

“Living Dolls”: François I^{er} Dresses His Women^{*}

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In addition to portraits and diplomatic reports, Renaissance courts relied on fashion dolls to acquaint themselves with foreign dress. Unfortunately, literature on this subject is scarce and often disappointing. Overlooked by doll historians, a letter written by Federico Gonzaga (1500–40) in 1515 reveals that François I^{er} (1494–1547) requested a fashion doll from Isabella d’Este (1474–1539). After examining this document within the context of what is currently known about Renaissance fashion dolls, this essay explores what François I^{er}’s interest in these objects suggests about his personality and his relationship to the women of his court.

1. INTRODUCTION

As competition among Renaissance European courts intensified, so did the pace at which clothing styles changed. Achieving sartorial supremacy was no longer simply a matter of flaunting wealth, but of following trends in order to set new ones: hence the attention paid to fashion in diplomatic reports. As informative as these eyewitness accounts were, they could hardly be used to accurately reproduce specific articles of clothing.¹ Portraiture provided detailed descriptions of fashions and how they were worn, but could only supply a visual approximation of their tactile qualities. The best way to appreciate the economic and aesthetic value of a garment was by handling or viewing it in three dimensions: thus the emergence of fashion dolls. Sent as diplomatic gifts, these enabled their recipients to fully experience foreign dress styles, and thus constituted a particularly effective method of promoting trends. In addition to helping courts circulate their sartorial language abroad, fashion dolls were also esteemed as precious objects in their own right.

Unfortunately, literature on pre-eighteenth-century fashion dolls is scarce and often disappointing. Renaissance dress studies rarely mention them, let alone offer any critical insight into their meaning and purpose.

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¹The earliest printed costume books date to the 1560s and functioned more as ethnographic studies than true fashion illustrations. For more on these, see Ilg.

Some costume historians have even disputed such dolls' existence. Furthermore, although most publications devoted to the history of dolls address the subject, they tend to do so in highly problematic ways. As Juliette Peers remarks in her brief discussion of early fashion dolls, “The same stories have been repeated ceaselessly without further research. The urtext is from the hands of Max von Boehn. . . . His lengthy account is virtually without footnotes and perhaps may even refer to sources lost in the Second World War. Meanwhile his suppositions codified into fact as the twentieth century passed.”² Peers then goes on to cite a number of doll historians — including Antonia K. Fraser and, more recently, Mary Rogers — who have replicated, at times verbatim, von Boehn's account in their studies. However, Peers fails to recognize that von Boehn did some mining of his own. Indeed, much of his discussion on the early history of fashion dolls stems from Esther Singleton's *Dolls* and from Henri René d'Allemagne's beautifully illustrated *Histoire des jouets*. In turn, much of the historical evidence cited by these authors appears to have been taken from Léon de Laborde's *Glossaire français du moyen âge*. Scholarship on Renaissance fashion dolls thus largely rests on the few precious documents Laborde unearthed over a century ago.³

This tendency to recycle secondary texts without conducting further research explains why an important piece of evidence has escaped the attention of doll historians. In 1896 Alessandro Luzio and Rodolfo Renier published a lengthy essay, entitled “Il Lusso di Isabella d'Este,” that brought to light a wealth of documents regarding the marchesa's beauty secrets and fashion expertise (fig. 1).⁴ As proof of Isabella's international reputation as an authority on such matters, the authors cited a letter written by her son, Federico Gonzaga, on behalf of François I^{er}.⁵ Dated 19

²Peers, 17.

³Manson presents much new and valuable information on European toy dolls but barely addresses the subject of fashion dolls.

⁴Luzio and Renier's study was published as a series of articles in *Nuova Antologia*. The first of these, Luzio and Renier, 1896a, explores the contents of Isabella d'Este's wardrobe and describes the fashions she is said to have invented. For more recent discussions of the marchesa's sartorial style, see Zaffanella; Welch, 245–74. For Isabella's perfumes, hair dyes, skin creams, and accessories, see Luzio and Renier, 1896b; Zaffanella, 218.

⁵In 1515 Federico Gonzaga, future Marquis and Duke of Mantua, was sent to Milan to pay homage to François I^{er}, who had recently won the Battle of Marignano. To ensure that the Gonzagas would not threaten his Italian interests, the king brought the young Federico back to France and kept him there as a hostage until 1517. Full of fascinating details about French court life at the beginning of François I^{er}'s reign, Federico Gonzaga's letters were transcribed and published by Tamalio, 1994. For more on Federico's stay at the French court, see *ibid.*, 43–77.



FIGURE 1. Titian. *Isabella d'Este*, 1534–36. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

November 1515, it states: “My Illustrious and Exalted Lady, Most Revered Mother and Lady, Monsignor de Moretta has told me that the King wishes My Lady to send him a doll dressed in the fashions that suit you of shirts, sleeves, undergarments, outer garments, dresses, headdresses, and hairstyles that you wear; sending various headdress styles would better satisfy his Majesty, for he intends to have some of these garments made to give to the women in France. Therefore, would you be so kind to send this and as soon as possible.”⁶ In sum, Isabella’s elegance was such that the King of France requested she send him a doll dressed in her favorite fashions so that he could have them copied for his court. In her response, the marchesa warned François that he would learn nothing new from the doll she would send him: “To satisfy the wish of His Most Christian Majesty, we will gladly have a doll made and dressed in all the fashions we wear on our body and on our head, although his Majesty will not see anything new, for the styles we wear are equally worn in Milan by the Milanese ladies.”⁷ Given her penchant for creating new fashions, particularly elaborate headdresses, Isabella’s seemingly modest reply was probably motivated by a desire to protect her trademark look.⁸

Publications devoted to François I^{er} generally ignore these letters, either inadvertently or perhaps because they are deemed too trivial or unmasculine to mention.⁹ After all, what could the king’s desire for a fashion doll

⁶Ibid., 127–28: “Ill. Ma et Ex.ma signora mia matre et signora observandissima. Monsignor de Moretta me ha detto ch’el Re desidera che Vostra Signoria li mandi una puva vestita alla fogia che va lei de camisa, di maniche, de veste di sotto, et di sopra, et de abiliamenti, et aconciatura di testa, et deli capili, come la porta; mandando perhò varie fogie di acconciatura di testa, Vostra Signoria satisfarà melio perché Sua Maestà designi far fare alcuni de quelli habiti per donar a Donne in Franza. Quella adunche serrà contenta mandarla et più presto sia possibile.” Luzio and Renier, 1896a, 466, quote only the passage referring to the doll and its wardrobe.

⁷Luzio and Renier, 1896a, 466: “Volienteri per satisfare al desiderio de la M.ta Chr.ma faremo fare la puva con tutti li acconciamenti di dosso et testa che portiamo nui, anchora che Sua M.ta non vederà cosa alcuna nova, perchè quelli che portamo nui si usano anche li in Milano da le gentildonne Milanese.”

⁸While there is no particular reason for doll historians to be acquainted with Luzio and Renier’s article, it is well known to Isabella d’Este’s biographers, many of whom briefly cite this epistolary exchange when discussing her role as a sartorial trendsetter. See, for example, Cartwright, 2:124; Pizzagalli, 392; Shemek, 274. I am grateful to Dr. Ann Jones for calling this last publication to my attention.

⁹To my knowledge, Knecht, 1994, 125, n. 72, is the only one of François I^{er}’s biographers to mention his request for a fashion doll: Knecht specifies that he obtained this information through private communication with Tamalio, who had not yet published Federico Gonzaga’s letters.

dressed à l'Isabelle reveal beyond his admiration for Italian chic? Why bother to focus on this seemingly minor anecdote when his reign was punctuated by so many significant political, religious, and cultural events? Yet Federico Gonzaga's letter not only constitutes a major contribution to the study of fashion dolls: it also provides key insight into François I^{er}'s personality. After examining this document in the context of what is currently known about Renaissance fashion dolls, this essay will consider what the king's interest in these objects suggests about his relationship to the women of his court.

2. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE OF RENAISSANCE FASHION DOLLS

Documents traditionally cited as proof of the early use of fashion dolls are far less informative, and far more difficult to interpret, than the letters exchanged by Federico Gonzaga and Isabella d'Este. The earliest of these documents is a payment record from the accounts of Charles VI of France (1368–1422). In 1396 Robert de Varennes, embroiderer and *valet de chambre* to Isabeau de Bavière (1370/71–1435), received 496 *livres* 16 *sols* for “dolls and their wardrobes for the Queen of England.”¹⁰ The dolls' great cost and their creation by someone intimately familiar with French court dress have led doll historians to conclude that these were indeed fashion dolls. However, doll-related publications addressing this document generally fail to specify the identity of the English queen at this time.¹¹ In 1396

¹⁰Laborde, 1872, 465: “poupées et mainages d'icelle pour la royne d'Angleterre.”

¹¹Singleton, 29, writes: “Certainly, the dolls that were sent to the Queen of England as a present from the King of France in 1391 were intended to exhibit the new fashions which Isabella of Bavaria had introduced into the court of France when she married Charles VI.” Singleton then states that in 1396 Robert de Varennes received 549 *livres* 16 *sols* for making “the wardrobes of these dolls.” Not only does Singleton fail to cite a source for Charles VI's alleged 1391 gift to the Queen of England, she does not take into account that at this point the said queen was Richard II's first wife, Anne of Bohemia (1366–94). One may wonder, then, why Robert de Varennes would have been paid in 1396 for making garments for dolls that had been sent to the English queen five years earlier, particularly since she died in 1394. Furthermore, the document published by Laborde, 1872, 465, specifically states that de Varennes was paid for making dolls and their wardrobes. In other words, if Charles VI sent dolls to Anne of Bohemia in 1391 — although I have found no documentary evidence of this — then it was a separate gift, unrelated to the dolls and clothing commissioned from Robert de Varennes in 1396. Von Boehn, 136, does not address Singleton's assertion that Charles VI sent such a gift in 1391. In his discussion of the 1396 document, he states: “Queen Isabeau of Bavaria got dolls sent to the Queen of England to give that youthful monarch an idea of the fashions of the French court.” That von Boehn uses the term *youthful* suggests he knew the queen in question was Isabelle de

King Richard II wed the daughter of Charles VI and Isabeau de Bavière, the nine-year-old Isabelle de Valois (1387–1410). The dolls were thus a present from the French royal couple to their daughter, and while they may have been intended to help Isabelle spread French fashions at the English court, they were surely also meant to amuse the young queen.

As for the size of the dolls and their wardrobe, von Boehn and Singleton argue that, given their cost, they must have been made to the English queen’s measure.¹² If this theory is correct, these were not dolls *per se* but rather dress-figures or mannequins, raising the question of what is meant by *poupée*. Derived from the Latin *pupa*, *-ae* (“little girl,” “doll,” “figurine,” and “nipple”) in the thirteenth century the term referred to a drawing, model, or statuette.¹³ By the late fourteenth century *poupée* had also acquired the meaning of “a child’s doll.” In light of its etymology, the term is probably used here to designate small figures. Instead of having anything to do with size, the large sum paid to de Varennes may simply reflect the quantity and quality of the dolls and their wardrobes. Furthermore, since de Varennes was an embroiderer, we may assume the dolls were made of cloth rather than of wood or clay.

A century later, François I^{er}’s future mother-in-law, Anne de Bretagne (1477–1514), ordered “a large doll to send to the Queen of Spain.”¹⁴ That it was deemed necessary to qualify the doll as “large” suggests this was unusual, lending credence to the argument that small figures were typically given as royal gifts.¹⁵ Moreover, large does not necessarily imply adult-size; the doll could easily have been the size of a toddler, as is the one appearing in a seventeenth-century Dutch illustration of a doll-merchant’s stall (fig. 2). Whatever its size, the doll was remade, perhaps because it failed to

Valois, who would have already been familiar with French court dress and therefore would not have needed to learn about it from a fashion doll.

¹²von Boehn, 136; Singleton, 29.

¹³Manson, 535–36, who provides a fascinating discussion of the linguistic evolution of *puppa* and its derivatives. See also Laborde, 1872, 465.

¹⁴Laborde, 1872, 465: “1496. . . . Pour avoir fait faire et refaire par 2 fois, par l’ordonnance et commandement d’icelle dame (la Roynne) une grande poupée pour envoyer à la roynne d’Espagne.”

¹⁵Singleton, 30, affirms that this large doll cost seven *livres*, but again fails to cite her source. If this information is correct, then this was significantly less than the sum paid by Isabeau de Bavière for the dolls she sent to the English queen, which further undermines Singleton’s and von Boehn’s theory that there necessarily existed a correlation between a fashion doll’s size and its cost.



FIGURE 2. Anonymous artist after Adriaen van de Venne. *Dolls' stall*, illustration in Jacob Cats, *Spiegel van den ouden ende nieuwen tijdt*, The Hague, 1632. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Library Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap.

meet Anne’s approval.¹⁶ The French queen may have felt its garments insufficiently elegant to impress Isabella the Catholic (1451–1504), known to have been particularly fussy about her appearance.

These payment records yield little information beyond the dolls’ status as gifts. Federico Gonzaga’s letter is far more informative. Not only does he list the various garments and accessories in which François’s doll was to be outfitted, he also unequivocally states the king’s intention of having these fashions copied for the ladies of his court. In this case, then, the doll was clearly intended to model samples of Isabella d’Este’s favorite styles. That Federico asked for a *puva* (doll) without specifying its appearance indicates he assumed his mother would have known what he was referring to, suggesting that such requests were not unusual. In fact, Isabella d’Este received at least one other similar request, this time from her younger son Ferrante (1507–57), then attached to Charles V’s (1500–58) court: “I am troubled by some of the queen’s ladies-in-waiting to have a doll sent to them from Italy dressed entirely in the manner you attire yourselves there. For this reason, I implore Your Excellency to commission and send such a doll, with some other accessories for women, such as headdresses, to give to the Lady Donna Magdalena Manricha, one of the ladies of the aforementioned queen.”¹⁷ Equally ignored by doll-related publications, Ferrante’s letter differs from his brother’s in one significant respect: it was written on behalf of Eleanor of Austria’s (1498–1558) ladies-in-waiting rather than for Charles V himself.¹⁸ In this instance, then, the request for a doll came from the women who would be wearing the fashions, rather than from the ruler whose court they graced. Federico Gonzaga’s letter thus attests to François I^{er}’s personal involvement in dictating his ladies’ attire.

The Gonzaga letters are silent as to the dolls’ size, although *puva*, like its French equivalent *poupée*, was used to designate small objects. Furthermore, since little dolls were commonly employed to promote court

¹⁶As von Boehn, 137, suggests.

¹⁷In 1523 Ferrante Gonzaga was sent to Charles V’s court to serve as a page, and remained there until 1526, when he returned to Italy to pursue a military career in the emperor’s service. Ferrante’s letters from his Spanish sojourn are transcribed and published in Tamalio, 1991. The letter (*ibid.*, 203) is dated 31 August 1524: “Io sono importunate d’alchune damiselle de la Signora Regina che gli fazzi venire de Italia una puva vestita in tuto del modo se accostuma li. Siché supplico Vostra Excellentia che commetta ne sia mandata una con qualch’altra gentilezza da donne, come sono accunziature da testa per dare alla Signora Donna Magdalena Manricha, una dele donzelle della prefata Signora Regina.”

¹⁸Eleanor of Austria was Charles V’s sister. Her first husband, King Manuel I of Portugal, died in 1524. Eleanor then remained at her brother’s court until she married François I^{er} in 1530.

fashions in later centuries, there is no reason to believe this practice was not already in effect by the early sixteenth century.¹⁹ Life-sized mannequins would have been far less practical to ship, and would have served only to model clothes, while a miniature fashion doll could be kept as a collectable or be recycled as a toy once it had served its didactic purpose.

3. THE FATE OF FASHION DOLLS UPON THEIR RECEIPT

References to fashion dolls in royal inventories suggest they were considered worthy of keeping once they had fulfilled their initial function. For example, two dolls sporting elaborate *brials* (dresses with fitted sleeves) under *mantillas* (outer garments often lined with fur) were listed among Queen Juana of Spain's (1479–1555) possessions at the time of her death.²⁰ Along with chess games, devotional objects, and other mementos, Catherine de' Medici (1519–89) kept fourteen dolls dressed in mourning and "as ladies" in her personal cabinet at the Hôtel de la Reine.²¹

In addition to being preserved by adults, used fashion dolls may also have been offered to young girls as gifts. An anonymous portrait of Arabella Stuart (1575–1615: fig. 3) is most often cited in support of this theory, for it shows the two-year-old girl clutching an intricate doll dressed in fashions of the previous decade.²² Lucas Cranach the Younger's (1515–86) portrait

¹⁹Mackrell, 73, provides an illustration of an exceptionally well-preserved doll's eighteenth-century French court dress. For more on eighteenth century fashion dolls, see Delpierre, 176–80.

²⁰Anderson, 1979, 200.

²¹The dolls are listed in a 1589 inventory of Catherine de' Medici's possessions: see Bonnaffée, 93–94. One of the dolls is described as "small," others are distinguished by their clothing: one was dressed "as a lady" ("en demoiselle"), six were dressed in black, one in white, and one in mourning (the remaining dolls were simply listed as "poupines"). Catherine may have received these dolls as gifts, or she may have ordered them to acquaint herself and the women of her court with new trends. With the exception of her children's weddings, the queen always wore black after the death of her husband, Henri II (1519–59), but nonetheless cultivated a fashionable appearance. As Frieda, 312, remarks: "Though [Catherine] presented a somber figure, the cut and quality of the lace and work in general made her mourning anything but drab. She subtly enhanced her black dress (usually made from plain wool) by its excellent cut; sometimes she used trimmings such as fur and gems, which created a majestic effect if the occasion demanded. When it came to her undergarments, she denied herself nothing: hidden beneath the black wool she wore the finest chemises and the most exquisitely embroidered petticoats." Catherine is also credited with having introduced the French court to underwear, of which she owned several pairs in various materials, including gold and silver cloth.

²²Arnold, 157–58.



FIGURE 3. Anonymous artist. *Arabella Stuart*, 1577. Chesterfield, Hardwick Hall.

of Marie of Saxony (1562–66) shows the young princess holding an equally sophisticated toy.²³ Here, however, the doll is dressed in a mature version

²³For an illustration, see Lilienfein, pl. 29. Von Boehn, 114, erroneously dates this portrait to 1540. The painting is in fact part of a series of six full-length portraits of

of her owner's outfit.²⁴ Both wear gold chain-link necklaces and crimson velvet gowns with similarly puffed sleeves and ruffled cuffs. While Marie wears a youthful bonnet and apron, the doll is given an elaborate coiffure and ruff, accessories appropriate for a noblewoman. Since Marie's doll is clad in Saxon attire, we may assume it was not a gift from a foreign court, but rather the product of a local doll-maker.

In the later sixteenth century, Native American children also appear to have inherited elegantly dressed dolls from English settlers, who may have brought them to the colonies to facilitate dressmaking. In 1590 the folio edition of Thomas Hariot's *A Briefe and true report of the new foundland of Virginia* was published in Frankfurt, with engravings by Theodore de Bry.²⁵ The engravings were based on a series of watercolors, executed by John White between 1585 and 1587, representing the fauna, flora, and native peoples of Virginia.²⁶ One of these watercolors depicts the wife of a Pomeiock chief, whose daughter holds a doll clad in English fashions. In de Bry's engraving, which was accompanied by a caption describing Pomeiock women's sartorial habits, the details of the doll's outfit are easier to see (fig. 4). Shown from the back, she is entirely swathed in fabric — even her neck is concealed by a ruffled collar and the brim of her hat — thus offering a striking contrast to the nakedness (inevitably construed by contemporary viewers as uncivilized, savage, and primitive) of the young girl carrying her. These images suggest that settlers may have handed out such dolls to the Native Americans they encountered, not only as amusing gifts, but also as a means of encouraging them to develop a taste for more proper — that is, European — attire.

Since a number of portraits and prints show girls toting dolls dressed

members of the electoral family executed by Lucas Cranach the Younger between 1564 and 1565. At least until 1942, the portrait of Marie of Saxony was located in Schloss Moritzburg; see *Lucas Cranach d. Ä.*, 113; Lilienfein, pl. 39. Through private communication with Dieter Koeplin, Schade, 391, n. 763, discovered that by 1974 the portrait of Marie of Saxony, along with Lucas Cranach the Younger's portrait of her brother Christian I of Saxony (1564), had entered a private collection in Switzerland. I am currently trying to determine the portrait's present location.

²⁴Marie of Saxony and her doll also share similar facial features: pursed lips, flushed cheeks, a high forehead, and thin, arched brows. While in reality the doll must have served as a model of sartorial elegance for Marie to aspire to, within the context of the painting it may have been intended to provide the viewer with a glimpse into what Marie of Saxony would have looked like upon reaching maturity.

²⁵I am grateful to Dr. Ann Jones for bringing these images and Lorant's publication to my attention.

²⁶For more on John White and his watercolors, see Lorant, 180, 185–224.

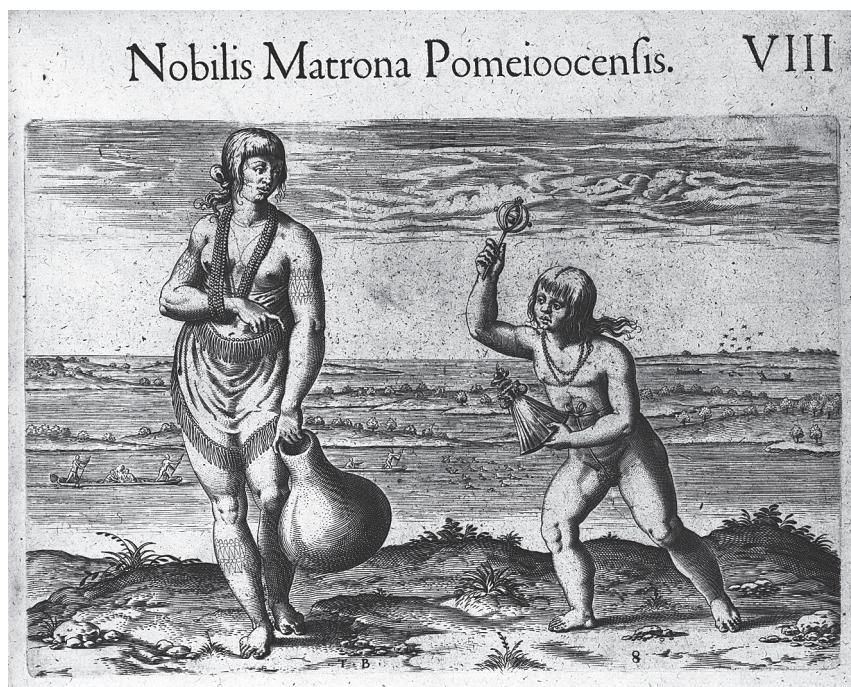


FIGURE 4. Theodore de Bry. *A Noblewoman of Pomeioock*, engraving from Thomas Hariot's *A Briefe and true report of the new foundland of Virginia*, Frankfurt, 1590. New York, The New York Public Library.

in exquisite replicas of women's fashions, one may wonder what distinguished these toys from the fashion dolls that were exchanged as diplomatic gifts. The only way to differentiate between the two is by their function, seldom an easy task since dolls were also used to acquaint aristocratic children with foreign dress styles. For instance, in 1492 King Fernando of Spain (1451–1516) sent a Christmas present to his young daughters in Barcelona of three dolls dressed in Valencian fashions. In addition to wearing chemises, underskirts, and velvet and *cebtà* (Spanish silk) dresses, the dolls were trimmed in *trançats*, a type of braid-casing favored in Valencia.²⁷ Some forty years later Charles V ordered a doll from Paris as a gift for his daughter, possibly to familiarize her with the fashions favored at the court of his main rival, François I^{er}.²⁸ Once again, whether these objects differed from the fashion dolls given to adults is difficult to assess and largely irrelevant, since they performed the same educational function.

²⁷Anderson, 1979, 163.

²⁸von Boehn, 123.

That fashionable dress was considered the defining feature of luxury toy dolls may be gleaned from a description of those offered to François I^{er}'s children by the city of Paris in 1528: "To a doll-maker, for a carriage with four wheels gilded in fine gold, with two horses covered in hair, sporting velvet harnesses adorned with bits, knobs, and golden studs with buckles; in said carriage, there was a lady seated on a chair, dressed in a gown of gold cloth open in the front, lined with crimson purple velvet, and in a coat of silver cloth and a black velvet shell, the crimson satin underside of which was embroidered with Cyprian gold, and the hems of the silver cloth were embroidered with pearls. Item, there was also in said carriage another lady of smaller size, equally seated on a chair, dressed in a gown of silver cloth lined with crimson velvet, open in the front, and in a shell of gold cloth, made in the Italian manner, lined with crimson velvet and slashed, and fastened with laces made of silver thread, the edges, hems and underside of which were made in the same manner as above."²⁹

While this payment record provides a detailed account of the dolls' clothing, no other mention is made of their appearance, suggesting that the quality of dress was the main criterion for determining their value. Judging from this remarkably precise description, the dolls' garments were not only luxurious, but trendy too. The smaller "lady" even sported a coat of gold cloth in the "Italian manner," indicating that by this date Parisian *poupeliers* (doll-makers) outfitted toy dolls with foreign styles. How accurate a copy this coat may have been is difficult to determine, but it is nonetheless interesting to note that both François and his children would have owned dolls dressed *à la mode d'Italie*.

Of course, such delicate toys were not meant to be vigorously played with, but rather admired and carefully handled. In addition to delighting aristocratic children, they served to instill within them an appreciation of clothing's economic and symbolic value. Dolls not only instructed young girls on how to wear garments, they also showed them that a carefully

²⁹Manson, 530: "A un poupelier pour un chariot branlant à quatre roués dorées de fin or, avec deux chevaux couverts de poil, arachés de velours, garnis de mort, bossettes et cloux doréz avec les boucles; auquel chariot y avoit dedans une dame assise sur une chaise, vestue d'une robe de toile d'or trait ouverte par devant, doublée de velours cramoisy violet, d'une cotte de toile d'argent et d'une coquille de velours noir, la renversure de satin cramoisy bordé d'or de chypre, les passes de toile d'argent brodés de perles. Item, y avoit aussi aud. chariot une autre dame plus petite, aussy assise sur une chaise, ayant une robe d'argent trait doublée de velours cramoisy, ouverte par devant, la cotte de toile d'or, une coquille de toile d'or, faite à la mode d'Italie, doublé de satin cramoisy, coupé par taillades, fermée à laz d'amours faits de fils d'argent, les bordures, passes et renversures faites comme dessus."

contrived attire could project a powerful image even when displayed on an inanimate object. In other words, these dolls would have been instrumental in encouraging girls to rely on their appearance as a primary mode of expression.

4. EXTANT DOLLS

Pre-eighteenth-century dolls are extremely rare and often difficult to classify. Nevertheless, a few delicately outfitted examples survive in an extraordinary state of preservation and are therefore useful for assessing the appearance of Renaissance fashion dolls.

Although a pair of beautifully-dressed dolls identified in the 1870s as examples of French Renaissance craftsmanship have since been dismissed as fakes, others may be securely dated to the sixteenth century.³⁰ Among these is a mechanical doll said to be of Spanish origin, now located in Vienna’s Kunsthistorisches Museum (fig. 5). Executed in the second half of the sixteenth century, the doll possesses an internal mechanism that enables it to play a tiny cittern and to move in time with the music.³¹ Although an automaton, this charming figure nonetheless gives us an idea of what high-quality, sixteenth-century miniature fashions might have looked like. Measuring forty-four centimeters in height, the doll sports a luxurious dress

³⁰The fake dolls were first shown in 1878 at the Historical Exhibition of Ancient Art in Paris. Formerly in the collection of Albert Goupil, the ensemble consisted of a doll wearing a white silk gown embroidered with flowers and cradling in her left arm a much smaller doll, also finely clothed. D’Allemagne, 102, describes the doll as “one of the most curious specimens of sixteenth-century playthings,” a sentiment echoed by Singleton, 27–28. However, according to von Boehn, 124–25, the dolls and their garments were not original, but rather fashioned from a mix of old and new materials of Italian origin by a dealer named Bardini. Von Boehn argues that the larger doll’s marble head was made in the fifteenth century — perhaps in Donatello’s studio — and that the dress was in fact a child’s garment dating from the sixteenth century. As for the smaller doll, he identifies it as a “Neapolitan crib-figure of the eighteenth century for which a dress in the style of the sixteenth century has been made out of old cloth” (125). Unfortunately, von Boehn fails to give references for this information. Furthermore, the smaller doll illustrated in von Boehn, 115, fig. 100, is different from the one appearing in Singleton, pl. 14: the latter bears closer resemblance to dolls, such as the one held by Arabella Stuart, represented in sixteenth-century paintings. Von Boehn was clearly aware of Singleton’s book, and yet fails to explain this discrepancy. Investigating this matter further is beyond the scope of this study, but perhaps this brief discussion might generate additional research into the fate of these puzzling dolls.

³¹Saxl, 20–21, attributes this automaton to Gianello della Torre (1515/19–89), a Cremonese engineer primarily active in Toledo.



FIGURE 5. Automaton, second half of the sixteenth century. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

and a cape made of ochre-colored linen and silk brocade with a patterned red border. An elegant headdress in matching colors completes the outfit and draws attention to the figure's delicately painted features.

Stockholm's Royal Armory harbors another doll in remarkable condition, dated ca. 1585–90 (fig. 6). Instead of painted wood, her head is composed of embroidered fabric and human hair, while her body consists of a wire armature designed to support her outfit.³² She is dressed in the height of late sixteenth-century fashion in a velvet and silk gown trimmed with lace and seed pearls, with matching muff and hair ornaments. Despite her small size (fifteen centimeters in height), this dainty lady wears such

³²King, 53–54.



FIGURE 6. Fashion doll (?), ca. 1585–90. Stockholm, Livrustkammaren.

meticulous replicas of contemporary garments that she may well have served as a fashion doll.

Since cloth could easily be affixed to them, wire frames were likely to have been a common feature of fashion dolls. The rest of their bodies might

have been composed of wood and have been articulated, as in the case of the dolls appearing in the portraits of Arabella Stuart and Marie of Saxony.³³ Heads and arms could also have been made of wax or papier-mâché, the latter especially popular in France. However, working with these materials would have required special technical skills, while fabric dolls such as the one in Stockholm could easily have been manufactured by court dressmakers without the assistance of professional doll-makers. Fabric dolls would also have been sturdier, lighter, and therefore easier to transport, than their sculpted counterparts.

5. THE MANUFACTURE OF RENAISSANCE FASHION DOLLS

Payment records pertaining to Isabeau de Bavière's and Anne de Bretagne's commissions suggest that fashion dolls were initially ordered from court dressmakers rather than professional doll-makers — hardly surprising, since the former would have had a more thorough knowledge of up-to-date royal dress. When exactly the manufacture of these objects became the prerogative of professional doll-makers has yet to be determined, although in the seventeenth century the export of fashion dolls became a full-fledged industry in France and England.

The situation in Italy is even more obscure. By the fifteenth century Florentine craftsmen had emerged as leading manufacturers of richly dressed religious dolls, but whether they lent their talents to the making of fashion dolls has yet to be established.³⁴ Unfortunately, the Gonzaga letters give no indication from whom Isabella d'Este commissioned her dolls. However, since they were intended to model precise copies of her favorite fashions, she probably ordered them from her personal dressmaker.

It is also worth noting that Parisian *poupetiers* were listed among the artists employed at Fontainebleau in the royal building accounts for the period 1537–40. A payment record dated 1539 specifies that they

³³Ibid., 50: "Lady Arabella's doll appears to be jointed at shoulder and elbow and the face was painted realistically. It is unlikely that the painters would have idealized the appearance of the dolls, so that we must conclude that the dolls of wealthy children were artistically finished and actually beautiful in their original state. A doll painted by Cranach the Younger also appears to have good articulation in the upper part of the body, though the skirt area is as stiff as that of the doll held by Arabella Stuart. Possibly the petticoats were made very stiffly, or, as has been suggested by other writers, the legs and lower torso were dispersed with and the figure rested on a conical framework or shaped wooden base."

³⁴For more on Florentine sacred dolls, see Klapisch-Zuber.

collaborated with painters on “composite works of earth, paper, and plaster” in preparation for Charles V’s arrival at Fontainebleau in the same year.³⁵ In his *Glossaire*, Léon de Laborde affirms that the term *poupetier* refers here to *ornemanistes*: that is, to artists who specialized in the making of stucco and papier-mâché decorations.³⁶ Following Laborde’s lead, Guy-Michel Leproux suggests that these decorations must have been destined for theatrical representations or for masquerades.³⁷ Yet as we have seen, by the beginning of the sixteenth century the words *poupetier* or *poupelier* were clearly used to designate makers of beautifully-dressed dolls. Does this mean, as Michel Manson asks, that the profession of *poupetier* encompassed the fabrication of dolls as well as of masks and of other theatrical props?³⁸ This seems likely, given that during this period papier-mâché was used not only for the creation of ephemera but also for dolls’ heads, as we see in a late seventeenth-century German engraving which shows a doll-maker and his assistant manufacturing dolls’ heads in a workshop containing finished masks and other ephemera (fig. 7).³⁹ Could it be that in addition to decorations, these *poupetiers* made dolls during their stay at Fontainebleau? In his efforts to win over his rival, François I^{er} may have also hired these artists to create fashion dolls, perhaps in collaboration with royal dress-makers, as gifts for the women of Charles V’s court.

6. THE ELUSIVE MALE FASHION DOLL

Extant evidence suggests that dolls were used exclusively for the promotion of female attire. Yet elite menswear was equally subject to sudden, and at times drastic, changes, particularly during the first half of the sixteenth century. Men’s fashions also easily competed with, and often surpassed, women’s in complexity and ostentation. The slashing trend that spread

³⁵Laborde, 1877–80, 1:436: “meslées de terre, papier et plâtre.” The full record reads as follows “To Pierre Gardin, Guillaume du Hay, Jean Chiffreble, Jacques Lucas, Guillaume de la Seille, Jean Vignay, Louis Jarres, Nicolas Martin, Jean Josse, Jean Festard, Robert Hernoul, Jean le Jeune et Louis Coullogne, thirteen in number, all painters and *poupetiers*, the sum of 247 *livres* for having collaborated on works made of earth, paper and plaster for the arrival and reception of the Emperor at Fontainebleau, at a rate of 20 *sols* per day.” Another payment record for the same year (*ibid.*, 437), states: “To Jean Veloux, *poupetier*, and Nicolas Groust, painter, the sum of 20 *livres* to each per month.”

³⁶Laborde, 1872, 465.

³⁷Leproux, 19.

³⁸Manson, 529.

³⁹*Ibid.*



FIGURE 7. Engraving no. 59 in Christoph Weigel, *Abbildung der gemein-nützlichen Hauptstände von denen Regenten und ihren so in Frieden als Kriegs-Zeiten zugeordneten Bedienten an bisz auf alle Künstler und Handwerker*, Regensburg, 1698. New York, The New York Public Library.

through Europe in the early 1500s is a prime example of this, since it was taken to a far more extravagant extreme in men’s garments than in women’s.⁴⁰ Since a fashionable appearance was central to the male persona, we may wonder why men would have refrained from using fashion dolls. We cannot exclude the possibility that such a practice existed for men and that we are simply lacking evidence of it today. Male aristocrats are known to have collected dolls and their accessories by the early seventeenth century, although this pastime may have originated earlier.⁴¹ Could it be, then, that the practice of using a doll as a tool for constructing one’s appearance was perceived as feminine? Interacting with dolls was considered acceptable for boys and men as long as they did so in a manner that allowed them to function as active subjects: for example, in the acts of playing and collecting. Girls, on the other hand, were expected to learn from dolls how to dress and how to be caring and nurturing, qualities essential for marriage and motherhood.⁴² In other words, men may have refrained from using dolls to acquaint themselves with sartorial trends because reliance on these objects as didactic devices had feminine connotations.

7. WOMEN AS SARTORIAL TRENDSETTERS

If fashion dolls were used exclusively to promulgate feminine fashions, they are likely to have been more commonly exchanged by women, a theory largely supported by the documentary evidence presented above. As a means of communication between women about women, fashion dolls would have functioned as objects of feminine empowerment. In addition to expanding its sender’s sphere of influence, the fashion doll would have acted as a tangible sign of her status as a leader, as someone possessing enough wealth, taste, and independence not only to create new modes of sartorial expression, but to effectively promote them as well. For the

⁴⁰Slashing consists of making one or more cuts in a garment’s outer layer and pulling the lining through the incisions. Legend has it that the practice originated at the Battle of Grandson (1476), where Swiss soldiers are said to have slashed the fabrics they plundered from the defeated Burgundians and to have used the pieces to patch their torn garments. Initially favored by German mercenaries, the style spread to the nobility by the beginning of the sixteenth century. For more on this trend, see Laver, 77–79.

⁴¹King, 60. For example, in 1632 the town of Augsburg presented the King of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus (1594–1632), with a cabinet containing two dolls, a cavalier and his lady, each measuring ten centimeters.

⁴²For more on how dolls were perceived as a means of encouraging maternal behavior in girls, see Manson, 531–36.

recipient, such a gift would have been perceived as an invitation to share in its sender's sartorial identity, thereby creating a special bond between the two. By acquainting the recipient with novel styles, the fashion doll would also have enabled her to become a trendsetter within her own circle, thus heightening her prestige. Considered within this context, the fashion doll emerges as a conduit for forging a network of female relations based on the exchange and appropriation of sartorial signs of feminine power and cultural sophistication.

A systematic study of how Renaissance women invented, circulated, and used fashions to consolidate their authority has yet to be made. There can be little doubt, however, that being a fashion arbiter was perceived as a mark of leadership and was thus a particularly important trait for women in powerful positions to cultivate. Responding to her daughter's fears of appearing hopelessly out-of-date after a long absence from court, Catherine de' Medici remarked: "it is you who invents and produces beautiful ways of dressing and wherever you shall go, the Court will emulate you and not you the Court."⁴³ Through these words, Catherine was reminding Margot that it was a queen's duty to instigate trends and to act as a model of sartorial elegance. Doing so was a means for her to instill desire — the desire to look, to imitate, and to please — in others and, therefore, to secure a strong following.

No one seems to have understood this idea more than Isabella d'Este, whose beauty secrets were solicited by women all over Europe, women such as the Queen of Poland, Bona Sforza, who once referred to the marchesa as "the source and origin of all the loveliest fashions in Italy."⁴⁴ As we have seen, even the ladies-in-waiting attached to Charles V's court were eager to copy Isabella's style, and thus requested a fashion doll from her via Ferrante Gonzaga. While such demands may have flattered the marchesa, she was highly selective about with whom she shared her expertise. When Federigo Gonzaga wrote to Isabella asking her to send some of her scented hand-creams to François I's first wife, Claude de France (1499–1524), he received three jars along with the following reply: "We are pleased to supply the Said Queen and Madam [the Duchess of Lansone, her sister] with our recipe [for scented cream] but to tell the truth, we do not wish to undertake

⁴³Cited in Lazard, 263: "C'est vous qui inventez et produisez les belles façons de s'habiller, et en quelque part que vous alliez, la Cour prendra de vous et non vous de la Cour."

⁴⁴Cited in Welch, 251 (letter dated 15 June 1523, in which Bona Sforza asks Isabella d'Este to keep her abreast of recent headdress trends).

this for other women.”⁴⁵ Thus Isabella d’Este reminded her interlocutors that she did not engage in the creation and distribution of cosmetics as a professional enterprise, but rather as a courtesy for an elite group of women. The marchesa may have been willing to share something as personal and unique as her perfumed lotions with the Queen of France and her sister, but diplomacy did not require her to extend the same service to others of lower standing.⁴⁶ In this manner, Isabella sought to protect her signature scent, to ensure that it would be worn only by the highest members of the royal family and that it would therefore preserve its cachet.

The marchesa’s desire to regulate the circulation of her sartorial and cosmetic creations may explain the manner in which she responded to François I^{er}’s request for a fashion doll. Rather than having anything to do with modesty, Isabella’s insistence that “his Majesty [would] not see anything new” in the doll she would send him suggests a reluctance to share her fashions under these particular circumstances. Had the request come from the women of François I^{er}’s court, Isabella could have imposed certain restrictions regarding how and by whom her favorite fashions were worn. Since, however, the demand came from the king himself, the marchesa’s only option from a political standpoint was to satisfy his wish without constraints, even though this meant relinquishing control over the dissemination of her fashions.⁴⁷ Thus, by requesting a fashion doll from Isabella d’Este for the purpose of impressing her style on his ladies, François I^{er} disrupted the pattern of exchange and appropriation of feminine sartorial signs described above. In this context, the doll no longer functioned as an invitation from one woman to another to share in her sartorial identity and its political and cultural meanings. Instead, it became a tool enabling François I^{er} to project his desires and ambitions onto the women of his court, so that their appearance effectively became representative of his identity.

8. FRANÇOIS I^{er} AND ISABELLA D’ESTE: THE FASHION DOLL AS FETISHISTIC SUBSTITUTE

Writing to Federico Gonzaga, the Cremonese courtier Giovanni Musso remarked that when Isabella d’Este visited Lyon “all the men and women

⁴⁵Translation by Welch, 270. Dated 18 May 1516, the original text (Luzio and Renier, 1896b, 679) reads: “Siamo contente di fornire la detta Regina et Madama di la nostro compositione, ma a dirvi il vero non volemo già questa cura per le altre donnè.”

⁴⁶Exotic and pungent substances such as Indonesian musk, Indian aloe, Egyptian balsam, mint, marjoram, and roses, were used in the confection of Isabella d’Este’s scented creams and perfumes. For more on this, see Luzio and Renier, 1896b; Zaffanella, 218.

⁴⁷Since Isabella wanted her son to maintain excellent relations with François I^{er} during his stay at the French court, it was in her political interest to satisfy the king’s request.

rushed to their doors and windows and onto the streets and stared in amazement at her Highness's fashions and those of her ladies-in-waiting; and many women from here say that our fashions are much more beautiful than theirs."⁴⁸ In light of the sensation that the marchesa created wherever she went, it is hardly surprising François chose her as a sartorial model for the women of his court, although he may have had other motives beyond updating their appearance when he commissioned a fashion doll from Isabella d'Este.

François coveted feminine beauty in all its forms. He collected attractive mistresses much in the same way he acquired painted and sculpted representations of beautiful women, such as Raphael (1483–1520) and Giulio Romano's (1499–1546) famous portrait of the Vice-Queen of Naples, Isabel de Requesens i Enríquez de Cardona-Anglesoda (1518).⁴⁹ Ordering a doll dressed *à l'Isabelle* would have been a way for François to acquire a component of her beauty, to own a piece of a woman celebrated throughout Europe for her elegance and wit. The king would thus have possessed a miniature reminder of the marchesa's dashing silhouette, and have used it to mould his female courtiers in her image, thereby suffusing his surroundings with her presence. More than a purveyor of foreign fashions, the doll would have served as a fetishistic substitute for a woman the king admired but could not possess.⁵⁰

To understand how François I^{er} may have experienced this gift in this manner it is necessary to consider how the relationship between individuals and objects in precapitalist societies differed from the one that has emerged in modern Western economies. As Jones and Stallybrass remark in their discussion of fetishism in precapitalist versus capitalist societies: "Capitalism could, indeed, be defined as the mode of production which, in

⁴⁸Pizzagalli, 412: "Sappia la Signoria Vostra che quando Madonna vostra madre passa per le contrade, tutti gli uomini e donne di ogni sorta alle porte et alle finestre e sulle strade sono a guardare con meraviglia le fogge di Madonne e delle sue donzelle e molte donne di qui dicono che le fogge nostre sono più belle delle loro."

⁴⁹For more on Raphael and Giulio Romano's portrait (now in the Louvre), see Fritz. I would like to thank the anonymous *RQ* reader who called this publication to my attention.

⁵⁰While there is no documentary evidence that François I^{er} was enamored with Isabella d'Este, given his reputation as a great womanizer (see n. 72, below) and hers as a stylish beauty — she was celebrated by authors the king greatly admired, including Castiglione and Ariosto — it is likely that he would have been attracted to her, even if from a distance. François attempted to meet Isabella on at least one occasion, during his stay in Milan following the Battle of Marignano (1515), but the marchesa declined the offer: Cartwright 2:121. The king's request for a fashion doll from Isabella d'Este that same year proves that the marchesa remained in his thoughts.

fetishizing the commodity, refuses to fetishize the object. In capitalist societies, to love things is something of an embarrassment. Things are, after all, ‘mere’ things. To accumulate things is not to give them life. It is because things are not fetishized that, in capitalist societies, they remain theoretically lifeless.”⁵¹ The commodity has become central to the survival of this system because it is precisely what the object is not: readily exchangeable and easily substituted according to the impulses of the market in which it circulates.

In defetishizing the object, capitalism has created an unbridgeable gap between individuals and things, and reinforced the polarity between the living and the inanimate, the personal and impersonal. In prior, and in alternate, systems — those which are not propelled by the exchange of commodities within a fast-paced, self-regulated market — this gap tends to be erased as the fetishizing of the object poses no economic threat and, in fact, becomes an essential component of its value. As Mauss demonstrates in *The Gift*, his fundamental anthropological study of gift-giving, in pre-capitalist exchanges, objects are not “indifferent things”: they have “a name, a personality, a past.”⁵² Thought to possess a soul, these things are believed to be part of the soul and thus “it follows that to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of yourself.”⁵³ The idea that there exists an inextricable link between the gift and its giver is important because it reinforces the notion that in giving something an individual is literally making a pledge of himself to the recipient, who perceives the act as such. Although based on his observations of Pacific Island societies, Mauss’s arguments are equally useful for understanding the gift-giving culture of sixteenth-century European countries such as France, whose economy rested on a system of reciprocity and gift redistribution in addition to bartering and local market sales. In examining the nature and significance of “the spirit of gifts” exchanged in France during this period, Davis shows how belief in the bond between individuals and their possessions was equally embedded within this culture, so much so that “to make

⁵¹Jones and Stallybrass, 8. The authors’ discussion centers on an analysis of Karl Marx’s theory of the fetishism of the commodity — laid out in the first volume of *Das Kapital*, section 4, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof” (Marx, 319–29) — and of how this theory implies that “the commodity comes to life through the death of the object” (Jones and Stallybrass, 8). For an in-depth critique of Marx’s theory, see Pietz.

⁵²Mauss, 22.

⁵³Ibid., 10.

gifts, things must be individual or ‘private’ enough to be given away.”⁵⁴ Dressed in miniature replicas of the fashions Isabella d’Este created and wore, the doll she sent to François I^{er} would have been charged with the memory of her personality and body. This gift would thus have been private enough to be worth giving and, therefore, to establish a particular connection between Isabella and the king. In turn, rather than perceiving the doll as a gift from her, François would have seen it as a gift of her: as an extension of Isabella’s being.⁵⁵

9. FRANÇOIS I^{ER} DRESSES HIS WOMEN

François I^{er}’s penchant for dressing his female courtiers was partly motivated by political concerns. At the time of his accession, the French royal court was still rooted in medieval traditions. François realized that his success as a ruler largely depended on his ability to transform this dusty relic into a gem dazzling enough to command the respect of allies and enemies alike. Using modern Italian courts as his model, the king set out to create an institution where polished manners and intellectual pursuits prevailed. In addition to enhancing his court’s cultural sophistication, François sought to heighten its visual impact through various means, including significantly increasing the number of women in his entourage and taking an active interest in shaping their image.⁵⁶ Indeed, the king

⁵⁴Davis, 13. For more on “the spirit of gifts” in sixteenth-century France, see *ibid.*, 11–22.

⁵⁵On 4 January 1519 François I^{er} received from Francesco Gonzaga a painting by Lorenzo Costa entitled *Venus with a Cornucopia* (1518, location unknown). The king’s reaction to the gift is described by Federico de’Preti (the brother of Ercole Gonzaga’s secretary) in a letter to the marquis in Cox-Rearick, 201: “He liked it very much and never tired of looking at it, and told me that he thanks Your Lordship a thousand times. . . . His Majesty the King asked me if it was of Madame’s [Isabelle d’Este’s] women, drawn from life, and I said I did not know. The King showed it to all these lords and gentlemen.” François’s eagerness to know whether the figure was modeled after one of the marchesa’s ladies-in-waiting suggests he may have perceived owning the image of a living woman as a substitute for having the woman herself.

⁵⁶Chatenet, 2002b, 27–28. Little is known about the household of François’s first wife, Claude de France, but at the onset of his reign, his mother, Louise de Savoy (1476–1531) had an entourage comprising thirty-one women. The household of François’s second wife, Eleanor (1498–1558), grew steadily from the time of their marriage in 1530. Fifty women were listed in the Queen’s household in 1531; by the end of François’s reign in 1547 the number had risen to ninety-eight.

recognized that a court that included a substantial and alluring female contingent was a powerful diplomatic weapon.⁵⁷

According to the Venetian ambassador Marino Cavalli, by the end of his reign François I^{er} was spending three times more on his female courtiers' pensions than on building.⁵⁸ This hardly seems an exaggeration when one examines the king's accounts, which not only list the extravagant sums he spent on his ladies' wardrobes, but also provide descriptions of the materials used for their confection. For example, a payment record dated 3 October 1538 states “221 *aulnes* of purple and crimson velvet to make twenty-two dresses for the service of twenty-two ladies, who are: Mainmillon, Myoland, Béatrix Pachecque, Torcy, Le Brueil, Mauvoysin, Monchenu, La Ferté, Lussinge, Tumbes, Boninceroy, Le Boys, La Chapelle, from the Queen's household; Heilly, Tallard, La Baulme, la jeune Maupas, Albanye, Brissac, Magdeleine, Katherine, Marguerite, from the household of My Ladies, in the amount of eleven *aulnes* for the said Torcy and ten *aulnes* for each of the others, at a cost of 14 *livres* per *aulne*, the sum of 3,094 *l.*”⁵⁹ The

⁵⁷According to Brantôme, 433, François declared that the way to ensure a guest's contentment was to greet him with a beautiful woman, a beautiful horse, and a beautiful hunting hound. François's interest in dictating the appearance of his women made a lasting impression on his daughter-in-law Catherine de' Medici, who perceived his reign as a golden age. As Frieda, 171, remarks, during her own reign “[Catherine] decided to employ the same principles for keeping nobles at peace that were once used by her revered father-in-law, Francis I, whose dictum had been: ‘Two things are vital for the French: to love their king and to live in peace; amuse them and keep them physically active.’” To this end, Catherine invited the most attractive women of her court to form a group which came to be known as her *escadron volant* (flying squadron). Numbering between eighty and three hundred depending on the source, these ladies were meant to distract the more meddlesome members of Catherine's court. To ensure her squadron's elegance, the queen required that they be “dressed like ‘goddesses’ in silk and gold cloth at all times” (ibid.). For more on this subject, see also Lazard, 258–59, 266–67. Catherine's occasional ally, Elizabeth I of England, also sought to regulate the appearance of her “Maids of Honour,” to whom she often made generous gifts of clothing and accessories. Documents suggest that certain groups of gowns ordered by the queen for her maids may have been a form of livery, as they were identical. For example, a record dated 1572 (Arnold, 100) indicates that Walter Fysche made eleven matching gowns of the finest materials for Elizabeth's ladies. Unlike Catherine de' Medici, who wore mourning throughout most of her reign, Elizabeth I had a penchant for elaborate, colorful fashions that made her the center of attention wherever she went. The English queen's interest in dictating her maids' attire may thus have been motivated by a desire to ensure they would not upstage her.

⁵⁸Wilson-Chevalier, 1999, 203.

⁵⁹Laborde, 1877–80, 2:399: “221 *aulnes* velloux violet cramoisy pour faire vingt-deux robes pour le service de vingt-deux demoiselles, savoir est: Mainmillon, Myoland, Béatrix Pachecque, Torcy, Le Brueil, Mauvoysin, Monchenu, La Ferté, Lussinge, Tumbes,

reader may recognize Heilly as the maiden name of François's second official mistress, the duchesse d'Étampes (1508–80: fig. 8). Torcy was probably larger than the other ladies, since she received an extra *aulne* of velvet. Additional payment records indicate the gowns were lined with white taffeta and embellished with silver cloth and thread for an additional 1,662 *livres*.⁶⁰ Each of the ladies' dresses thus cost approximately 216 *livres*, roughly the equivalent of a Fontainebleau painter's yearly salary.⁶¹ Although generous, this gift pales in comparison to others listed in the king's accounts. For instance, on 7 October of the same year Madame de Canaples, one of François's favorite mistresses, received 1,273 *livres* worth of gold cloth and taffeta for the creation of two dresses.⁶² Of course, such magnificent garments required equally dazzling accessories. To complete their look, François provided his ladies with velvet shoes, hats, feathers, furs, and jewelry.

Writing of the Abbey de Thélème's inhabitants, based by Rabelais (1494–1553) on François's courtiers, Lance Donaldson-Evans remarks that they are "in fact vacuous and static fashion dolls like those which were exchanged by the courts of Europe."⁶³ The extent to which François perceived the women of his court as fashion dolls, as objects serving to display his wealth and good taste, is suggested not only by the king's paying for his female courtiers' wardrobe, but also by his personally selecting what they wore.⁶⁴ In a letter to Isabella d'Este dated 11 July 1516, Stazio Gadio, Federico Gonzaga's secretary, provides the following description of a banquet hosted by the king: "That Sunday, the king threw a banquet and feast and had fourteen ladies dressed in the Italian manner, with rich garments that his Majesty brought from Italy. Twelve of the ladies were in the queen's service and two in the service of Madame de Bourbon; among those of the queen was Made-moiselle de Châteaubriant, Monsieur de Lautrec's sister, dressed in a gown of

Bonincero, Le Boys, La Chapelle, de la maison de la Roynne; Heilly, Tallard, La Baulme, la jeune Maupas, Albanye, Brissac, Magdeleine, Katherine, Marguerite, de la maison de Mesdames, qui sont onze aulnes pour lad. Torcy et dix aulnes pour chacune des autres, au pris de 14 l. l'aulne, la somme de 3,094 l."

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Fontainebleau painters generally received a monthly salary ranging between twelve and twenty *livres*. For example, from May to October 1536 Francesco Primaticcio and Rosso Fiorentino each received twenty *livres* per month for working on the château's stucco decorations and frescos: *ibid.*, 98–107.

⁶²Ibid., 402.

⁶³Donaldson-Evans, 10.

⁶⁴As Bouchot, 76, remarks: "François prevented [French women] from varying the essence of their toilette, although he allowed them a certain freedom in the details."



FIGURE 8. Attributed to Corneille de Lyon. *Anne d'Heilly, dame de Pisseleu, duchesse d'Étampes*, undated. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.197). Photograph, all rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

dark crimson velvet embroidered all over with gold chains bearing silver plaquettes well placed within the chains, on which were inscribed devices.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵Knecht, 1994, 117, n. 41: “Il Re fece quella dominica uno banchetto et festa et fece vestir quatordecì damselle all italiana, con riche veste che Sua Maestà portò de Italia, dodece

Thus, in addition to requesting a fashion doll from Isabella d'Este, François brought back garments from his Italian travels and dressed his ladies in them to enhance his banquet's visual appeal. Gadio pays particular attention to the toilette of Françoise de Foix, comtesse de Châteaubriant (1494–1537). As the king's first official mistress, her attire was probably more spectacular than that of her fellow ladies-in-waiting.⁶⁶

As much as François I^{er} admired Italian fashions, he despised Spanish ones. In fulfillment of the Treaty of Cambrai (1529) the king grudgingly married Charles V's sister, Eleanor, whose Castilian fashions enjoyed popularity at the French court. Fearful of seeing his entourage drown in a sea of puffed sleeves, the king discouraged his ladies from wearing Spanish dress unless they were native to that country.⁶⁷ François may even have been responsible for convincing Eleanor to abandon her sartorial roots.⁶⁸ Eager to assert her nationality, the queen elected to wear Spanish attire for her first French triumphal entry and in her early official portraits.⁶⁹ However,

vi erano dela Regina e due de Madame di Borbone; et tra qualle dila Regina eravi Made-moisella di Chiatobriant, sorella di monsignor di Leutrech, vestita d'una vesta di voluto morello cremosino recamata tutta de catena d'oro con tavolette di argento ben collocate nelle catene, sopra quale era scritto sponte.”

⁶⁶Françoise de Foix married Jean de Laval, seigneur de Châteaubriant, in 1509. She may have been present at court as early as 1516, serving as a lady-in-waiting to François's first wife, Claude de France, and may have remained François's mistress until his return from captivity in Spain in 1526. For more on the king's relationship with the comtesse de Châteaubriant, see Toudouze; Heim, 91–119, 134–80, 197–224.

⁶⁷Bouchot, 69–70.

⁶⁸See Anderson, 1981, 222; Wilson-Chevalier, 2002, 506–07.

⁶⁹Foreign queens had to choose whether or not to adopt French attire when making their debut. A queen's decision to wear her native fashions for her first public appearances may have been perceived as a sign of reluctance to embrace her new country. For more on this, see Anderson, 1981, 216; Wilson-Chevalier, 2002, 203; Cosandey, 171–72. Eleanor made a dazzling impression on her new subjects during her first entry into Bordeaux on 13 July 1530: “The Queen . . . dressed in the Spanish manner, had on her head a coif or crispine of gold cloth made of golden butterflies and in which was her hair, wound with ribbons, and hanging behind her down to her heels. She had a bonnet of crimson velvet covered with gems and trimmed with a white feather arranged like the one the king wore that day. Each of the Lady's ears was adorned with a gem the size of a walnut. Her dress of crimson velvet was lined with white taffeta and from its sleeves, which were covered with gold and silver embroidery, white taffeta was puffed out instead of the chemise. Her coat was of white satin and was covered all over with a design in beaten silver and an abundance of precious stones” (*Journal tenu par un bourgeois*, 2:152). Executed around the time of her arrival in France, Joos van Cleve's portrait of Eleanor (1530–31, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) shows her wearing an equally sumptuous Spanish outfit, consisting of a gold brocade gown with a bateau neckline and black-and-white detachable sleeves. For more on this and other versions of van Cleve's portrait of Eleanor, see Wilson-Chevalier, 2002, 503–04. For more on the queen's Spanish fashions, see Anderson, 1981.

As Wilson-Chevalier argues, images dating from the later thirties and early forties, such as Léonard Limosin’s enamel portrait of 1536 (Ecouen, Musée de la Renaissance), reveal that by then Eleanor’s appearance had acquired a distinctly French flair, as she is shown wearing the type of headdress, high collar, and flattened hairdo favored in her adopted country.⁷⁰ Given that seeing the Queen of France parade about in Spanish dress must have been a constant reminder of his defeat at the hands of Charles V, François is likely to have urged this transformation. The king may not have had a choice in marrying Eleanor, but he could hasten her assimilation and help curtail the spread of Spanish influence at his court by encouraging her to adopt French fashions.

In flaunting his elegantly groomed women at court, François not only sought to impress his guests, but to entice them as well. Displayed among lavish goods, painted, perfumed, and fashionably dressed, these women acted as reminders that beauty and the funds necessary to sustain it were within the reach of those who proved their loyalty to the king.⁷¹ While surrounding himself with alluring female courtiers may have been a tactical move on François’s part, it also satisfied his personal desires.⁷²

The king’s need for women attracted much criticism from his contemporaries, such as Jean de Saulx-Tavannes’s famous declaration “Alexander sees women when he has no business to tend to, François tends to business when he has no women to see.”⁷³ Such an accusation is hardly surprising, given the lengths to which the king went in order to indulge his

⁷⁰Wilson-Chevalier, 2002, 506–07, who points out that Eleanor is also portrayed wearing a *touret* and *chaperon* (a type of French headdress) in a drawing of ca. 1540 attributed to the Clouet workshop (Chantilly, Musée Condée).

⁷¹Bouchot, 71: “The toilettes [of the ladies of François’s court] matched the tapestries of the palaces, and were changed each time the court travelled.” Unfortunately, the author fails to provide a source for this information. If accurate, it attests to François’s desire to visually equate his ladies with his costliest possessions. Instead of merely exhibiting these women in an elaborate setting, the king would have literally made them a part of it, and, in doing so, reinforced their status as luxurious commodities.

⁷²Throughout his reign, François I^{er} was known for his loose sexual mores and his readiness to flirt with any woman who caught his eye, including married women and foreign royalty. Even Mary Tudor protested that the king made her a victim of unwanted advances: Knecht, 1994, 112. François I^{er} had multiple lovers in addition to his successive wives and official mistresses, and suffered from syphilis, although it remains unclear whether he died of complications resulting from the disease: see Heim, 75–90, 283–98; Knecht, 1994, 112–13, 557–58. Many of the king’s contemporaries commented on his philandering ways, including Antonio de Beatis, who remarked in his travel journal on 13 August 1517 that “the King . . . is a great womanizer and readily breaks into others’ gardens and drinks at many sources”: Beatis, 107.

⁷³Cited in Heim, 10: “Alexandre voit les femmes quand il n’a point d’affaires, François voit les affaires quand il n’a point de femmes.”

amorous pursuits, including reorganizing the court's routine so he could schedule more time in the company of women.⁷⁴ According to the Bishop of Saluzzo, François I^{er} systematically housed his hunting expeditions in small châteaux, knowing that court custom required that women had priority over men when it came to sleeping accommodations.⁷⁵ Having forced his potential competitors to find lodging elsewhere — preferably several miles away — the king was free to spend an evening enjoying the undivided attention of lavishly attired women.

François's decision to increase the number of women in his entourage and to dictate their appearance was thus clearly motivated by profoundly personal as well as political concerns. In a monologue describing man's capacity to love, a character from *L'Heptaméron* (1558) declares: "a child, depending on his age, loves apples, pears, dolls, and other little things, the most his eye can take in, and perceives wealth as the act of accumulating little pebbles, but as he grows older, he loves living dolls and accumulates the possessions necessary for human life."⁷⁶ Whether or not Marguerite de Navarre had her brother François in mind when she wrote this, he appears to have perceived certain women of his entourage as *poupines vives* (living dolls) for him to dress up, parade in public, and amuse himself with in private.

The extent to which François viewed his *petite bande* (band of ladies) as a collection of playthings may be gleaned from a story related in Brantôme's *Recueil des Dames* (1587).⁷⁷ As entertainment, the king reportedly called upon his magician, Gonin, to make his most beautiful female courtiers suddenly materialize, naked and posed.⁷⁸ Brantôme may not be

⁷⁴Chatenet, 2002a, 81.

⁷⁵Ibid., 81–82.

⁷⁶Marguerite de Navarre, 243: "L'enfant, qui selon sa petitesse ayme les pommes, les poires, les poupées et aultres petites choses, les plus que son oeil peut veoir, et estime richesse d'assembler les petites pierre, mais en croissant, aymes les poupines vives et amasse les biens nécessaires pour la vie humaine." This is one of two references to dolls that Manson, 537, uncovers in Marguerite de Navarre's literary oeuvre.

⁷⁷The term *petite bande* was coined by Brantôme to describe the group of women who constantly kept François I^{er} company. Heim, 79, notes that in addition to *dames de qualité* (honorable women) the king maintained prostitutes at his court.

⁷⁸Brantôme, 434. The author does not specify who François was with when this event reportedly took place, although he indicates the king was in "private company" ("compagnie privée"), which suggests that a small group was present to witness the disrobing of the court's ladies. Brantôme goes on to compare this "magic trick" to a supposed Ancient Egyptian practice: "I think this vision must have been as pleasant as the one of Egyptian ladies in Alexandria, who, for the greeting and reception of their great god Apis, went before him in a grand ceremony and, raising their dresses, coats, and undergarments, and hiking them up as far as they could, their legs spread far apart, showed [the Egyptian men] their private parts, and then, [the Egyptian men] no longer seeing them, thought that the women believed they had adequately paid their God through this."

the most reliable source, but — given the king’s penchant for risqué subject matter and staged illusions — it is highly likely he would have orchestrated such an event.⁷⁹ By displaying his women in this manner, François would not only have provided his guests with a provocative and amusing spectacle, but also demonstrated the scope of his authority. On a whim, the king had the power to divest these women of the very sartorial splendors he had bestowed upon them, and by doing so, strip them of their social significance. The sight of these vulnerable female bodies would, therefore, have served as a reminder to all that François could erase identities just as easily as he created them through gifts of titles, land, and money. Having used their clothed bodies to promote his wealth and power, François would thus have appropriated their nudity for the same purpose — and, in doing so, taken their objectification to a new level.

Compelling women to surrender their bodies to a collective voyeuristic gaze meant obliging them to transgress rules of feminine propriety and, therefore, to temporarily relinquish their place in civilized society.⁸⁰ In exposing and marginalizing his women in this manner, François would have further proven the extent to which they were his possessions, to do with as he pleased. In addition to shaping their appearance and manners, he could violate their modesty by publicly flaunting what lay beneath their sartorial armor, in the way a child might undress a doll and eagerly reveal its anatomical secrets (or lack thereof) to his playmates.⁸¹

10. CONCLUSION

At the same time François I^{er} was engaging in such conduct, he was also accepting the political council of, and affording significant authority to,

⁷⁹Royal feasts, masquerades, and theatrical representations took on a more sensual flair during François I^{er}’s reign: see Chatenet, 2002b, 217–25. Several foreign dignitaries commented on the dazzling displays they witnessed at the French court, including the Mantuan ambassador, Marcantonio Bendidio. In a letter dated 23 January 1539, Bendidio describes with awe one of François’s masked balls, which featured cross-dressed ladies and a group of satyrs cavorting with nymphs whose costumes revealed “the back of their necks” and “most of their busts”: *ibid.*, 224.

⁸⁰For more on the significance of publicly undressing the female body, see Jones and Stallybrass, 220–44.

⁸¹As the following advertisement, dated 1880, for the Parisian doll Bébé Jumeau suggests, much of the appeal of these objects — and, by extension, of women reduced to their status — lies in their defenselessness: “As for my disposition, it is of the sweetest. Possessed of matchless philosophy my placidness is unbounded. You may according to the impulse of the moment of your fancy, caress or flog me, kiss or strike me, hold me topsy turvey, or dash me to the ground; I shall smile nonetheless” (Peers, 91). Note that Bébé Jumeau describes herself in this manner.

certain women of his entourage. The king was particularly attached to his mother, Louise de Savoie (1476–1531), and to his sister, Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549). Despite their markedly different personalities, they were equally devoted to François and influenced his views on a wide range of subjects, including politics and religion. So involved was Louise in national and foreign policymaking that her detractors dubbed her the “King of France.”⁸² Marguerite, an accomplished author and deeply devout woman, was often at her brother’s side, counseling him in matters of the state and of the heart. Even when her evangelical sympathies placed her — and, by extension, François — in a precarious position, he invariably sided with her when she came under attack, despite that doing so provided his enemies with grounds for questioning his commitment to the fight against heresy.⁸³ François equally adored his official mistresses, first Françoise de Foix, comtesse de Châteaubriant, and later Anne d’Heilly, duchesse d’Étampes, described by a foreign visitor as the “the real president of the king’s most private and intimate council.”⁸⁴ In addition to offering these

⁸²Wilson-Chevalier, 1993, 45. Ignoring the Parliament of Paris’ protestations, François chose his mother to serve as regent during both his Italian campaigns and defended the initiatives she took during his absences. The extent of Louise de Savoie’s power over her son may be gleaned from the following letter, written by Thomas Wolsey while he served as ambassador to the French court in 1521 (Knecht, 1994, 113): “I have seen in divers things since I came hither that when the French king would stick at some points, and speak very great words, yet my Lady would qualify the matter; and sometimes when the king is not contented he will say nay, and then my Lady must require him, and at her request he will be contented; for he is so obeissant to her that he will refuse nothing that she requireth him to do, and if it had not been for her he would have done wonders.” For more on Louise de Savoie’s relationship with her son, see Orth.

⁸³While Marguerite de Navarre never officially renounced Catholicism, her beliefs reflected a profound admiration of humanistic thought and Lutheran ideology. In addition to expressing her views in poetry and prose, she opened her court at Nérac to scholars and religious reformers fleeing persecution in France, including Rabelais, Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (1450–1536), and Bonaventure des Périers (1500–44). Marguerite’s beliefs earned her many enemies, particularly among the faculty of the University of Paris, whose members encouraged the staging of a satirical play in October 1533 that portrayed her as a malicious heretic. When word of this reached François, he called for the arrest of those responsible, but the play’s author was never apprehended: Knecht, 1994, 308–09. For more on Marguerite de Navarre’s religious views, see Lefranc; Stephenson.

⁸⁴Knecht, 1994, 395. Anne d’Heilly, dame de Pisseleu, served as a lady-in-waiting to Louise de Savoie when she first met François I^{er} at the age of eighteen. The king arranged Anne’s marriage to Jean de Brosse in 1534 and awarded them the county of Étampes. The duchesse remained François’s official mistress until his death in 1547 and was then banned from court by Henri II (1519–59) and his mistress, Diane de Poitiers (1499–1566). For more on François’s relationship with the duchesse d’Étampes, see Heim; Wilson-Chevalier, 1999.

women lavish gifts of jewels, titles, and land, François encouraged them to play significant roles at court. The duchesse d'Étampes not only sought to steer François's artistic choices — favoring Francesco Primaticcio (1504/05–70), she vehemently fought for Benvenuto Cellini's (1500–71) dismissal — she also succeeded in obtaining the political advancement of many of her protégés and in securing the demise of her most troublesome adversaries.⁸⁵

François's willingness to yield considerable power to these women suggests he was sensitive to the notions of gender reciprocity and complimentarity evoked by Marguerite de Navarre and authors engaged in the literary debate known as *la querelle des femmes* (The Women Question).⁸⁶ However, although he afforded certain women of his entourage a prominent voice in various matters, including those of state, the king granted his ladies little autonomy when it came to elaborating their toilette. That he took the initiative of requesting a fashion doll from Isabella d'Este demonstrates the extent to which he regarded the construction of women's physical identity as a male prerogative. In dressing his ladies according to his preference, François I^{er} treated them as living dolls — and, in doing so, not only satisfied his fantasies, but also asserted his right to govern one of their most valuable assets: their appearance.

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⁸⁵For more on the duchesse d'Étampes's antagonistic relationship with Cellini, see Vickers. Among those whose fall from grace the duchesse helped orchestrate was Anne de Montmorency (1493–1567), Constable of France and close friend of François I^{er}. When Montmorency's attempts to mend Franco-Imperial relations failed in 1540, his enemies — chief among them the duchesse d'Étampes — were quick to accuse him of purposefully misleading François for his own profit. Although the Constable was driven from court, he maintained a close relationship with the future Henri II, and returned to power when the latter succeeded François I^{er} in 1547. For more on the Constable's life and career, see Bedos Rezak.

⁸⁶During François I^{er}'s reign, the notion of women as morally and intellectually inferior beings was increasingly challenged by those advocating the Neoplatonic concept of women as the mirror image of men. At the heart of this dispute stood the *joute littéraire* (literary joust) known as *La Querelle des Femmes*, which addressed a wide range of topics, including women's education, their role in marriage, and their capacity to love. One of the most famous works stemming from this debate was Bertrand de La Borderie's *L'Amie de cour* (1542), whose witty heroine staunchly defends her right to a marriage founded on mutual respect and equality. For more on *la querelle des femmes*, see Berriot-Salvadore, 45–116, 369–90; Lazard, 28–35; Telle; Villemur.

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