicates the nation's position as to wealth, taste, the state of mechanical arts and so forth,"

observed a reviewer for the *London Quarterly Review* in 1855. "In fact, between fig-leaves and flounces," he declared, "there lies the history of the world." The reviewer also noted the powerful influence of dress on the wearer and reminded readers of the discomfort felt when they are not properly dressed, or the humiliation felt by those forced to wear prison uniforms. "A gala-day would be shorn of its attractions," he suggested, "if we could not don a little extra finery."<sup>3</sup>

William Makepeace Thackeray, with his great talents of description and fine sense of wit, provides the most vivid example of the transforming power of costume. In describing Versailles in his *Paris Sketch Book* of 1840, he evoked the image of Louis XIV resplendent in his dazzling regalia that Hyacinthe Rigaud had depicted in his famous portrait: When Majesty came out of his chamber, in the midst of his superhuman splendours, viz., in his cinnamon-coloured coat, embroidered with diamonds, his pyramid of a wig; his red-heeled shoes, that lifted him four inches from the ground...

when he came out, blazing upon the dukes and duchesses that waited his rising, - what could the latter do but cover their eyes, and wink, and tremble? And did he not believe, as he stood there, on his high heels, under his ambrosial periwig, that

there was something in him more than man - something above Fate?  
But beneath the six feet of splendid edifice is a "little lean, shrivelled, paunchy old man, of five feet two." Thackeray's caricature of Hyacinthe Rigaud's portrait proves his point (Fig. 1). It is his dress that transforms the spindle-legged, pot-bellied, bald, unprepossessing man into the vision of the magnificent, imposing Sun King. "Thus," wrote Thackeray, "do barbers and cobblers make the gods we worship."<sup>4</sup>

The Victorians believed strongly in the power of dress to present an appearance that would affect the observer and transform the wearer. What more natural way could occur to them in reviving a medieval past than to dress in the apparel of that time? In addition to their belief in the transforming power of dress, the Victorians inherited a long tradition of wearing costumes in a variety of circumstances. The tradition of wearing costumes in popular theater and civic pageantry went back to medieval times, that of the court masques to the English Renaissance. Queen Elizabeth I was very fond of costume displays of all kinds, including masques, tournaments, and royal progresses.

The court of Charles I further developed the masque theater. George IV, in the nineteenth century, revived the full panoply and ritual of medieval times for his coronation.

In the eighteenth century the masquerade became a popular pastime. The pleasure gardens of Vauxhall and of Ranelagh and the splendid interior of the Pantheon frequently provided the setting for masquerades, often of a very elaborate nature. For masquerade balls great numbers of people from all segments of society wore a variety of dress, but the primary factor of the costume was the mask which rendered the identity of the wearer incognito. The masks and disguises cloaked the true identity of individuals, while the labyrinthine grounds of the pleasure gardens offered opportunities for assignations and illicit meetings.<sup>5</sup> The masquerades in the Vauxhall Gardens continued into the nineteenth century. The Times of 13 August 1839, for example, reported a masquerade at Vauxhall which "if it were dull, it was, at all events, decent."

Many of the costumes were rented from masquerade shops, whose stock of costumes derived largely from the characters of the Italian Harlequinade, or from an exotic, if imaginary, Orient. Occasionally, however, the costume could be very innovative. In a search for variety, guests would sometimes dress in the costume of a specific historical personage. Before 1773, however, masqueraders who did not own their own gallery of ancestral portraits had very few sources from which to copy accurate delineations of historic dress. In that year Joseph Strutt published the *Regal and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of England*, in which he gave to the public sixty engravings copied from illuminated manuscripts in the British Museum and the Bodleian Library. The chosen illuminations depicted people of note from Edward the Confessor to Henry VIII. Although

some distortion of the originals was inevitable, Strutt managed to transcribe the general outline, the details, and a sense of the style of the originals with a fair degree of accuracy. In the next six years Strutt published five more volumes that dealt with the costume, manners, arms, and pastimes of the English people. Several editions, including two volumes with handsome hand-colored plates issued in 1842, attest to the popularity of his works. All the volumes were illustrated from original sources, especially illuminated manuscripts, and in all of them Strutt identified the original sources and added notes concerning the colors of the costumes in the original illuminations. Strutt thus set a high standard of scholarship in the history of costume, one that not all his successors followed, even those of the present day. Although books of costume had previously been published, none reached such a high standard of authenticity, none illustrated such a wide variety of dress within each period, and none gave such a sense of the evolution and gradual change of styles. Furthermore, as Strutt preserved the gestures and postures of the figures in the original sources, the costume plates evoked a sense of animation and movement that helped to bring the Middle Ages to life (Figs. 2-3).

Monumental sculpture, particularly tomb effigies, although not used extensively by Strutt, provided other sources for costume which were copied by antiquaries. The most extensive project of this nature was undertaken in 1811 by Charles Stothard, son of the artist and illustrator Thomas Stothard. His beautiful plates illustrated tomb effigies in Westminster Abbey and other cathedrals and churches. He often provided a full front view of the figure as well as a profile view and details of accessories or decorative patterns. The small color sketches that were often part of his plate transformed the dead stone of the effigy into a more lifelike, costumed figure. Stothard expressed the antiquarians' creed by his passion for the preservation of the sculptures and for the reproduction of these scattered monuments in a collection of plates. The effigies not only provide portraits of historical personages, but also, he reminded the readers, illuminate the customs and habits of the past. "To history they give a body and substance," he wrote in his introduction, "by placing before us those things which language is deficient in describing." Through the study of monuments, he asserted, the past could be brought to life. "By these means we live in other ages than our own, and become nearly as well acquainted with them." The "intellectual pleasure" of the study of the past could even turn back the clock. "In some measure we arrest the fleeting steps of Time," Stothard declared, "and again review those things his arm has passed over and subdued, but not destroyed"<sup>6</sup>

In the early nineteenth century a number of books providing authentic sources for medieval costume could be purchased in the book shops and print shops. Books on costume, such as Camille Bonnard's *Costume Historique*, first published in 1829, were imported from the Continent. Not only were books published on arms and armor, but

several exhibitions, including a new museum built for arms and armor in the Tower of London, opened their doors to the public. The small number of titles mentioned here does not exhaust the books on costume published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but seeks to mention those that were more influential and which went to authentic sources for their illustrations. All the volumes mentioned above were fairly expensive. Not until the 1830s and 1840s were popular inexpensive histories available for the broader public. James Planché, a writer of scripts for shows and pageants, a theatrical costumer, and an antiquarian, published his *History of British Costume* in 1834. Fredererick William Fairholt, an engraver and self-taught antiquarian, followed with *Costume in England* in 1846. In the same decade a "Lady of Rank" joined the list of popularizers.

All of these inexpensive editions were illustrated, Fairholt's volume contained 600 small woodcuts. The illustrations were not of the high quality of those in Strutt, Stothard, or Bonnard, but they were, in fact, greatly dependent on these older works for the sources of illustrations. Whether the popularizers went to the original monuments and manuscripts to draw their illustrations or merely copied the illustrations from the older volumes, is not clear. One does begin to see, however, the same illustrations repeated in a variety of books. Even general books on English history included many illustrations of costume, often the same illustrations as those in the costume books.

Froissart's *Chronicles* appeared in several illustrated editions in the early nineteenth century. Charles Knight's *Pictorial History of England* of 1838 removed Strutt's figures from an architectural setting and from historical action to present them as examples of historic dress of an era. The result is to make the past less of a play of events and historic forces, and more of a gallery of costumed figures.

Despite the publication of Strutt's books on costume in the eighteenth century, theatrical productions played little attention to the authenticity of costume before 1824. Stage productions either had no historical model, used costumes inappropriate to the period of the play, or indiscriminately jumbled costumes from different periods in the same production. In 1824 James Planché provided the historical research and supervised the costumes for Charles Kemble's production of Shakespeare's *King John*. He published these designs in the previous year, carefully documenting the sources for each costume and earnestly recommending research to ensure historical accuracy.

In his autobiography Planché describes the skepticism, even hostility, with which the actors viewed the costumes he had designed for them. Only the fact that Kemble supported Planché and that he would be wearing, in the role of King John, a similar "abomination" reconciled the barons to donning their costumes. "They had no faith in me," Planché confessed, "and sulkily assumed their new and strange habiliments." Fully expecting the audience to laugh at them,

the actors awaited the rise of the curtain. "There was a roar of approbation, accompanied by four distinct rounds of applause, so general and so hearty," wrote Planché describing the opening, "that the actors were astonished." The critical and financial success of the experiment was assured, "and a complete reformation of dramatic costume became from that moment," declared Planché, "inevitable upon the English stage."<sup>7</sup>

II

With the experience of masquerades and other copart of their heritage, with the resources of antiquarian costume available to them, with the example of author's stage productions, and with their self-conscious transforming qualities of dress, the early Victorians try to revive the Middle Ages. Two spectacular even Tournament of 1839 and the Queen's costume baument the fervor that attended the recreation of the Victorian England and the important part costume revival.

The idea of holding a tournament supposedly grew out of the frustration felt by the Earl of Eglinton and his stepfather Sir Charles Lamb at hearing that the simple coronation of Queen Victoria would avoid the elaborate ritual of George iv's coronation. The aristocrats would be denied their hereditary roles and their elaborate costumes.

There would be no Queen's champion to ride into Westminster Hall and throw down his gauntlet; there would be few feudal ceremonies to be solemnly enacted.<sup>8</sup>

The conception of the tournament grew by stages into an elaborate costume pageant with thousands of participants and tens of thousands of spectators. The Earl of Eglinton and his friends spent most of a year acquiring equipment and armor, training their horses, and practicing for the jousting which was to form the main event. Eglinton Castle in Ayrshire, just across the border in southwest Scotland, was chosen for the scene of the tournament. Pavilions, tents, and grand stands were erected. A Queen of Beauty, Lady Seymour, and a long list of costumed knights and ladies, including Louis Napoleon, were to form a procession leading from the castle to the jousting ground a mile away. A great deal of interest was generated by the preparations for the tournament. Practice tilting set up in Marylebone Road attracted thousands of spectators and earned both the praise and the skepticism of the press. As the day of the tournament, Wednesday, 28 August 1839, approached, many spectators made arrangements for transportation to Eglinton Castle. The Examiner estimated that from 60,000 to 80,000 spectators, most of them in some kind of costume, thronged to the grounds.<sup>9</sup> Many Londoners took the train to Liverpool, then boarded steamers landing at Ardrossan or nearby ports and walked or found a carriage to carry them the eight miles to the castle. Some of the steamers provided overnight accommodations, and all available rooms in nearby villages were rented for enormous sums.

The morning of the 28th of August was sunny, but as noon, the time for the procession, neared, the clouds gathered and the rain began

The forty groups in the procession started their damp progress to tilting ground. Because of the rain, the Queen of Beauty and the other ladies rode in covered carriages instead of mounting their richly parisoned steeds, while the desperate use of modern umbrellas by spectators further destroyed the desired effect. "There is nothing declared the Chronicle, "chivalrous about an umbrella!"<sup>10</sup> One observer described the procession as it neared its destination: As it came into sight and wound along the curved passage to the lists, its long serpentine line of helmets and glittering armour, gonfalons, spear points, plumes, just surging above the sea of moving umbrellas, had the effect of some dangerous and bright scaled dragon swimming in troubled waters.<sup>11</sup> By the time the procession reached the tilting ground, the rain increased significantly and had turned the field into a sea of mud. Thirteen knights and their steeds began their jousting, but the conditions made their footing precarious and obscured their vision. Soon the tents and grandstands collapsed and the spectators and participants fled for shelter. The collapse of the banqueting pavilion meant that a thousand guests who had expected to be fed and entertained until morning were left to wander through the rain-sodden countryside, their medieval finery ruined and their stomachs empty, trying, along with other disappointed spectators, to find some food and a dry place to spend the night. On Thursday the rains subsided, and by Friday the weather was much improved. The costumed procession again bravely began its march to the tilting ground, and the jousting resumed before a crowd of 10,000 spectators loyal enough to return after the Wednesday disaster. That evening, after an authentic medieval banquet, the costume ball that ended the tournament took place. The occurrence of the rain makes it difficult to assess the success of the tournament. The number who participated and came to watch the tournament was truly impressive, but the rain caused them considerable discomfort and destroyed the schedule of events. It pushed the tournament, as Bradshaw's Journal noted, "from the sublime to the ridiculous," and it afforded ammunition to unsympathetic persons who wished to ridicule the event.<sup>12</sup> The tournament might have had a far greater impact had the sun continued to shine. Even with the disastrous rain, it was a remarkable event, one long remembered by participants, spectators, and even those who only read about it. The amount of time, energy, and money that went into the thorough preparations implies the seriousness with which this revival of chivalry was taken. The Earl of Eglinton spent at least ?40,000 on the tournament, a sum that left him in financial distress for the rest of his life. Individual ladies and knights in the procession also spent large sums of money to outfit themselves, their horses, and their entourages. Lord Glenlyon's accounts included items amounting to ?346 for his own costume and armor and another ?1,000 for the outfitting and maintenance of his retinue.<sup>13</sup> Even the tens of

thousands of spectators who came from all walks of life went to considerable expense and trouble to procure costumes and assure transportation and lodging for themselves.

The press took the event seriously, giving extensive coverage to the preparations for it as well as the event itself. Six reporters for The Times attended the tournament, as did top reporters and editors from other papers. A special grandstand reserved for reporters and artists was crowded despite the conditions. The artists were numerous and included Daniel Maclise, Clarkson Stanfield, Thomas Marshall, James Henry Nixon, and Edward Corbould. The artists "plied their vocation busily from various parts of the grounds and enclosures," one observer reported, "and numerous wearers of antique costume were transferred to sketchbook before the owners were aware of the honor extended for them."<sup>14</sup> At least one painting shown at the exhibitions the next summer displayed the title "The Tournament," and at least half a dozen sets of illustrations of the tournament were published (Figs. 5-7). Although none of the illustrations depicted the effects of the rain, it probably caused greater reliance on memory than was usual for the artists, for none of the sets of illustrations resembled each other. In the following years at least one pantomime, one opera, and one novel made references to the Eglinton Tournament. To most people the Eglinton Tournament must have seemed a bizarre event, to others perhaps merely a frivolous one, but to a few it allowed, however briefly and imperfectly, the medieval past to live again:

On one small spot time had revolved; it shown as though five centuries had rolled and left all unchanged. The antiquarian might close his volume and look on the living picture his lore pondered o'er - no scenic delusion; no dramatic artifice; no character sustained in masquerade - all true, all natural, real as on the battle-eve, all the nobler feelings swelled the bosom and dignified the part.<sup>15</sup>

Three years later the Victorians witnessed another grand-scale attempt to revive the medieval period. This time it was the young Queen and her Consort who acted as hosts. Although the royal couple were no less lavish in their preparations than the Earl of Eglinton and spent a reported £100,000 on the ball, they wisely located their entertainment inside, protected from any inclement weather by the roofs of Buckingham Palace. They did not include jousting but concentrated on the costume ball. The Queen chose to revive the reign of Edward and Queen Philippa of Hainault and urged the greatest attention to historical accuracy upon her guests. Victoria and Albert impersonated their royal forebears at the ball in costumes copied from their effigies and enacted a meeting with Anne of Bretagne (the Duchess of Cambridge) and her court.<sup>16</sup>

The Queen's call for historical accuracy was eagerly followed. Several of the guests copied costumes from ancestral portraits; others



turned to experts for advice. James Planch, in a souvenir album of the ball, described how "the Antiquary and the Herald are courted for their information." Book and print sellers, he reported, could find buyers for their most expensive plates. "Artists are employed to copy," he continued, "and artisans of all sorts" to reproduce costumes with historic accuracy. "Tissues must be woven expressly spurs, weapons, and jewelry modelled and manufactured on purpose." This was no mere fancy-dress ball", he assured the readers.

"Boots, shoes, gauntlets, hose, nearly every article of apparel must be 'made to order.'"17 The ball not only sought to revive the fashions and manners of the Middle Ages, it also sought to revive the languishing economy of Spittlefields - an aim quite in keeping with a medieval paternalism, and one the press applauded. The newly founded Illustrated London News complimented the "exquisite taste" of the conception of the ball, but we "admire still more," it confessed, "the charity and beneficence to suffering traders and artisans."18 It was the perfect combination of art and commerce. "Knowledge is acquired while Money is circulated," boasted Planch?, "Art advanced while Taste is improved."19

The press gave the ball considerable coverage. It described the costumes in great detail and, in the case of the Illustrated London News, illustrated them (Fig. 8). Several albums of plates depicting the ball costumes were published, and a double portrait of Victoria and Albert in their costumes painted by Edwin Landseer (Fig. 9). The painting shows both the splendor and lavishness of the costumes. It also reveals the difficulties of trying to adopt the appearance of another era. Victoria's silhouette betrays her unwillingness to relinquish her tightly laced corset and to assume the more supple lineaments of the medieval woman. The stiff, rounded shape of her skirt suggests that the costume was not cut to hang from the shoulders in the medieval manner, but from the waist as was common in the nineteenth century. Planch admits that the ladies' costumes were cut as jackets and skirts instead of in the medieval form of garments in which the surcoat is worn over the kirtle, both cut with no waist and both falling from the shoulders.20

The press, although dazzled by the "2000 distinguished individuals" on the guest list and the vast sums of money spent for costumes and jewels, noted how successfully the ball did recreate the past. The World of Fashion expressed amusement at the change wrought in the appearance of the Victorian guests by their medieval disguises.21 The Globe complimented Prince Albert on his "handsome features and noble manly carriage," which well suited the costume of his chivalric model and "added the charm of reality to that of illusion."22 The Times reported that "the description of the ancient chroniclers" had been brought to life, while the Observer described the costumed figures at the ball as "living pictures of the great men of the age."23 The Art-Union reported that "the illusion was perfect." For a few brief hours, it asserted, the ball "restored in vivid truthfulness the long departed glories of the middle ages."24 The Court Magazine, highly gratified by the "richness and variety of the

dresses," reported a "still greater pleasure in the excitement that was given to the imagination in seeing the impersonation of those historical associations so interwoven with the record of the honour and glory of Great Britain."<sup>25</sup>

The English Chronicle expressed surprise that after the Eglinton Tournament any other lavish attempt should be made to revive the Middle Ages, but agreed with The Times that scenes from the pages of Froissait, Monstrelot, and other chroniclers of the medieval period were "visibly present" at the ball.<sup>26</sup>

The success of the revival, the English Chronicle suggested, was due to the fact that Queen Victoria chose to identify herself with a historic personage, Queen Philippa of Hainault, and to enact the meeting with Anne of Bretagne. This pageantry, the reporter asserted, encouraged all present to sustain the characters of their chosen historic models and lifted the ball beyond a "mere display of dress." When the costumes and personages accurately reflected the characters and circumstances of the past, the English Chronicle continued, "the fitful dreams of fancy became reality." When the costumed figure of a Knight of the Garter stood beside the present royal embodiment of the founder of that order, the reporter concluded, "each were what they seemed."<sup>27</sup> The spectacle of two thousand distinguished guests who "condescended to merge the identity of their own character in that of the illustrious of bygone days" impressed the Illustrated London News reporter, but it was the illustrious, the romantic, and the glamorous that presided at the ball. "Any reference to the stern and unclothed facts of actual life," he continued, "would be out of place."<sup>28</sup>

If observers and participants regarded these medieval revivals as successful, it was as a revival, not of everyday activities or the harsher realities of another age, but of its pageantry, chivalry, and historic glory. The pomp and privilege enjoyed by the nobles under the medieval feudal system were, after all, the more attractive aspects of medievalism, and the ones that "distinguished individuals" of the Victorian period might feel should be their natural milieu. As one function dress has always performed is to designate the rank of the wearer, inversely, the wearing of lavish aristocratic costumes may seem to bestow rank. The Eglinton Tournament and the Queen's ball frankly imitated the surface appearance of another age. By assuming the costume and rituals of the Middle Ages, the participants entered into, or believed they were entering into, the spirit, values, and privileges of the past. Their careful study of the externals seemed based on the belief that by assuming the superficial appearances, the deeper spirit of the age could also be captured. The more accurate the details could be reproduced, the more convincing would be the complete transformation.

IV

It was not only the participants in masquerades and

that turned to costume to help create the ambience of the Middle Ages. Artists, and particularly history painters, also conducted an antiquarian study of dress. Strutt, Stothard, Fairholt, and others had all recommended the study of their works on costume. It was a recommendation heartily endorsed by the premier art periodical, which printed a series of articles by Fairholt and praised his *Costume in England* as "a work which every artist, amateur, or connoisseur should be without."<sup>29</sup> The periodical particularly endorsed the study of costume for the historian. He must "place our ancestors before us in all the details of their dress and time," the Art-Union asserted, "until they appear as parts of a personified allegory, but beings of flesh and blood."<sup>30</sup>

When Ford Madox Brown, one of the more innovative of British history painters in the mid-nineteenth century, began *Chaucer at the Court of Edward III* in 1845 (Fig. 10), he turned to the same period as that which was represented in the Queen's costume ball. For the costuming of his figures, he went to many of the same costume sources. Roy Strong identifies Strutt, Stothard, and Bonnard as among his sources.<sup>31</sup> He may also have used Henry Shaw's *Dresses and Decorations of the Middle Ages*, published in 1843. Ford Madox Brown, in his article "On the Mechanism of a Historical Picture" written for the *Germ*, explained the importance of historical research. "The first care of the painter," he wrote, "should be to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the character of the times, and habits of the people ... and next, to consult the proper authorities for his costume and such objects as may fill his canvas." Brown conceded that the artist must consider the technical aspects of his work, but most importantly, he must seek "to enter into the character of each actor, studying them one after the other, limb for limb, hand for hand, finger for finger, noting each inflection of joint, or tension of sinew, searching for dramatic truth internally in himself."<sup>32</sup>

Brown's painting shows evidence of his research into the history of costume, but he, along with most historical painters, did not transfer figures from the sources directly into his compositions. Instead, he used the costume books as patterns from which he made costumes for his models to wear. As Roger Smith has shown, Brown used a figure from Bonnard to create the costume for the hooded figure in the lower right of *Chaucer at the Court of Edward III*. Brown purchased yellow brocade for the hood and had it cut and sewn into a garment similar to that shown in Bonnard. He then painted a study of the figure from a model wearing the hood (Fig. 11). The study is very similar to that of the figure in the finished painting. It was an arduous way of working. In a letter to Lowes Dickinson, Brown complained of the

"nasty list of little things to run after." He had just gotten a hood of chain mail, feathers for a fan, and some cloth of gold, but, he complained, he still has to find flowers, a dog, and some white velvet.<sup>34</sup>

When Brown turned to sources for Chaucer himself, many were available. One of them might have been the frontispiece from the Corpus Christi College (Cambridge) manuscript of *Troilus and Criseida* which depicts Brown's own subject, Chaucer Reading to the Court of Edward in. Although the styles of costumes are different, Brown has devised a similar composition and mood. Most probably Brown used Chaucer's portrait in Strutt or Shaw (Figs. 2 and 12), but what is important is to note that, whatever source he did use, he used it to copy the costumes, not the figures, from. He then dressed his models in these costumes and painted from them. Not inappropriately, his model wearing Chaucer's costume was his poet-painter friend, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Brown had originally conceived Chaucer in the Court of Edward III as a painting commemorative of the "Origin of our Native Tongue" and intended to include in side panels and roundels figures of Milton, Spenser, Shakespeare, Byron, Pope, Burns, Goldsmith, and Thomson. Perhaps by placing Rossetti in Chaucer's robes, Brown was bringing the past of British poetry full circle into the present.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti in his own paintings was not as pedantic about historical accuracy as Brown, but he appreciated the desirability of creating a medieval setting and mood for his paintings. He too valued Bonnard and gloated about finally acquiring a copy for himself. "Now a great piece of news," he wrote triumphantly to F. G. Stephens in 1849; "my dear p.r.b. I have got a Bonnard!!!!" (The news rated four exclamation points.) "A most stunning copy, too," he continued, "with India proof impressions." Even the price was right. "The published price of a plain paper copy is 6 guineas," he bragged; "for mine I gave 3 pounds, and it is perfectly new."<sup>35</sup> Rossetti was a notorious conflator of time, moving at ease from the daydreams of the present to the imagined fictions of the past. He would play Hamlet to Lizzie's Ophelia, or Dante to her Beatrice. The reality of choosing between a blonde Lizzie or a dark-haired Jane in real life could be removed to another age by the mere expedient of dressing the figures in medieval dress. Some of Rossetti's letters describe the stock of costumes that were a part of his studio paraphernalia. He particularly remembered "a white velvet medieval woman's dress... cote-hardie, open up sides and kirtle to go under it- off white velvet quartered with yellow."<sup>36</sup> Several of Rossetti's medieval themes start with a sketch of people in contemporary dress, sometimes in a kiss or passionate embrace, then, in the same pose, they are costumed in medieval garb. In the *Rose Garden*, for example, the real subject is the kiss, which then may form the central theme for several works (Figs. 13-16). It is as if Rossetti were not recreating the past, but escaping into it, clothing the passions of the present in the more

congenial mood of another time. Although Rossetti may be more immersed in the medieval artistic mode than his fellow artists, his themes are often those passions immanent in the present, and of a pressing concern in his own life. A painting of a man and a woman in Victorian dress, passionately kissing, might not be acceptable to potential purchasers. Costume would not only lend a timeless picturesqueness, but remove human relationships from the more sordid claims of the present to the no less passionate, but somehow more pure and elevated, atmosphere of a more courtly age.

There is something almost magical about the transforming power of dress. It acts as a release of inhibitions and a catalyst for the adoption of another persona. Could the Earl of Eglinton and his guests have jousted in frock coats? Did not Queen Victoria's belief in the historical accuracy of her costume give greater veracity to her adoption of the identity of Queen Philippa? Could Brown have as convincingly painted Edward in and his court if he had not found authentic sources for their actual appearances? Could Rossetti have evoked the lush, dreamlike romanticism of his figures without the effects of medieval costumes? The costume could act as the medium through which an individual of the present could step into the past. The costume might be a misleading, misconceived, and even mistaken conception of the past, but it was a material, achievable, and understood means by which Victorians attempted to revive the past.

If the wearing of medieval costume proved to be an effective psychological catalyst, costume as it was used by the Victorians also served to work against a true revival. In choosing to emphasize the accuracy of the details of costume, the Victorians missed the unique and inimitable style of the Middle Ages. The sinuous line, the characteristic postures and gestures depicted so vividly in medieval manuscripts and transcribed by Strutt, were quite lost in the Victorian reconstructions of costume and in history paintings. The stiff, upholstered look of Queen Victoria betrays the Victorian silhouette, as does the line of a gathered skirt revealed in many paintings. The result discloses a Victorian matron masquerading as a medieval lady. The present is not so easy to efface. More successful is the attempt to meld the past and present. When Brown uses Rossetti to act as the model for Chaucer, he forms a link between past and present. Rossetti himself paints the present reflected, and perhaps intensified, in the picturesque trappings of a medieval setting. To attempt to revive the past may be too ambitious. The ritual of Champion at the English Coronation, as Carlyle's Professor **Teufelsdröckh** asserted, is only the "tatters and rags of superannuated worn-out Symbols" which "hoodwink," "halter," "tether," and perhaps "suffocate."<sup>37</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896), pp. 40, 27, 48-49.
2. *Quarterly Review*, 80 (March 1847), 375-76. The contributor is identified by Walter Houghton in the *Wellesley Index* as Elizabeth Eastlake.
3. *London Quarterly Review*, 4 (1855), 123.

4. Thackeray, *The Paris Sketchbook in Works*, ed. Anne Ritchie (New York: Harper and Row, 1898), v, 256, 259.
5. Eighteenth-century masquerades are described by Aileen Ribeiro in "The Exotic Diversion: The Dress Worn at Masquerades in Eighteenth Century London," *Connoisseur*, 197 (January 1978), 3-13.
6. Stothard, *The Monumental Effigies of Great Britain* (London, 1817), p. 2.
7. Planch?, *Recollections and Reflections* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872), i, 52-57.
8. Ian Anstruther, *The Knight and the Umbrella; an Account of the Eglinton Tournament, 1839* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1963), pp. 5-9. The account of the tournament in this paper is based on Anstruther and the following contemporary sources: *Guide to the Tournament at Eglinton Castle on 28th and 29th Aug. 1839* (Irvine: Maxwell Dick, 1839), pp. 3-26; *Tournament of Eglinton Castle on Wednesday and Friday, 28th and 30th Aug. 1839* (Glasgow: Du & Sons, 1839), pp. 3-21; *Tournaments or, the Days of Chivalry, Its Origin, Nature and Effects* (London: W. Strange, 1839). The copy of this book in Widener Library, Harvard University, contains clippings from the *National Gazette*, the *Spirit of the Times*, and other unidentified newspapers; *The Times*, 29 Aug. 1839; and the *hammer*, 18 Aug. 1839, p. 521; 1 Sept. 1839, pp. 554-55; 18 Sept. 1839, p. 569.
9. *Examiner*, 1 Sept. 1839, p. 554.
10. As quoted in the *Examiner*, 1 Sept. 1839, p. 555.
11. From a clipping from an unidentified newspaper attached to *Tournaments or, the Days of Chivalry* (see note 8, above).
12. *Bradshaw's Journal*, 3 (1842), 86.
13. Anstruther, pp. 158-60.
14. *Tournament of Eglinton Castle on Wednesday and Friday, 28th and 30th Aug. 1839* (Glasgow: Du & Sons, 1839), pp. 9-10.
15. *Tournament at Eglinton Castle, Aug. 30, 1839* (London: Day and Hague, 1840), p.l.
16. The Queen's masked ball was described in most of the daily and weeklies including the *Examiner*, *The Times*, *Globe*, *English Chronicle*, *Sun*, *CoPost*, *Court Circular*, *Observer*, *Standard*, and *Illustrated London News*.
17. *Souvenir of the Bal Costume Given by Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace, May 12, 1842*, Drawings by Mr. Coke Smytve Letter Press by J. R. Planch? (London: Paul and Dominic Colnaghi,)
18. *Illustrated London News*, 1 (1842), 7.
19. *Souvenir of the Bal Costume*, p. 5.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
21. *World of Fashion*, 19 (1842), 123.
22. *Globe*, 5 May 1842.
23. *The Times* and *Observer* quoted in the *Courier*, 9 and 13 May 184

24. Art-Union, 1842, p. 140.
25. Court Magazine, 22 (1842), 488.
26. English Chronicle, 14 May 1842.
27. Ibid.
28. Illustrated London News, 1 (1842), 9, 8.
29. Art-Union, 1846, p. 227.
30. Art-Union, 1843, p. 131.
31. Strong, *Recreating the Past: British History and the Victorian Painter* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 58.
32. Brown, "On the Mechanism of a Historical Picture," *Germ*, No. 2 (February 1850), pp. 78-81.
33. Smith, "Bonnard's Costume Historique - a Pre-Raphaelite Source Book," *Costume: The Journal of the Costume Society*, 7 (1973), 29.
34. Ford M. Hueffer, *Ford Madox Brown: A Record of His Life and Work* (London: Longmans, Green, 1896), p. 72.
35. Rossetti, *Letters*, ed. Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), i, 54.
36. As quoted in Leonée Ormond, "Dress in the Painting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti," *Costume: The Journal of the Costume Society*, 8 (1974), 27.
37. Carlyle, p. 180.