LABERINTO

Fashion and Nationalism:
Political Critique in Early Modern Costume Books

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The sixteenth-century genre of the costume book illustrates early modern conceptions of nationalism in a variety of ways.[1] These lavishly illustrated books, which are often labeled with the German moniker *trachtenbuch*, typically contain an encyclopedic selection of woodcuts or engravings showcasing a wide range of subjects from a variety of countries dressed in national costumes.[2] In both word and image, they attempt to define what constitutes the nation and what should be categorized as foreign or uncivilized by virtue of a curious display of fashion plates and accompanying prose or verse commentary. Occasionally, costume books offer unflattering representations of certain nations/peoples that can be read as political critique. One particular volume, the costume book *Omnium fere gentium* (Antwerp, 1572), contains a variety of revisions of earlier depictions from a French costume book that appear to respond to Spanish repression during the Dutch Revolt. In addition to exploring the significance of these modifications, the following article has two ancillary objectives. First, a brief overview of the genre will highlight the ways in which costume books were a form of expressing nationalism during the early modern period. Second, given the large number of propagandistic images produced during the conflict between Spain and the Low Countries, the importance of print culture during this rebellion and its centrality as a form of consolidating national identity will be examined.

Throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, costume books were published in the principal European centers for printing in Italy, France, Germany, and the Low Countries.[3] Scholars have noted that the genre's appearance corresponds to the widespread publication of encyclopedic compilations and world maps during this period (Ilg 33-8). While increased international commerce and travel made the exchange of textiles and styles of dress more common, the invasion of foreign fashions could be viewed as a threat. In examining the backlash against the importation of French, Spanish, and Italian textiles in England, Hentschell

identifies a strain of nationalistic discourse: "…it is the very 'force of fashion' that can work to create a sense of nation. The threat of the other, and specifically the threat of the other's *clothes*, works to consolidate the importance of the English cloth industry for its subjects" (52).[4] The fashion catalogue included in the costume book functioned not only as a means of displaying the wares available in other lands but also as a form of defining the appropriate and customary clothing of a particular nation.[5] Wilson comments that, despite regional variations, similarities in forms of dress would foster a sense of collective identity in particular nations:

> Viewers from Venice, for example, would have identified more easily with Roman or Florentine attire than with the more articulated garments worn by those from distant lands. The conventions would have enabled Italians to compare their clothing with that of other locales, screening out the details that protruded beyond the contained contours of those costumes found in European centres. (*The World* 76)

In this way, by forcing viewers to recognize similarities and differences in visual representations of sartorial practice, Wilson asserts that costume books "...participated in the process of forging national boundaries" (*The World* 76). In regards to a volume produced in a particular country, often this sense of nationalism was produced not only by creating an identity in opposition to foreign dress but also by selecting or critiquing particular local types as being representative (or not) of the nation.[6]

The costume book's focus on particular regional and national identities, as well as its establishment of an explicit center/periphery by virtue of the locales chosen, makes it a fascinating genre for the study of early modern nationalism(s). This is particularly true in relation to costume books printed in the Low Countries since Dutch printers often reformulated works published in France, Germany, or Italy. An analysis of the costume book *Omnium fere gentium*, which was produced during the initial phase of the Dutch Revolt, will highlight how the nationalistic thrust of the costume book manifests itself most clearly in relation to the political critique of foreign nations deemed hostile or uncivilized. *Omnium fere gentium* is largely a copy of the French costume book, *Recueil de la diversité* (Paris, 1562), which is often discussed as "the first costume book."[7] Since this French volume was produced for a child, the young King Henry IV of France, it has a slightly more humorous tone than other examples. The illustrations of

figures from a variety of nations are complemented by depictions of fantastic creatures, such as the "Episcopus marinus [Sea Bishop]" and the "Monachus marinus [Sea Monk]" (Fig. 1), which appear to communicate the "monstrosity" of Catholics.[8] In *Recueil de la diversité* many of the figures are explicitly labeled as "savages" and anti-Catholic sentiment is often apparent (Jones "Habits" 105-16, Urness viii).[9] Some of the unflattering illustrations in the volume include the portrait of an avaricious Portuguese woman, negative representations of members of the clergy, and the image of a "shameful" Spanish maiden (Fig. 2).[10]

With the exception of the illustration of "Le sauvage en pompe [The savage on display]" (Shannon 136), all of the images from *Recueil de la diversité* are retained in the costume book printed in Antwerp. However, instead of beginning with a voluminous series of illustrations of French costume, *Omnium fere gentium* arranges the figures alphabetically (Fig. 3). Close scrutiny of the illustrations from the two texts reveals some of the differences between the French and Dutch editions. In the costume book printed in Antwerp, it appears that both the borders of each illustration and the images themselves were printed from new woodcuts. The figures are very similar but slight differences attest to the fact that an artist simply sketched from the French costume book and new woodblocks were created for printing. The Dutch book, in addition to moving the text to face each illustration, also incorporates Latin epigrams by Jacobus Sluperius to accompany the French quatrains.[11] Nevertheless, as shall become apparent, not all of these epigrams can be considered "translations" and some of the original French poems were rewritten.

Figure 1. "Monachus marinus / Le Moyne marin"
Omnium fere gentium (Antwerp, 1572)
(Copyright Bayerische Staatsbibliothek)

Figure 2. "Hispana Mulier tonsa / La tondue d'Espaigne"
Omnium fere gentium (Antwerp, 1572)
(Copyright Bayerische Staatsbibliothek)

Figure 3. "Index Alphabeticus"
Omnium fere gentium (Antwerp, 1572)
(Copyright Bayerische Staatsbibliothek)

Given that *Omnium fere gentium* was published in Antwerp in 1572, a period of great political conflict between Spain and the Low Countries, both the historical context of the book's publication and the role of print culture in the rebellion against Spain are of utmost relevance. From the start of the Dutch Revolt, the printing press was a central means for representatives on both sides of the conflict to disseminate ideological and political messages. In her study of Hapsburg forms of communicating with the local populace during the conflict, Stensland argues that scholars have primarily examined Dutch propaganda and have failed to recognize the wide variety of forms of communication that were employed by the Spanish Crown (16).[12] These forms include proclamations, edicts, notices of ceremonial events (royal entries, religious processions, the commemoration of military events, etc.), pamphlets, and visual media (Stensland 18-23). Spanish political tracts and propaganda that circulated in the Low Countries provoked the local population to produce a plethora of printed matter that invoked nationalistic, anti-Catholic, and anti-Spanish discourse. While

increasing religious intolerance and excessive taxation were important contributors to the Dutch Revolt, the loss of local autonomy and the military intervention of the Spanish regime were key issues that helped to unite disparate sectors of the population.

Omnium fere gentium was published a few years after the Iconoclastic Fury or *Beeldenstorm* (1566), in which rebellious Dutch Calvinists destroyed altarpieces, statues, paintings, and other sacred Catholic images. In response to these open signs of rebellion and heresy, King Philip II promptly replaced the Governor-General Margaret of Parma with the more tyrannical Duke of Alba. After his arrival in the summer of 1567, Alba immediately began to undermine any past concessions and to suppress dissent. He quickly earned the nickname of "Iron Duke" by forming the infamous "Council of Blood," punishing the rebels, and vowing to stamp out any remnants of "...heresy, privileges and local autonomy" (Gelderen 40). Furthermore, Alba viewed censorship as a key tool and passed new laws regarding printed matter. As Stensland explains:

> …the revised overall censorship legislation that was issued in 1570 took as its point of departure that heresy and rebellion had been able to spread thanks to the "desordre" among printers, booksellers and schoolmasters, and that this was what made increased control of current practices both necessary and desirable. (38)

In spite of these new prohibitions, Dutch presses quickly spread graphic images of Alba's repressive regime, particularly of the violent executions of local nobles (Stensland 37).[13] Arnade proposes that the discourse of patriotism united the many regional, religious, and class factions in the Low Countries: "Rebels responded to Alba's governorship with a stream of patriotic lore vented in cheap prints, engravings, and pamphlets that portrayed the Netherlands as an imagined *patria* of virtuous citizens hounded by a zealous despoiler of cities and their rights" (169). Given the low rates of literacy in the Netherlands during this period, both word *and image* were central in the propaganda produced during the Dutch revolt (Stensland 16, 23-4).

The publication of *Omnium fere gentium* (1572) occurs after what Parker labels the "First Revolt" (against Margaret of Parma) and during the initial stages of the "Second Revolt" (against the Duke of Alba). It also coincides with the Spanish Crown's celebration of victory in the Battle of Lepanto (1571), which prompted the organization of elaborate celebrations

throughout the Low Countries that served to foment Spanish hegemony by underlining Philip II's military might (Stensland 35). The Dutch population appears to have recognized that these ceremonial events were part of the Hapsburg propaganda machine and viewed these celebrations with much antipathy. The local populace was particularly united in their opposition to the military occupation of towns throughout the Low Countries and could not view Spain's victory as a triumph. As Stensland argues, "…the regime's self-congratulatory discourse does not appear to have had much effect among those who had reasons to resent what the regime stood for" (35). The censorship of printing, along with the Spanish Crown's use of imperial celebrations as a visual reminder of its power, only further encouraged the local population to produce antagonistic texts.

Given this context, it is interesting to note that many of the explicitly anti-Catholic strains of the French costume book were removed from *Omnium fere gentium*. While the fantastic sea monsters in the shape of Church authorities were retained, the more scandalous French quatrains that were openly critical of members of the clergy were modified. The original poem describing "The monk" proclaims:

> Ce pourtrait cy que voyez, vous delivre,
> Du moyne au vif, ayant en main son livre.
> Si d'aventure il n'ayme la vertu,
> Pour recompense il est ainsi vestu. (Shannon 169)[14]

In the Dutch edition, however, the poem was revised to conclude by affirming the monk's virtuousness: "Il admoneste de ensuivre les vertuz, / S'il ne fait bien se trouvera confuz [He encourages all to follow the virtues / If he didn't do good, he would be confused.]" (103v).

Similarly, the French edition of 1567 begins by describing "The prior" as large and fat: "Pourtrait est cy, un gros et gras prieur [This portrait that you see, a large and fat prior]" (Deserps 23). In contrast, the Dutch version starts by presenting him as an honorable man: "Pourtrait est cy, l'honorable Prieur [This portrait that you see, the honorable Prior]." [15] These modifications in the descriptions of Catholic figures throughout the costume book reflect the repressive climate of the period, although it remains unclear if the changes were mandated by Spanish authorities or if the publishers reformulated the text from the very beginning for fear of punishment or censorship. The prefatory material of the book does include an approval dated 1569 by "Phillipus de Almaraz, Canonicus Antuerpien"

that seems to clearly indicate that censors sought to eliminate anti-Catholic rhetoric. Almaraz assures the reader that the volume "nil continet quod sit contra fidem Catholicam, aut quod pias aures offendere possit [does not contain that which is against the Catholic faith nor that which would offend pious ears]" (2).

While it is also possible that the printers of *Omnium fere gentium* were faithful Catholics, the revisions that praise Church authorities do not constitute the only major change in the Dutch costume book. The removal of negative images of the Catholic Church, which was most likely a response to Spanish censorship, is accompanied by other revisions that could be considered expressions of patriotic sentiment. Some of the Latin epigram "translations," unlike the often vapid French quatrains, seem to offer pointed responses to Spanish repression and alternative visions of Dutch subjects. While Alba's regime justified a broad range of punishments by alleging that the Dutch were heretical and rebellious, the Latin epigram provided to accompany the illustration of the "Flander" provides a contrary view (Fig. 4). While most of the Latin epigrams are loose translations of the French, this one seems to respond to the original quatrain that merely claims that Flemish men enjoy wearing short robes and are not quick to change their habits:

> Si du Flament veut sçavoir la vesture,
> Sa courte robe et sa maniere aussi
> Tu le verras par ceste pourtraiture
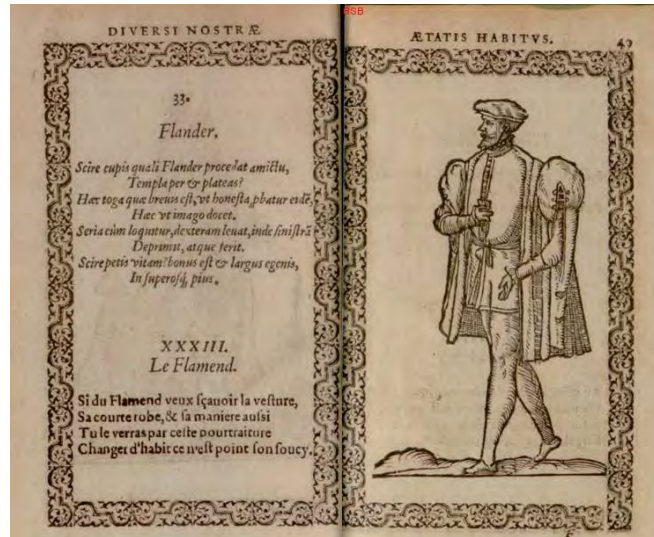> Changer d'habit ce n'est point son soucy. (Shannon 168)[16]

Figure 4. "Flander / Le Flamend"
Omnium fere gentium (Antwerp, 1572)
(Copyright Bayerische Staatsbibliothek)

The Latin epigram, which is twice the length of the French original, seems to question this simplistic view. In providing a verbal portrait of the Flemish, it stresses qualities that are the antithesis of Alba's allegations: "…bonus est et largus egenis / In superosque pius [The Flemish man is good and generous to the needy / Unequal in conquering and pious]" (48v). The poem underlines Christian qualities and also provides a response to Spanish domination by suggesting militaristic ones. The altered commentary on the nature of the Flemish man serves to provide a critical response to the religious oppression, censorship, and military action that was initiated by the Duke of Alba.

Figure 5. "Flandrensis puella / La fille Flamende"
Omnium fere gentium (Antwerp, 1572)
(Copyright Bayerische Staatsbibliothek)

Another epigram that even more directly incites patriotic sentiment accompanies the illustration for the "fille Flamende" (Fig. 5). The original quatrain is somewhat simplistic and merely proclaims: "Qui fille belle et freche voir demande / … Doit contempler ceste fille Flamende [Whoever asks to see a girl who is beautiful and youthful / … Must contemplate this Flemish girl (Shannon 57)]" (Shannon 165). While the illustration is identical to the French edition, the Latin epigram that was added to the Dutch volume starts by introducing the maiden and ends with a call to battle. Though the figure of the "Flemish girl" only represents one of the provinces of the Low Countries, a young maiden was often used as a symbol for the entire nation in Dutch propaganda. Furthermore, the epigram accompanying the image seems to incite military action against the Spanish. After reading the Latin poem, which mentions several occupied cities, Dutch readers would be challenged to take up arms and reclaim the Low Countries:

Insignem facie vides puellam,

> Formosamque, comis, aevoque virente decoram,
> Quales Flandria nostra fert frequentes.
> At si quis nolit vel pictis credere tornis,
> Aut bis carminibus libellulisque
> Oppida Flandra petat, Gandensia moenia primo,
> Hinc Hypras adeat, deinde Brugas. (52v)[17]

The Latin poem shifts from a description of the maiden/motherland to what appears to be an invitation to visit the principal cities of Flanders to see such a maiden. Nevertheless, given the political context of the book's publication, these concluding lines sound like a battle cry. The verb forms of "petere" and "adire" from the closing verses, which have been rendered as "march," can also be translated as "attack." It is possible that this suggestion of the necessity of military action in the name of the Flemish maiden, while invoking a symbolic manifestation of the motherland, alludes specifically to the occupation of particular cities in Flanders by Spanish forces and calls on Dutch readers to defend the nation.

Although *Omnium fere gentium* does not provide a national costume to illustrate "the Netherlands" as a united entity nor does it link each of the provinces within a common frame, it exemplifies the role of a variety of print genres during the Dutch Revolt. It is apparent that from the very beginning of the rebellion, Spanish rule was viewed as a repressive regime that was to be contested not only by military action but also by means of the printing press. Despite prohibitions on propaganda and strict censorship laws, printers in the Low Countries produced very graphic images of Spanish repression as well as more subtle responses that served to consolidate a collective (national) identity in opposition to the representations of Dutch identity that were created by foreign powers. In his analysis of the anti-Hapsburg underpinnings of Dutch patriotism, Arnade concludes that centuries of regional divisions were finally forgotten in a battle against a common enemy:

> After the revolt of 1572, however, the figure of the citizen-patriot became inseparable from heady talk about the fatherland, a ratcheting up of an awareness of a cultural identity as Netherlanders … Not coincidentally, an affective attachment to the Netherlands as a territory steadily emerged among those in opposition to Habsburg political and religious policies. (11)

While Arnade's comprehensive study of the Dutch Revolt primarily highlights paternalistic conceptual metaphors, such as devotion to "the fatherland" and "the father prince" (William of Orange), the figure of the Dutch maiden as motherland frequently appears in printed images from the period as well. In a broadsheet entitled "Tirannie van Alva" (Fig. 6), for example, the seventeen provinces are personified by a group of maidens that sit in chains before the demonic Alba while paralyzed Dutch magistrates look upon them in silence.[18] Over time, however, these multiple maidens would gradually become consolidated into a single figure that would represent the motherland and a collective national identity in a variety of propagandistic illustrations. It is noteworthy that in the image that appears in a broadsheet entitled "Het Testament van het Twaalfjarig Bestand [Testament of the Twelve-Years Truce]" (Fig. 7), which loosely follows some of the elements of "Tirannie van Alva" in the central grouping of figures, a single maiden representing the Netherlands sits in one corner to accept the terms of the truce.

Given their position within a politically subordinate occupied space, Dutch publishers were reformulating the genre of the costume book within a quasi-colonial milieu and a period of crisis. While publishers in Italy, France, and Germany focused primarily on the fashions of their respective nations and provided limited space for more "peripheral" regions, the costume books printed in the Netherlands were able to revise some of the representations created by these foreign powers and simultaneously contest Spanish domination. In this sense, *Omnium fere gentium* and other politically-oriented forms of print culture that were produced during the Dutch Revolt seem to reveal that early modern nationalism was most fervent when the nation was under siege. As the rebellion against Spain intensified, the printing press would continue to be a central mode of both creating a collective identity and disseminating political critique in order to foster the creation of what would become the United Provinces of the Netherlands.

Figure 6. "Tirannie van Alva" (ca. 1569). Willem Jacobsz. RP-P-OB-79.001.
(Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum)

Figure 7. Top Portion of "Het Testament van het Twaalfjarig Bestand"
(1615) Claes Jansz. RP-P-OB-80.795. (Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum)

[1] The costume book is discussed at length in Wilson's *The World in*

[2] The precursors of the sixteenth-century costume book include a variety of illustrated travel narratives that contain depictions of foreign dress. There are a few modern editions/translations of costume books (Rosenthal and Jones, Shannon) and a number of costume books have been either partially or completely digitized. *Omnium fere gentium* (Antwerp, 1572), the principal focus of this article, can be viewed on the website of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Bavarian State Library): http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0002/bsb00028653/image_1 . The third edition of *Recueil de la diversité* (Paris, 1567) is available on the website of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. An example from Italy that is similarly titled *Omnium fere gentium* is available in two editions on the website of the Biblioteca Nacional de España. The most beautiful digitized example in the BNE collection is an exquisite copy of *Habitus praecipuorum populorum* (Nuremburg, 1577) that features hand-colored woodcuts by Jost Amman.

[3] Examples of printed Hispanic costume books appear to be a later phenomenon. The earliest volume printed in Spain that follows the conventions of the costume book might be Cruz Cano y Olmedilla's *Colección de trajes de España, tanto antiguos como modernos* (Madrid, 1777). Still, there is evidence of the circulation of costume books in the Spanish Empire as well as the existence of an active manuscript tradition of documenting costume (Cummins, Rosenthal and Jones 28).

[4] Hentschell cites the influential study of Renaissance clothing by Jones and Stallybrass. Wilson also demonstrates that the loss in popularity of traditional Venetian forms of dress in favor of Spanish and French clothing was viewed to be analogous to military and political domination (*The World* 71).

[5] Both Defert and Jones ("Habits") discount the value of the costume book as a form of cataloguing contemporary fashion and primarily view the genre as a form of early modern ethnography.

[6] Ilg discusses the parallel between discussions of local "costume" and "custom" in examples of the genre (43-7) while Jones makes a similar distinction in relation to the dual significance of "habit" ("Habits"). Wilson notes that Venetian costume books often include images of the "cortesana" and display a dichotomy between "bad" and "respectable" women (*The World* 111-20). Guaman Poma's manuscript *Nueva coronica* also falls within

this tradition as the Andean chronicler presents a series of unflattering portraits of Spaniards that depict their dress while narrating their misdeeds.

[7] Wilson states that records indicate that Enea Vico applied for a copyright in 1557 for the costume book *Diversarum gentium aetatis habitus*, which would make that publication earlier than the French volume (*The World* 292; note 3).

[8] *Recueil de la diversité* includes illustrations of four mythical creatures: the Cyclops, the Sea Monk, the Sea Bishop, and the Walking Monkey of Peru. See Jones ("Habits" 108-21) and Shannon (158; note 7) for further analysis of these images of "monsters."

[9] Shannon's edition of *Recueil de la diversité* (1562), which is based on a hand-colored first edition copy in the collection of the James Ford Bell Library of the University of Minnesota, is slightly different from the 1567 digitized edition held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Deserps) in that the type face used (*civilité*) is more difficult to read (Urness vii). There are also some slight changes in some of the quatrains (See note 14). I will primarily cite Shannon's facsimile edition of *Recueil de la diversité* (particularly for transcriptions and translations).

[10] Shannon posits that this woman, "La tondue d'Espaigne [the shorn woman of Spain]," (109) is most likely a sorceress charged by the Inquisition given her tambourine, shaved head, and the reference to shameful acts (158; note 9). It is also possible that she is a prostitute of the Spanish army, as Trexler describes them marching with the soldiers dressed like men (52).

[11] Although these quatrains are usually attributed to François Deserps, Jones disputes this claim ("Habits" 96).

[12] Stensland cites Harline's study as being representative of the focus on the Dutch rebels' use of print culture.

[13] Arnade's book also includes many images from this period (190, 206-7).

[14] [The portrait that you see, depicts for you, /A true-to-life monk, / holding his book in his hand. / If by chance he does not care for virtue, / To compensate he is dressed like this] (Shannon 77).

[15] Curiously, some of the anti-Catholic descriptions were already revised in later editions of *Recueil de la diversité* (1564 and 1567). Nearly all of the original French quatrains proclaim that secular and regular clergy are

well-dressed but devoid of faith. For example, the description of "The Canon" is unflattering in the first French edition: "Gras et refait n'est seulement un moine / Fort bien nourri, bien couché, bien vestu: / Mais ainsi aise est le riche chanoine, Garny d'habits et non pas de vertu. [Not only is a monk fat and vigorous, / (He is) well fed, comfortably bedded, well dressed. / But the rich canon is thus content, / Adorned with clothes and not with virtue. (Shannon 76)]" (Shannon 169). Nevertheless, this quatrain was reformulated in subsequent editions and the revised (more reverent) quatrain is what appears in the Dutch edition: "Quand le Chanoine veut aller au Monstier / Pour assister à son divin service, / De tel habit il se vest volontier [When the Canon wishes to go to the Monastery / to attend his divine service / he usually wears this habit]" (*Omnium* 38v).

[16] [If you want to know about the clothes of a Flemish man, / His short robe and also his manner, / You will by this portrait, / To change his style of clothes is not his worry] (Shannon 72).

[17] [You see the figure of a remarkable girl / Beautiful and courteous, and with the passage of time, full of youth and grace / So like those our Flanders produces in great numbers. / Yet if some shall refuse to believe that such beauty is pictured / Nor heed the two poems of this little book / Then march through the province of Flanders, first to the ramparts of Ghent / Onward to Ypres march, then to Bruge].

[18] In reality, there are only thirteen maidens in this engraving but they are labeled as "the provinces." This broadsheet is a copy of one that is entitled "Alba's Throne," which does attempt to squeeze seventeen maidens into the picture. For a detailed analysis of this image, see Arnade (205-6) and Nierop (29-30).

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