Lesser-known precursor to the fop and the dandy, the English galaunt (gallant), or “man of fashion,” is perhaps best known as a socioliterary type in early modern English drama. Scholars of this period have pointed out the important role that the early modern gallant plays in processes and notions of both social and theatrical performance, outlining the ways in which these ever-stylish theater-going, tavern-haunting, attention-seeking, moneyless young Englishmen became associated with dramatic players, theatrical presentations, and the process of playwriting itself in this period. The impressive list of early modern playwrights who wrote about gallants—which includes Shakespeare, Marlowe, Middleton, Dekker, Marston, and Jonson, as well as anonymous authors of several morality plays—has tended to obscure the presence of this figure in other genres, cultural arenas, and time periods, however. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the primary characteristics of the English galaunt as a literary type crystallized for writers long before its association with drama.
or the early modern stage. As the consummate figure of sartorial imitation and changeability in a society that was in the process of shaping a national social identity largely according to the same terms, the fashionable galaunt was a compelling topic for late-medieval English writers, who used the figure to confront and organize questions about, among other things, the creative energies expressed by ever-changing fashions, about English *varietas vestium* as a national style, and about the connection between emerging literary and vestimentary aesthetics.

The cultural valence of the English galaunt as a late-medieval topic of interest can be seen in the extensive and diverse body of literature that touches on the subject in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which includes poems, ballads, lyrics, chronicles, sermons, conduct manuals and other didactic literature, as well as the dramas that precede the early modern association of galaunts with thespian players. The most common characteristic attributed to these figures is their capacity for stylistic change, and in particular their ability to aestheticize change through various forms of sartorial vacillation. Most often described as “fresshe” or “newe,” galaunts are said not only to change their outfits frequently but also to wear forms of clothing that stage their own stylistic mutability in the changing shapes of doublets, sleeves, hose, codpieces, and shoes or through their hybridized and pluralized colors, ornaments, fabrics, and fillers. The personal characteristics of galaunts further embody changefulness: gamblers by nature, they are described as penniless, wandering revelers who regularly overindulge in decadent drink, food, and entertainment. The radically aestheticized worldview presented by these figures is exemplified by their Frenchified public slogan, *vive la bel* [long live beauty], as well as by their highly stylized forms of speech or song, poetic forms such as macaronic and doggerel verse, acrostics, ballads, and carols.

Following the argumentative thread of my previous chapters, I am most interested in examining the literary galaunt’s potential as a fulcrum for late-medieval English responses to aesthetic changes in their culture and to the related notion of worldly transience more broadly. That is, although this figure is often comical, I would like to read the trope of the late-medieval English galaunt for the serious cultural work it accomplishes, work that in many ways complements, for example, that of Griselda in the same periods of English literary history. Whereas, as I discuss in the previous chapter, Griselda proved helpful to late-medieval writers as an example of stoic steadfastness in the face of material abundance and fluctuation, the galaunt represents the Englishman who changes with every new whim that fashion dictates. Whereas the Clerkly narrator of Chaucer’s tale overtly shuns liter-
ary ornament, the poems on the galaunt that I will examine in this chapter revel in the creative pleasures of ornamental poetics. Both Griselda and the galaunt are repeatedly imagined by poets as victims on Fortune's wheel; yet while Griselda confronts the experience of material changeability with unmoving patience and resistance, the galaunt, as a more overtly satirical figure, embraces worldly change as a source of power and happiness. Griselda and the galaunt are both extreme exemplars of the manner in which a late-medieval individual might respond to worldly fluctuations and to the fashions that came to represent those fluctuations, and each also represents the importance of clothing as a tool for medieval writers who wished to explore more generally the allure of aesthetic novelty.

As the diverging tones of this chapter's two epigraphs suggest—one denoting the onerous “hevynesse” brought about by the galaunts, the other, their lighthearted festiveness—late-medieval literary portrayals of galaunts tended to vacillate between typecasting these figures of fashion as nation-destroying degenerates or as superficial lyric diversions. In the two poems that I will analyze most comprehensively in this chapter, these stereotypical aspects of the literary galaunt work together in a dialectic relationship that aggressively interrogates the larger cultural phenomenon of aesthetic changeability. As I will discuss, the meaning of these poems rests in the opposition between gravity and frivolity; the frivolity of the galaunts' ever-changing fashions and playful lifestyle is cast in opposition to the grave incidents of military insurgency and national misfortune that they are said to incite. Each poem presents the galaunts' radical aesthetic as a visual event tied to a moment of military and social crisis: one on the eve of the Uprising of 1381 and another in the context of the equally fractious Jack Cade revolt of 1450. While these poems single out contemporary insurgents as the originators of the galaunts' startling appearance—the earlier poem targets liveried retinues, while the later poem points to those English soldiers who have recently returned from final defeat in France—they also effectively offset their moral concerns about England's new galaunt aesthetic with poetic experiments that themselves mimic galaunt stylistic elements. Underscoring these poets' interests in the aesthetic value of galaunts' changeable, diversified style are suggestions that the galaunt is a trope that refigures the contemporary English experience of cultural and linguistic polyvalency: whether presented as a hybrid appropriation of French style, as a touchstone of English *varietas vestium*, or as the fulfillment of a recurring prophecy that links their changing fashions to England's own fragmented linguistic history, the galaunt of these poems seems inherently to personify the late-medieval English aesthetic experience.
Charles Baudelaire described the later dandy as a figure who emerges in societies in transition and whose aesthetic power resides in part in his ability to traverse, through his singular attention to mannered form, temporal and cultural upheavals. The medieval English galaunt functions as such a crossover figure, not merely because he is presented as emerging and thriving in particular moments of social, political, and economic upheaval, but also because his embodiment of these moments engages in myriad ways the notion of cultural translocation itself. Most often the fashionable galaunt was presented in the context of his ability to disrupt social hierarchy and social ordering. One late text overtly concerned with galaunt aesthetics, Peter Idley’s fifteenth-century conduct manual Instructions to His Son, echoes earlier chroniclers, sermonizers, and poets alike in its description of the leveling impact that contemporary fashions have on English social status: “A man shall not now kenne a knave from a knyght,” Idley says, in an oft-quoted phrase, “ffor al be like in clothynge and array.” The galaunt is a social and literary type, therefore, that is grounded in its ability to undermine not merely the social order but also the practice of social typing. A type that explodes types, the galaunt’s mutable aesthetic creates, through social chaos, hermeneutic confusion, asking how one is supposed to understand one’s surroundings, or one’s place in the world, without relying on the signs usually offered by conventional clothing and consumption patterns. Like the modern cross-dresser discussed by Marjory Garber, the galaunt signals “not just another category crisis, but—much more disquietingly—a crisis of ‘category,’ itself.”

As we will see, this epistemological crisis rests not only in the novel appearance of the galaunts’ clothes but also in the unconventional way that clothes themselves are used by galaunts. Like the sudden change in functionality that, according to Bill Brown, signals the thingness of an object, clothing is worn by galaunts in a way that changes its purpose and meaning: that draws attention to the stylized garments themselves, rather than to their mundane former function as signifiers of social status. Each corresponding aspect of the late-medieval galaunt, from his deprivileging of the social as a category of analysis to his professed love of beauty, confirms his production of an aesthetic that explicitly stages itself as a primary experiential event, a mode of calling attention to stylistic variability as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end.

To conclude my reading of the galaunt’s process of aesthetic reorientation, in the final section of this chapter I will suggest a way to understand the galaunt’s ethos of changeability—his performance of mutable appearance and social status at historical moments of rupture—as a form of aesthetic playfulness. The English word galaunt comes from the Old French
word *galer*, meaning to play or to amuse oneself, and I would argue that the galaunt’s ethos of playfulness sets him apart from other vice-ridden social types in this period.\(^{11}\) Reading the poeticized English galaunt through his characteristic role as a dicer and game player, I propose, reveals a figure whose aestheticized lifestyle follows the rhythmical lyric patterns of what Johan Huizinga termed cultural play. In the context of his own games of chance, the galaunt’s often lively association with Fortune’s wheel seeks to reframe the experience of material changeability—and especially the vestimentary dispossession for which Fortune is most known—as a form of cultural movement and play. At the same time, his corresponding association with stylized poetics suggests the extent to which the galaunt’s experimental forms represent a phenomenologically significant lyric sensibility, within which the practice of poetic style might be experienced and understood in material terms.

**JACKS AND *JACQUERIE*: A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY GALAUNT POEM**

In the second decade of the fifteenth century the English scribe John Shirley jotted down a recipe “For to make fine stuffe proved for jakke or doublet of defence” on the first folio of his first major manuscript anthology, now known as British Library, MS Additional 16165.\(^{12}\) As a long-time member of the retinue of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and with substantial service in France, Shirley would have experienced the jack both as a military and social imperative and as a culture-crossing artifact.\(^{13}\) Stuffed jacks and doublets were crucial garments in both military and social spheres in Shirley’s period, descended from aesthetically similar garments at the heart of the “revolution” of dress in the mid-fourteenth century: both were short, fitted male jackets padded either for defense or for fashion that were worn, with military and stylistic modifications, well into later centuries. The histories of these garments are decidedly different, however. The well-known doublet (so-called for its double layer) began as a padded undergarment worn by knights beneath their hauberk, eventually coming to be worn on its own as an outer garment by the elite classes and then the middling and lower classes, becoming, along with male hose, the ultimate symbol of the new fashions worn in this period, and for some critics, the symbol of the beginning of fashion as a concept.\(^{14}\) The jack, on the other hand, appears to be one of the few fashions that rose from below in the late-medieval period.\(^{15}\) First associated with French peasants and artisans—historians connect the French jack to
the term *Jacquerie* used for the peasant revolt of 1358 after the French lost at Poitiers—this layered jacket came to be used as the central military attire of English foot soldiers, and was eventually worn by all classes, including English gentry and kings.16

As an enthusiastic supporter of vernacular English lyric and a wearer of English jacks, Shirley represents the ideal reader to appreciate the crucial role that the jack plays in a poem that has been cited as housing the earliest extant reference to the English galaunt and that exists in three mid-fifteenth-century manuscripts from his era. This anonymous, 236-line bilingual complaint lyric begins “Syng I wolde, butt alas!” and was generically titled “On the Times” by its original editor, Thomas Wright. Written in alternating, rhyming lines of English and Latin, this poem represents the galaunt as a largely home-grown character of divisiveness and disorder who emerges at the most critical moment of cultural discord in England’s history. Richard Firth Green has dated the poem to the autumn of 1380, early in Richard II’s rule and mere months before the most dramatic political event of late-medieval England, the Uprising in June of 1381.17

“On the Times” situates its grievances against galaunts within a larger dialogue about England’s fallen reputation in the eyes of the world, and about accelerating foreign violence: those who once feared England now attack it (25–28), and “many a thousand” enemies outside the realm are said to

*“nos per rus per mare querunt” [seek us out through the countryside and the sea]* (27–28). But while the poem presents itself as a veritable call to arms, exclaiming “Ynglond, awake now— / consurgunt jugiter hostes” [England, awake now— / [our] enemies jointly arise] (37–38), the vast majority of its complaints address internal, not external division. “Loo! Withyn oure lond,” says the poet mournfully, “*insurgunt undeque guerre* [wars rise up everywhere] (21–22). The metaphor of England’s internal war is sustained throughout most of the poem. In the world-upside-down section that opens the poem, for example, profligacy accounts for much of this cultural disorder: the poet equally derides desire for profit (20), wealthy merrymakers (41), “[u]nthryft” in entertainment and bodily desires (55–58), straightforward gluttony of “Gentyles, gromes, and boyse” alike (59), and the general habits of manner and consumption that blur social hierarchies—“*Sugget and suffrayn / uno quasi fune trahuntur*” [Subject and sovereign / are drawn as if with a single line] (61–62). As the poem progresses, the jumble of complaints is distilled into three main categories of domestic divisiveness: roughly sixty lines are devoted to the corruption of secular law and Richard II’s faulty rule, thirty lines to avarice in the Church, and ninety lines—by far the longest section—to the vices of the fashionable galaunt.
The long description of galaunts in this poem is introduced by way of an obscure passage that puns mercilessly on the many meanings of the aforementioned jack. The extended quotation reveals well the startling visual and aural disjunction of the poem’s bilingual metrical scheme:

Now without a jak
   paucos timuit remanere;
Sum have hym on his bak,
   sed bursa mallet habere.
Goode Jak, where is John?
   ubi gratia nunc requiescit?
Jak, now grace ys gone;
   ad regna remota recessit.
Jak nobil with hym ys;
   iter simul accipuerunt.
Of bothe ys grete mys;
   illos multi modo querunt.
Galaunte, Purs Penyles—
   per vicos ecce vagantur.

(105–18)

[Now without a jack [quilted jacket/coin] / it frightens few to remain; / Some have him [the jacket/coin] on his back, / but would prefer to have him in their purses. / Good Jack, where is John? / Where does his grace now lie at rest? / Jack, now grace is gone; / he has gone off to distant realms. / Jack noble [a coin] is with him; / they've gone on a journey together. / Both are greatly missed; / many now seek them. / Galaunts, Purse Penniless— / behold, they wander through the countryside.]

At the heart of this passage is a play on the jack’s vestimentary role: as a garment ostensibly meant for defense, the jack’s might also be seen, in a different way, to protect those people ostensibly “frightened” by the violent excesses of court culture. Yet, following as they do a discussion about the king’s (Richard II’s) ineffectual rule of law, his placating councilors (the king was still 14 years old), and various “payntyt sleves” (85), or liveried retainers, who oppress and corrupt the legal system, the first lines here about the cultural capital of the jack also speak to the culture of favoritism—and especially retinues marked by special attire or livery—that would come to characterize Richard’s court. That the poem overall addresses the king’s lack of self-rule is clearly evidenced by its final Latin postscript, which reads “O rex, si rex es,
rege te, et eris sine re rex / Nomen habes sine re, te nisi recte regas” [O king, if you are king, rule yourself, and you will be a king though you have nothing. / You have the name without the thing, unless you, king, rightly rule yourself].

More specific associations with the names “Jak” and “John” in these verses have been proposed by Green in his dating of the poem. “Jak,” he points out, is most likely a reference to John Philipot, prosperous citizen and former mayor of London. Philipot donated ships and armor to the soldiers of Gaunt’s youngest brother, Thomas of Woodstock, for an expedition against the French in the summer of 1380 and most likely expected some form of reimbursement from Gaunt, who was subsequently away on an expedition to the border of Scotland in the fall of 1380. According to Thomas Walsingham’s Historia Anglicana (c. 1400), “jakke” was the specific name used for the jackets that Philipot lent to Woodstock’s men after the men, clearly underpaid, pawned their own armor for food before the expedition.

Considering the time of this poem’s writing, the association of the name “Jak” with commoners is especially evocative. “Jak” being deserted by “John” could be a reference not only to one “commoner,” Philipot, but to commoners in general who have been abandoned by the ruling faction; as the poet states elsewhere, “the rych maketh myry, / sed vulgus collacrematur” [the rich make merry, / but the common people weep] (41–42). This reading is also suggested by the poet’s earlier inclusion of the fable of the cat on whom no one dares to tie a bell (99–100), well-known from its use a year or so earlier in Langland’s Piers Plowman (B-Text), where the cat most likely refers to John of Gaunt. The “jak” also possibly represents a coin—“Jak noble,” the poet quips, is with John on his journey—and hence the poet’s reference to those who have “Jak” (the jacket) on their back, but would rather have him (the coin) in their purses (105–6). As Green points out, having “jak” on your back might also be an allusion to the poll taxes of 1380–81, the third such tax, and one which increased the dislike of Gaunt, as its expense was in part due to the failure of his and his men’s excursions against the French. This tax was, moreover, the main impetus for the Uprising later that year, during which the rebels who broke into Gaunt’s palace the Savoy were said to have left arrows in his own “jakke,” as well as turning his coat of arms over as a sign of treason, before burning the palace down. In its connection between jacks and groups of restless, violent Englishmen fresh from the war, “On the Times” seems inherently to associate Englishmen’s jacks with the violent French Jacquerie of 1358.

When the “Galauntes, Purs Penyles” are finally introduced at line 117 in this poem, therefore, it is within the local context of Richard’s courtly favor-
ites and lack of self-rule, of Gaunt’s military excursions and the wealthy Lon-
don businessmen who support them, and of the unpaid and unruly young
retainers caught in the middle. It is also within the context of a garment that
stretches to symbolize all these things—as well as symbolizing the English
aristocratic appropriation of both French fashions and commoners’ attire at
a moment when power relations in both of those arenas had begun to tip
against the English aristocrats. The galaunts are first imagined as wander-
ing destructively through the countryside, very much like the unnamed but
clearly French enemy in the opening of the poem (28, 117). They borrow
without repaying and gain in violence as they gather together, each “busy to
commit war” [\textit{satagit committere guerram}] (122). Impulsive and unpre-
dictable, they are literally here one minute and gone the next, ravaging the land,
says the poet, like a foreigner: “Now ys he here, now is he gone / \textit{destruxit
ut advena terram}” (123–24). These descriptions quickly give way to lengthy
explanations of the galaunts’ fashions, which change like the wind: “Now
schort and now longe, / \textit{ventus velud ecce vacillant}” [Now short and now long
\textit{/ Behold, just as the wind they vary}] (167–68). The offensive changeability
of the galaunts’ attire is equaled only by their deceptive and deforming powers
of alteration, which are said to deny God’s superior powers of fashioning, a
meaning nicely underscored by the tension between the alternating lines of
Middle English and Latin:

\begin{quote}
Freshest of the new towche, 
\textit{incedunt ridiculose},
Lytel or noght in the powche, 
\textit{pascuntur deliciose}.
Brodder then ever God made 
\textit{humeris sunt arte tumentes};
Narow thay bene, thay seme brod, 
\textit{nova sunt haec respice gentes}
They bere a newe facoun, 
\textit{humeris in pectore tergo};
Goddes plasmacoun 
\textit{non illis complacet ergo}.
\end{quote}
(125–36)

[Freshest of the new fashion, \textit{they strut ridiculously}; / Little or nothing in
the purse, \textit{they dine deliciously}. / Broader than ever God made \textit{they swell
out at the shoulders}; / Narrow [though] they are, they seem broad / Look!
These are a “new fashion” of gents / They bear a new fashion \textit{with shoul-}
ders in the back of the chest; / God’s shaping of them / therefore is not pleasing to them.]

Manipulated by the very “stuff” of which Shirley later speaks, these clothes are said not only to create unnatural girth, making skinny men broad, but also to reshape and distort the human body altogether, creating lumps where they shouldn’t be—on men’s backs. Like other poems on the galaunt, this poem takes up the subject of “new fashion” (133) as troubling evidence of personal changeability in the face of higher forms of order.

As the poem progresses, the galaunts’ extreme disorder takes on a more recognizable form; this group of Englishmen at metaphorical war with England perform the antitype of the order of chivalry. Like an ideal chivalric knight, they have broad shoulders, large chests, and wide necks, if only in appearance; they are armored with long spurs on their heels and strong, sharp “poyntes” on their toes, although they are only for show and their owners cherish them indulgently (141–42). Their hose are problematic specifically because the galaunts cannot, without damaging them, properly kneel to pray or pay homage (147–58), a gesture obviously fundamental to feudal relations; rather, they stand “in a workaday manner” (156), bringing confusion to those around them (158). This type of mimicking and undoing of the proper elements of knighthood is also suggested by the most recurrent expression used to describe the galaunts in this poem, that they are “newe.”

These galaunts in their “newe facoun” mock the entire idea of the new life of the knight, the nouvelle vie described by poets such as Eustache Deschamps in his popular ballad “Du Bachelier d’Armes” [The Bachelor at Arms]. Literal and metaphorical renewal was made explicit in the initiation rituals of all knights, who were made anew with new garments and the girding of the sword in enactment of the Christian mystery of renovation, to “put off the old man, and put on the new man” in the words of Ephesians 4:22–23. Last, like any good chivalric hero, the galaunt in this poem has a war cry, one he declares as he kisses his lady friends, as he drinks fragrant wines to excess, and as he demands, with implied violence, artful entertainment. Yet the slogan “Vye velabel” [vive la bele; long live beauty] (189) does not refer to his prowess or his sword, like standard war cries, but rather to his self-identified love of beauty. This mock-order of knights initiates followers by inculcating in them certain aesthetic tastes; a cultural war based on codes of consumption, rather than codes of chivalry. If the ideal knight was meant to keep order through military force and personal restraint, then the galaunt means to breed disorder through social violence, aesthetic disruption, and personal devotion to pleasure.
The slogan “vive la bele” that emerges in relation to galaunts in “On the Times” and that reappears in the later lyrics (usually as the neologism *vyla-bele*), and the ideals of beauty and pleasure that it implies, might seem more appropriate to the Aesthetic movement of the nineteenth century than to the aesthetic sensibilities of the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. In fact the philosophical tenets of classical Epicureanism have been shown to have existed in late-medieval Europe; Paul A. Olson, for example, has suggested that the Wife of Bath’s famous “sect” of followers were in fact epicurean radicals. Yet, as Umberto Eco pointed out years ago and as Maura Nolan has more recently discussed, the value of aesthetic pleasure—and especially the idea of transcendental beauty—was also fundamental to the medieval belief system. One of the few Platonic texts available to medieval readers was Plato’s *Timaeus*, which, through Chalcidius’s Commentary (fourth century) and Boethius’s famous meter “O qui perpetua” (Book III.m.9), impressed upon medieval sensibilities the way in which the visual splendor of the world reflects the ideal beauty of the Good. In Boethius’s words, “pulchrum pulcherrimus ipse / mundum mente gerens similique in imagine formans / perfectasque iubens perfectum absoluere partes” [You who are most beautiful produce the beautiful world from your divine mind and, forming it in your image, You order the perfect parts in a perfect whole] (III.m.9:7–9).

The galaunt’s embrace of aesthetic pleasure in “On the Times” seems more closely linked to the former, epicurean appreciation of beauty than to the latter, transcendental version. The slogan *vive la bele* itself accentuates the phenomenology of beauty, inherently requiring that one consider beauty in terms of lived—*vivre*, to live—experience. The galaunt signifies our own experience of enjoyment in a variety of ways, embodying and even aestheticizing excessive appetite for material pleasures while at the same time providing untold entertainment for the medieval poet, reader, and cultural observer in the witty retelling of his stylish exploits. The galaunt desires novelties and he *is* a novelty; his much-maligned cult of imitation exemplifies the “phenomenon of unceasing begetting,” or the impulse of replication that Elaine Scarry has described as characterizing the cultural practice of beauty. Yet the trope of the galaunt also clearly requires contemplation of the larger role that transient material goods play in epistemologies of mortal experience. As I will discuss at more length below, the galaunt is often presented as the lavishly dressed victim perched precariously atop Fortune’s wheel; at the same time that he is satirized as a figure of mirth, therefore, he also inherently presents a warning about mortal attachment to goods and quite possibly, following my argument in chapter 1, a Boethian demonstration of the transcendent knowledge that *losing* material goods can bestow. Scarry’s contention
that the experience of beauty is inseparable from the “experience of ‘being in error’” can be seen quite literally in this capacity of the galaunt to aesthetically forecast his own misfortune.\textsuperscript{35}

The impending fall of the galaunt is often demonstrated through a particular prophecy linked to his existence. Written on the cusp of the Uprising as it apparently was, the prophecy in “On the Times” sounds especially pointed and threatening:

\begin{quote}
With wyde koleres and hye,
\[\textit{gladio sunt colla parata},\]
War ye the profycy
\[\textit{contra tales recitata}.\]
\end{quote}

(137–40)

[With wide collars and high, / their necks are prepared for the sword, / Beware of the prophecy / spoken against such men.]

There are two possible sources for the prophecy alluded to here, one in Ranulf Higden’s popular chronicle of English history, the \textit{Polychronicon} (1330s–40s), a source that was used more clearly by later galaunt poems, as I will discuss below, and that Andrew Galloway has recently argued was responsible for much of the discourse of \textit{varietas vestium} in late-medieval English chronicles.\textsuperscript{36} The poet could also be referring to a popular song later recorded in the \textit{Brut} chronicle (c. 1400) that ties the worthlessness and downfall of Englishmen to their own stylized appearance. The \textit{Brut} version reads:

\begin{quote}
Longe berde hertles,
\[\textit{peyntede Hode witles},\]
Gay cote graceles,
\[\textit{makep Englishman þriftles}.\]
\end{quote}

The \textit{Brut} chronicler adds historical context to these lines, locating their creation in the skirmishes between the Scots and English in the early fourteenth century, and specifically claiming that in 1337 the Scots, mocking both the resources and the appearance of the English, pinned the verses to the doors of St. Peter’s Church in Stonegate, York. Forms of this well-known quatrain, like the similar prophesy by Higden, were drawn on by sermonizers as well as by poets in late-medieval England, and as Wendy Scase has discussed, were eventually co-opted for more pointed association with galaunts in the late-fifteenth-century poem “Proud Gallants and Popeholy Priests.”\textsuperscript{38}
The galaunts’ prophecy is interesting less for what the prophecy forecasts—apocalyptic ruin was a frequent element of late-medieval complaint lyrics—than for its heightening of the galaunts’ symbolic significance. “War ye the profycy / contra tales recitata”: the poet does not repeat the details of the prophecy, but rather assumes that most readers already know it well, and in this way suggests the extent to which the galaunts have become mythologized as a particular part of England’s fated history. More specifically, what is mythologized is their stylized aesthetic, which in this poem takes the form of a political event equivalent to political and juridical corruption. In the same way that the galaunt’s garments manifest the tension between past and present vestimentary styles, so his present appearance troubles both his own future and England’s future. At the same time, however, like all prophecies, this one is grounded in an inherent curiosity about divine mysteries—in this case juxtaposing the fleeting demonstration of the galaunt’s self-fashioning with the unmoving providential order of divine design. On the one hand the existence of the prophecy amplifies the intensity of the sociocultural danger associated with the galaunt, and on the other it increases the galaunts’ impression of ephemeral mysteriousness, in effect accentuating the inherently fleeting and enigmatic nature of vestimentary change itself.

In choosing a highly mannered and somewhat overly complex poetic form for discussing the topic of the galaunt, the poet of “On the Times” poetically engages some of the same questions that his poem attends to in its thematic developments. The system of alternating Middle English and Latin half-lines mirrors not only the cultural turmoil that the poem describes and the fluctuating circumstances of the galaunts themselves, but also the aesthetic irresolution for which the galaunts are most known. A prime example are the first lines of the poem, which reinforce the aesthetic effects of the changeable form by complaining about the change—that is, the recent downturn—of England’s fortunes:

Syng I wolde, butt alas!
   *decendunt prospera grata.*
Ynglond sum tyme was
   *regnorum gemma vocata,*
Of manhood the flowre,
   *ibi quondam floruit omnis;*
Now gone ys that oure—
   *traduntur talia sompnis.*

(1–8)
[Sing I would, but alas! / Good times are fading away. / England once was / called the jewel of nations, / the flower of manhood, / where once all flourished; / Now that hour is gone— / such things are fading into dreams.]

In addition to their alternating rhythmical effect, the aesthetic impact of these lines and those throughout the poem is to reinforce the fragmented and changeable vestimentary style worn by the galaunts. Like the fashionable figures lamented in this poem, the sense of an aesthetic whole is thwarted by the text’s multiple fluctuating idioms, rhythms, and rhymes. Likewise, one might say that the excessively mannered artifice of the poem illuminates certain tensions and provocations inherent in the formation of poetic style itself, complicating the hermeneutic codes prioritized by a reader’s reading practices. Whether one is meant to read the poem for narrative sense, for aural rhythm, or for visual continuity; whether the poetic structure invokes order or disorder: such questions move from background to foreground as the poem’s formal stylistic choices take over as one of its dominant topics.

Accompanying the poem’s heightened, almost experiential expression of the connection between poetic subject and poetic form are more overt references to poetry-making as well. Like the later poem I will discuss in the next section, “On the Times” expressly links its own poetic performance with that of the galaunt. Whereas the first line of the poem speaks of the poet’s “singing” as having been dampened by England’s misfortunes—misfortunes, we subsequently learn, caused in large part by galauntise—the end of the poem suggests a more direct connection between that act of singing and the unruly galaunts. The poet singles out one singer (himself, one imagines) who complies with the galaunts’ impetuous demands for entertainment: “A countertenore, / canabit carcere clausus” [a countertenor / shut up in a prison will sing] (207–8). In further proof that this lyricist is meant to be understood as the poet himself, singing his poem at the insistence of the galaunts about which he writes, we are told that he decides to sing “[o]f the cherche” (209) just as the poem itself turns its final attentions to the same subject.

The poet’s metatextual concerns are further revealed in an epigraph suggesting that the poem’s unruly verse form is superseded by the unruliness of the English language itself: “Hec quicumque legat / non dampnet metra que pegi / Anglica lingua negat / semet subdere legi” [Whoever may read these things / let him not condemn the meters I have fashioned; / the English language refuses / to submit itself to any law]. Wrangling the subject of the disorderly galaunt into bilingual couplets is difficult enough, we are to
understand, without the added challenge of wrangling the lawless English language into verse. Adding these lines to the preceding poem helps to make more overt the value of the galaunt as a trope for exploring changes in literary aesthetic practices as well as in cultural aesthetics more broadly—English stylus as a manifestation of English style—and also suggests that this trope may have been privileged as a deliberate choice by fourteenth-century poets wanting to experiment with the English vernacular as a new poetic medium. This interest in the excessively varied style of the galaunt as a figure for the aggregated aspect of English lyric style develops more fully in the fifteenth-century galaunt poem that will be the focus of my next section.

“FURRED WITH NON SEQUITUR”:
THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY TREATISE OF A GALAUNT

The manuscript history of “On the Times” suggests not only that the poem had relevance to the period leading up to the Uprising of 1381 to which its writing has been dated, but also that it enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in the mid-fifteenth century, the period to which its three manuscript copies have been dated, as I mention above. The poem’s complaints about galaunts likely carried analogous political implications in the later period, as jacks, the garments at the center of the satire in “On the Times,” were also commonly worn by English militia in the fifteenth century and may have been associated with the rebels of the Jack Cade revolt in 1450 as well as those of the earlier Uprising.

That galaunts in general were associated with the Jack Cade rebels can be discerned by their treatment in a sermon given at Saint Paul’s Cross in the last decade of the fifteenth century by Bishop of Ely, John Alcock. At the end of his sermon on pride Alcock recollects a poem from his childhood, “a treatyse callyd Galand,” that he invokes both for its wisdom about galaunts and for its authority as a poem written by esteemed poet and monk of Bury, John Lydgate:

frendes I remember dayes here before in my yougte. y' there was a vertuous monke of Bury callyd Lydgate. whiche wrote many noble histories. & made many vertuous balettes to the encrease of vertue. & oppression of vyce. And amonge other he made a treatyse callyd Galand. & all the kindred of Galand he discryued therin I suppose if galantes vnderstode the progeny. they wold refuse to be of y' felyshyp & kyndrede.
Lydgate’s authorship of the galaunt poem is crucial to Alcock, whose apparent nostalgia for the moral clarity of his childhood seems to coincide with his nostalgia for a poet of Lydgate’s stature who could, with his verse, effect “the increase of virtue and oppression of vice.” This passage expresses a similar conviction regarding the efficacy of Lydgate’s poetry in its apparent hope that in resurrecting this poem about the galaunts’ ignoble origins he will, with the late poet’s help, compel contemporary galaunts to turn away from the reprehensible practice itself. In his subsequent description he merges the literary origins of Lydgate’s poem (here called a book) with the political origins of the galaunts themselves:

The occasion of makynge this boke was whan englysshe men were bet out & [had] loste fraunce. Gasgoyne. Gyon. & came home disguysed in theyr garmentes in every parte of theyr bodyes. whiche englyssh men sawe never before. and many folowed the lewde & abhomynable garmentes . . . and in short season after were grete surrections & murdre of lords & others as I doubt not many that lyuethe can remember it.

In these lines Alcock situates the emergence of the galaunt aesthetic in the final English defeat and exile from France in 1449–50 at the end of the Hundred Years War and also in the Jack Cade rebellion shortly thereafter, which, as legend tells it, included some of the returning English troops. This searing indictment of the galaunt as a figure produced and branded by English military defeat, retreat, and domestic rebellion is clearly mediated, however, by Alcock’s somewhat romantic view of the galaunt’s role in England’s literary history. If Lydgate indeed wrote the poem invoked here, a claim that has since been disputed, then it would have been one of his last, since he died in 1451, shortly after the history described here. To Alcock, however, the galaunt represents an aesthetic event in England’s recent history worthy of both a bishop’s and a poet laureate’s attention, a hybridized figure—English inside, French outside—whose sudden appearance seduced an entire population with fashions that “englyssh men sawe never befor” and caused social unrest so violent that it has been seared into England’s cultural memory as well as copied into its books.

The poem *Treatise of a Galaunt*, about which Alcock reminisces, characterizes its galaunts in a similar light. Made up of roughly 32 seven-line stanzas, the poem is the longest and most concentrated medieval treatment of the English galaunt, and also appears to have been the most popular, surviving in three extant manuscripts from the second half or third quarter of
the fifteenth century and in four printed editions associated with Wynkyn de Worde in the first decades of the sixteenth century. Like “On the Times,” the Treatise connects the galaunt’s historical appearance with many types of cultural change, starting with the deterioration of England’s overall prosperity, reputation, and happiness:

Ryght late stode our lande in suche prosperyte
Of chyualry / manhode / and ryche marchaundyse
Thrughe all crysten royalmes / sprange our felycyte.
Of grete welthe and provesse / in sondry wyse
Our sadnes is chaunged the [sic] / for [sic] newe guyse
We haue exyled our welthe / I note where
England may wayle / that euer it came here.
(15–21)

As this passage suggests, the myriad ways in which the old values of England have been “chaunged” for new fashions, or “newe guyse,” constitutes the main theme of the poem. Like the earlier poem, the general downturn of England’s fortunes provides a backdrop for more particular examples and interpretations of the “myschaunce” (159) associated with the galaunt. Not only is the galaunt explicitly likened to a man atop Fortune’s wheel, poised for his own downfall, but he is also repeatedly associated with “Lucifer’s fall” (61) through the sin of pride. The galaunt reflects and even causes the fall of the world around him, which the poet makes clear by citing the causal relationship between “new fangle guyse” and the biblical destruction of kingdoms and their people:

For many a vengeaunce as scrypture maketh mencyon
Hath fallen to kyngdomes in sondry wyse
And fynally put the people in dystruccyon
For theyr obstynacy / a[nd] newe fangle guyse
Alas englande that somtyme was so wyse.
(36–40)

The poet takes considerable time to explain in different and myriad ways the immorality of the “newe dyssymulacyon” that “consumeth” England (11) and the dramatic changes it effects. For instance, the galaunt aesthetic is described as “dysfygurynge nature” (23), as an act that “causeth deth” (124), and as an event that will cause the “transmygracyon” of the English into Babylon (171).
When he describes the specific garments of galaunts, the poet depicts new forms of change in the garments’ ever-shifting, ever-manipulated shapes, substance, and durability. He states:

Beholde the rolled hodes / stuffed with flockes.
The newe broched doublettes / open at the brestes
Stuffed with pectoll / of theyr loues smockes.
Theyr gownes and theyr cotes / shred all in lystes.
(183–86)

This description represents not merely the “newe” look of clothing in this period, but the way clothes were being individually modified; the garments are “broched,” or studded with ornaments, “rolled,” “stuffed,” “shred,” or worn “open.” In a similar way the poet complains that people are spending all their creative energies and intellectual resources on this one particular imaginative form:

All people laboure of this newe dysguysynge.
In forgynge theyr fantasyes / to maynteyne pryde.
He is nowe wysest / that can moost of deuysynge
Good makynge of a man is nowe layde on syde.
This newe araye is brought vp / in this lande to wyde
And yet for all that it may not last a yere.
England may wayle / that euer it came here.
(176–82)

This emphasis on the creative process of self-fashioning (Idley uses similar wording, speaking of the galaunt’s garments as “[n]ew shappis his fantasie was to devise”) reveals an important aspect of the figure’s appeal to cultural commentators. Words such as “fantasye” and “deuysynge” suggest that the galaunt, as the embodiment of a highly personalized and stylized aesthetic based inherently on rapid change and short-lived appeal (rather than moral, steadfast character: “Good makynge of a man” [179]), provides an optimal mechanism for exploring self-fashioning as a formulation of literary creativity.

As in the earlier poem “On the Times,” the galaunt’s changing aesthetic in the Treatise becomes a tool for thinking through various other types of cultural change, and especially for thinking through England’s own particular reputation for aesthetic variability. Here the recent change in dress is blamed directly on the French. While the Treatise is not as overt as Bishop Alcock implies in tying the historical emergence of the galaunt to the English
soldiers expelled from France at the end of the Hundred Years War, the suggestion is certainly there. Alcock’s narrative about tail-turning soldiers who have been pillaged of their own attire and forced to return to England flamboyantly costumed as the enemy is a dramatic enhancement of two anti-French stanzas in the *Treatise* that complain generally about having left “[o]ur gentylnes / for galauntyse” (48) in France, and specifically about the “galauntes progenye vyperyous / That out of Fraunce be fledde” (50–51). Situating “galauntyse” against “gentylnes” makes clear the extent of the threat, which is positioned to replace not merely English garments but the entire social and national code by which the English historically (and ideally) lived their lives. Thus the galaunt’s foreign garments, “[o]ther nacyons refuse” (41), pollute England not only through their imitation of the “hatefull pryde and lothsome vnclennes” of the French (44), but also through their display of newly encultured values, such as personalized style.48

While the French are the immediate foil, the poet makes a point of situating the galaunts’ eccentric mutability in a longer narrative about the recurrent history of English transformation at the hands of foreigners. Like the earlier galaunt poem, and like the galaunts’ French fashions themselves, the refrain of the *Treatise* (“England may waile / that euer it came here”) keeps the subtext of invasion ever present. A later passage reminds the reader that the incursion of galaunts is just the latest in England’s extensive record of military—and linguistic—instability:

Forget not lightly / how many straungers.  
Haue entered this kingdome / and kepte the possession.  
Fyue tymes / as wryteth old cronyclers  
And chaunged our tunges / in sundry dyuysyon.  
(204–7)

According to this poet, then, the galaunt does more than just *look* like an invading enemy in his French fashions; his ever-changing aesthetic recalls—even performs—the numerous conversions of identity undergone by the English themselves in former times. The source of the “old cronyclers” for this discussion was most likely Higden’s *Polychronicon*, although the poet appears to have slightly exaggerated the narrative he finds in his source. Higden follows Henry of Huntington in describing both past and future political ruptures caused by English vices, but like Huntington, he lists only three invasions—those of the Danes, the Normans, and (in the future) the Scots—rather than the five mentioned by the *Treatise*.49 At this point in his text Higden also discusses English *varietas vestium* as part of his larger fascination,
discussed by Galloway, with *variantas* as an English national trait: in Higden's words, “adeoque tunc varium erit seculum, ut variantas mentium multimoda vestium variatione designetur” [and to such an extent then will the age be varied, that the variety of mind will be represented by the multiple variety of clothing].

The poet of the *Treatise* seems to have absorbed Higden's narrative about *variantas vestium*, for while his directive about remembering England's divisive past certainly invokes the customary warning about the galaunts' prophecy, it also endows the figure of the galaunt with a more particular historical background, locating his hermeneutic power squarely in the English experience of and effects of cultural polyvalency. Rather than being the simple enemy of England, the galaunt becomes the embodiment of an England formed by repeated and "sundry dyuysyon": a patchwork history of nations, languages, cultures, and styles.

Like "On the Times," the *Treatise's* focus on English mutability and hybridity reveals itself in the language and structure of the poem as well. As if reenacting the divisions that "chaunged our tunges," the *Treatise* undergoes its own transformation partway through the poem, suddenly becoming a formal dissection of the galaunt's figure and name. Starting roughly ten stanzas into the poem, depending on the manuscript, a protracted acrostic ties the seven letters in the word "galaunt" to the seven sins, effectively dividing the figure into smaller rhetorical pieces as if to aid a more microscopic understanding of his fragmented makeup. In two of the three manuscripts the shift in poetic form is introduced by an abbreviated acrostic explicitly displaying the verses' new visual structure:

G for glotony that began in paradyse.
A for Auaryce that regneth the world thorough.
L for luxury that norysheth euery vyce.
A for Accydy that dwelleth in towne and borough.
V for Wrathe that seketh both land and forough.
N for noying Enuy that dwelleth euery-where.
T for toylous pryde: these myscheuen oure land here.

Next, a series of seven stanzas expands the acrostic, so that each of the word's seven letters becomes the centerpiece for a highly alliterative stanza exploring the seven sins and their many associative evils. The "G" and "A" that begin "galaunt," for example, produce the following:

O thou gay galaunt / by thyne vnthryfty name.
With gabbynge & glosynge / gettest that thou hast
Gyle was thy father / and Jalousye thy dame
In Jettynge / in Janglynge thy dayes ben past.
For all thy gloryous goynge / age gnaweth fast
Thy glased lyfe and glotony / be glewed so in fere
That Englande may wayle / that euer it came here.

Appetytes of auaryce / be to them so amerous
Abusyon and arrogaunce / be of one affynyte
Aduenture and angre / ben aye so debatous.
Faynynnge estate / of counterfet auctoryte
Adulacyon of aduenture / mayst thou not auaunt the
As a lyer in goodnes / in thyne araye doest appere
England may wayle / that euer it came here.
(64–77)

Toward the end of the galaunt acrostic the poet seems to get overwhelmed by his ambitious poetic form, losing his focus on the seven sins. As Julia Boffey points out in her elucidation of the poem’s manuscript context, scribes and printers in turn jumbled the form and/or the rhymes in the final stanzas of the acrostic, most likely from verbal overload. Indeed, as the stanzas of the acrostic persist, the alliteration becomes overwhelming for readers as well, not only because of its visual and verbal surplus and its tongue-twisting challenge to reciters of the poem, but also because of its associative inundation. The powerful effect of the bewildering array of iniquities recorded here is to make the galaunt seem wildly and excessively erratic, someone who leaps from one behavior to another for no reason except aesthetic similarity (here acoustical and alphabetical correspondence) in the same way he changes his fashions. Yet as a poetic experiment in aesthetic organization, this intriguing acrostic also creates in the galaunt an organizing principle for this bewildering array of vices, for the galaunt’s exhaustive catalogue of sins also makes him a type of English everyman who characterizes the vices possessed by “all our nacyon” (85).

If the ornamental poetics of the acrostic are meant to expose the multifarious and interwoven network of sins that makes up the Englishman’s ornamental style, they serve another important stylistic purpose as well: exposing the poet himself as a type of galaunt. The visual excess of these verses, especially in the manuscripts with the double acrostic, do more than mimic the galaunt’s lavish decoration. They indulge—self-consciously, but not satirically, it seems—in precisely that obsessive love of style for style’s sake that the galaunt embodies. Even as it castigates visual uniqueness, therefore, the
mannered artifice of the form asks that this poem be especially enjoyed for its visual qualities. The acrostic itself was a form more overtly favored by French than English poets in the Middle Ages, and elsewhere in the poem there are hints that the poet has succumbed in other ways to his own form of rhetorical galauntise. For example, the reader is treated to a healthy dose of ostentatiously Frenchified and Latinate words, such as “dyssymulacyon” (11) “intoxycacyoun” (51), “transmygracyoun” (171), “perseuerauntyle” (215), and the notable “beryllous pronostycacyon” (193). Likewise, the poet shows off an impressive number of terms for contemporary fashions, some of which, like the familiar “non sequitur,” best known in this period as a type of collar around the neck, have meanings that play on the intersection of sartorial and rhetorical ornament in themselves: “So many purfled garments / furred with non sequitur / With so many penyles purses / hath no man sawe” (141–42). In this period of the fifteenth century, in fact, the word “galaunt” came to be specifically associated with ornate language as well as with ornate clothing, and in this vein the poet’s citations of the galaunt’s verbal conquests, from linguistic novelties (such as the aforementioned new “tunges” imposed with his invasion) to standard complaints about rhetorical disguisings (the “glosynge” and lying alluded to above), simultaneously speak to the subject of the galaunt’s ornamentation. The poet’s disclosure of his own inner galaunt corresponds to his uneasiness about whether the galaunt represents the English in foreign disguise or the inherent hybridity of English identity itself.

Added to this evidence of poet-as-galaunt is the fact that the Treatise signs off as if the galaunt were the speaker of the poem rather than its object: “Thus endeth this galaunt,” writes the scribe below the poem. The galaunt is associated with poetry-making in a variety of ways in late-medieval poems, most often, as in the earlier poem “On the Times,” as the singer of his own song. In this respect the galaunt’s signature and the ballad form of the Treatise (elsewhere called “Song of a Galaunt”) correspond to other songs such as the fifteenth-century “Huff! A Galaunt,” published by Rossell Hope Robbins, whose refrain, the second epigraph of this chapter, emphasizes the song’s self-reflexive nature: “Huff! A galawnt, vylabel! / Thus syngyth galawntys in here revel.” The song in the Digby Mary Magdelene offers a similar performative circularity, with the galaunt entering the stage singing a song about his entrance: “Her[e] shal entyr a galavnt thus seying: / . . . Hof, hof, hof! A frisch new galaunt!” Wendy Scase also points out that in one version of the fifteenth-century poem she titles “Proud Gallants and Popeholy Priests,” the galaunt is turned into the speaker of the poem’s clerical satire. These poems cannot seem to decide whether they are commentary on galaunts or
commentary by galaunts; while they clearly mock the figure’s self-involved nature, they also suggest, in a Baudelairean sense, that the galaunt’s role is, like the poet’s, that of cultural experiencer and commentator. Not only is the galaunt made to describe what he is wearing—translating visual appearance into poetic terms, and in this sense demonstrating one of the more difficult roles of the poet who chooses vestimentary satire—but also he is made to take on the voice of his own satire. The apparently self-generated aspect of this satire suggests a level of irony about the galaunts’ sartorial self-fashioning not often apparent in moralizing discourses about clothing and fashions in this period. Having the galaunt sing his own poetic caricature both enhances the satire and undermines it, asking readers on the one hand to imagine the galaunt’s fashions as naive imitations worn by a simpleton, and on the other hand to understand them as sophisticated statements of irony crafted by a medieval flâneur.

The few critics who have worked on the manuscript culture of fifteenth-century galaunt poems describe a particularly fluid, changeable, evidently experimental poetic and scribal process that adapts popular material and that changes to keep up with the change of fashions; as Boffey puts it, the text of the Treatise is “quite simply invitingly unstable.” One might argue that medieval writers found this subject equally attractive as a test of their knowledge of both cultural trends and poetic versatility. As Sponsler has discussed, the conventional trope of indescribability was in this period ingeniously appropriated as an expression of the idea that “even linguistic invention cannot keep pace with clothing’s rampant spread.” For the anonymous poets of “On the Times” and Treatise of a Galaunt, statements about the difficult poetic process they have undertaken seem to speak on some level to the creative pleasure generated by the topic of the galaunt as well as to his power as a figure for the creative process itself. In their up-to-the-minute descriptions of galaunt fashions and in their imitations of and experiments with galaunts-ise aesthetics as a recognizable English poetic form, however, these poets also engage with one of the more problematical aspects of the galaunt as a literary type, which is his creative defiance of existing moral paradigms regarding material goods. In these poems the characteristic portrayals of the galaunts as social and military insurgents, racial hybrids, and vice-ridden consumers are folded into a remarkable singularity of purpose and symbolism. As we see in his self-reflexively self-fashioning songs, the galaunt’s clothing, behavior, history, and speech on some level serve the same all-encompassing purpose, which is to draw attention to the topic of highly mannered, changeable form itself.
FORTUNE AND THE GALAUNT:
FALLING, DICING, DRESSING

Prior to my discussion in this chapter, the galaunt appeared twice in this study, each time in his relationship to Fortune’s spinning wheel. The fifteenth-century morality play that served as my opening example in chapter 1 describes the king at the top of the wheel (Regno) as “ce galant qui est la hault” [that gallant who is up high], the imminent victim of Fortune’s change of favors. Likewise, in chapter 2 I discussed an early-fifteenth-century illuminated French manuscript of Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae* in which the king atop Fortune’s wheel is portrayed as a stereotypical galaunt figure with pointed shoes and pendant sleeves (plate 1). The texts on which I have focused in this chapter also underscore the association. The *Treatise of a Galaunt*, for example, explicitly likens the galaunt’s variability to that of the man suffering Fortune’s “fresshely” formed whims: “Many a worthie man / bryngeth he to sorowe and care,” the poet states, “Where Fortune somtyme / fresshely on hym loughe” (31–32). As well, the highly mannered and somewhat overly complex poetic forms used in both “On the Times” and the *Treatise* demonstrate a type of “verbal swagger” that is elsewhere explicitly associated with Fortune’s vacillations.

In an important way, the galaunt’s association with Fortune’s wheel speaks to his characteristic vice of pride. Fifteenth-century texts in particular seem to use the trope of the galaunt atop Fortune’s wheel to play out in material terms the moral consequences of prideful appearance and behavior, revealing how the motif of Fortune’s ever-changing wheel was often keyed to the prevalent biblical anecdote that “Pride goeth before destruction: and the spirit is lifted up before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). In the prologue of Book II of his conduct manual *Instructions to His Son* (1445–50), for example, Peter Idley spends almost two hundred lines exploring the subject of prideful appearances and dress, to which he ties a series of spectacular downfalls: Lucifer’s biblical fall, Adam and Eve’s fall from grace, England’s moral descent and fallen reputation, and eventually, the inevitable fall of all mortals from Fortune’s wheel. Idley’s discussion of Fortune’s wheel leads directly to his con-
demnation of “galauntis” (II.170) as prime examples of the “disguysyne of clothis” (II.171) that he has been discussing. These stanzas in turn lead to the first tale of the book, which starts by describing the tragic death of one specific galaunt whose “ffresshe cote” offends Fortune herself:

Ther was a knyght that loued nyce array;
New shappis his fantasie was to devise.
He wolde that non were so galaunt and gay
As he, and that in all maner of wyse:
Twoo or thre shapes might not suffise,
Suche was his appetite and his hertis desire,
To be arraied giselie [elegantly] and of a straunge attire.

Amonge all othir he hadde a ffresshe cote
Was all to-lagged with poisies on euerie side,
And botoned with siluere to the harde throte.
He knewe no grounde he coude on abide,
His mynde was sette so highlie on pride;
But Dame Fortune with an vnware clappe
Bokeled hym in a clothyng of anothe shappe.\(^{65}\)

This passage underscores the important role that the literary trope of Fortune played in late-medieval discussions and conceptualizations of fashion, as I discussed earlier in chapter 2. Fortune’s proprietary control over vestimentary mutability is implicit in Idley’s text; her sudden and dramatic reshaping of the shape-shifting galaunt implies that, like Arachne’s famous metamorphosis at the hands of Athena, this mortal is being penalized for his audacious performance in what Fortune feels is her own field of expertise. More to the point for my current argument, in this passage Fortune completes the series of images in Idley’s prologue in which prideful clothing both causes and symbolizes a fall or misfortune. The “clothyng of another shappe” that the poet refers to here is the beating and murder of the galaunt, who is caught unawares by his enemies when he goes riding in his “fresshe arraye” (II.195). A similar fate then occurs to a prideful clerk who dons the garment after the galaunt’s death.\(^ {66}\)

At the same time that it serves to highlight the consequences of pride, therefore, the repeated poetic association of galaunts with the victims on Fortune’s wheel also makes the topic of worldly changeability, and especially the phenomenological events of sudden change, chance, and downfall, an integral part of understanding galaunt aesthetics. The implication is that galaunt
aesthetics—the embracing and aestheticizing of change itself through a series of ever-changing, shape-shifting fashions—keeps ever present the transitory nature of worldly experience. Poems such as “On the Times” and Treatise of a Galaunt continually tie their galaunts’ changeable appearances to the possibility of future misfortune, invoking England’s demise, acts of military insurrection, and the mysterious prophecy against galaunts, but unlike Idley’s text, they fall short of actually punishing the galaunts themselves. One point of this exercise seems to be to explore and to perpetually extend the experience—or the anticipation of the experience—of material change itself. As the galaunt named Curiosity in the Digby Mary Magdalene explains, being a galaunt is not about prideful appearance, but rather about a certain type of lived knowledge: “I lefe in this wor[l]d, I do it for no pride”: I do it not for pride, but because I live in this world. Like Baudelaire’s dandy, who is said to hold “une intelligence subtile de tout le mécanisme moral de ce monde” [a subtle understanding of all the moral mechanisms of the world], these galaunts seem to exemplify a subtle awareness and even irony about the interlocked moral and material habits of their own culture.

As I discuss above, several late-medieval poems on the galaunt, including “On the Times” and the Treatise, include as part of their poetic project a certain level of stylistic playfulness and creativity, even going so far as to position the galaunt as the singer of his own satire. These poems’ repeated associations of aesthetic playfulness with the cycles of material and cultural transience symbolized by Fortune’s wheel might be helpfully understood through Johan Huizinga’s pioneering theory of play in Homo Ludens. According to Huizinga, cultural play, which is rooted in the rhythm of lived experience or “the rhythm of life” epitomized by the cycle of birth and death, denotes one of the foundational human experiences of sacred order. “[O]rder, tension, movement, change, solemnity, rhythm, rapture”: Huizinga’s list of the elemental aspects of play accords with many of the themes found in galaunt poems. Also, poetic rhythm is one expression of culture’s underlying ludic principle; in Huizinga’s words, “[s]uch elements as the rhyme and the distich derive from and only have meaning in those timeless, ever-recurring patterns of play: beat and counter-beat, rise and fall, question and answer, in short, rhythm.” As we have seen, the medieval galaunt expresses such ludic rhythms in poetic terms: his changing fashions, his association with the rise and fall of Fortune’s wheel, and his ever-wandering gait—his constant movement, or “gloryous goynge,” in the words of the Treatise (68)—are mirrored by and informed by his lyric versification.

Along with his ever-changing fashions, the galaunt of late-medieval English poetry is explicitly associated with another object of play that con-
nects him to the trope of Fortune’s wheel and to the ludic rhythms of worldly experience which that trope represents: dice used for playing games of chance. Since antiquity dicing was considered the specific domain of Fortune, an association that remained popular in the late-medieval period. Chaucer uses the metaphor in his Boethian *Knight’s Tale*, where Arcite dramatically apostrophizes to Palamoun, “[w]el hath Fortune yturned thee the dys” (*CT* 1.1237), when he perceives his cousin and rival to have the upper hand. Similarly, Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* describes Fortune’s changeability in terms of the popular game of hazard: “The pley of Fortune lik hasard retournable, / With sodeyn chaung of fals felicite” (5.1882–83). The galaunts’ association with dicing games at first seems merely to be another aspect of their immoral and excessive behavior; galaunts, we are to understand, indulge in dicing games in the same way that they consume excessive amounts of food and drink and wear excessive amounts of new clothing. As the song “Huff! A Galaunt” describes it, three dice are the only objects likely to be found in a galaunt’s purse:

Galaunt, by thy gyrdyl ther hangyth a purss;
Ther-in ys neyther peny ner crosse,
Butt iij dysse, and crystys curse—
Huff, a galawnt!”

Yet even this brief reference to dice shows their symbolic potency in relation to the galaunt. Putting aside for a moment the exact nature of the dicing game implied here, we can see that the dice are related to several key aspects of the galaunt: his financial irresponsibility, his misleading show of money; his inherent connection with mortality, sin, and the burdens of the material world in the reference to “Christ’s curse.” Finding dice rather than coins in a galaunt’s purse, moreover, specifically captures the sense of misplaced or frustrated expectation so often exemplified by galaunts: they offer not money, but the promise of an attempt to attain money, or conversely, evidence of the game of chance that consumed—that will always consume—the money that once existed.

Dicing games of chance provided a particular type of shorthand for the larger questions generated by the trope of Fortune’s wheel. As Rhiannon Purdie points out, unlike other popular gambling games in the Middle Ages—cards, chess, sporting events—dice represent the only game wherein “the sole operative factor (barring cheating) is chance.” The dice imagined in the galaunt’s purse in “Huff! A Galaunt” were most likely meant to symbolize the game of hazard, which involved three dice, a preliminary knowledge of
the probability of rolling certain numbers with these dice, and a series of random, ever-changing rules that complicated the chance of winning the game by rolling a particular number. Medieval authors’ depictions of hazard suggest an appreciation of the game’s implicit mirroring of the arbitrariness of life, and of its playful ability to interrogate the daily workings of causality, temporality, and determinism. Three dice were also associated with playing lots, as well as with playing a related fortune-telling game pervasive throughout Europe that was rendered into poetic verse in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Whether for purposes of gambling or prophecy, three dice were, as Thomas M. Kavanagh points out, “the preferred randomizers of medieval Europe,” used in various ways to reenact and redirect the experience of worldly unpredictability.

What is particularly fascinating about this picture of late-medieval dicing culture is how seamlessly it fits into the galaunt’s overall program of aestheticized disorder, suggesting even further the extent to which late-medieval English galaunt poems together formulated a distinct ethos or methodology based in aesthetically recreating and reengaging the experience of instability. According to the social historian Gerda Reith, the phenomenon of gambling facilitates exactly this kind of knowledge; gambling games such as dicing, she says, “act as a kind of theatre in which human relations with uncertainty are symbolically played out.” While the unpredictability of the dicing game creates a microcosm of the transitory world, its strict rules, repetitive actions, and unequivocal outcomes offer something that the outside world does not: a means of concluding that unpredictability. Reith argues that the associations of gambling with greed and personal gain are misleading. In practice, the appeal of gambling is rooted in an obsessive revisiting of the sensation of losing and gaining security and order: in the excitement derived from a repeated and deliberate “seeking out of uncertainty and the need for the resolution of that uncertainty.” In the aesthetic world of the galaunt, falling or losing in its various forms seems to develop from a general moral hazard associated with that figure’s excessive changeability of form into a deliberate methodology and a mode of engaging with the world. Dicing is effectively not about earnings, or even winning, but rather about negotiating the experience of losing what one has; as Chaucer’s Franklin puts it in reference to his own son’s gambling habits: “To pleye at dees and to despende / And lese al that he hath is his usage” (CT 5.690–91).

While dice are not usually considered sartorial objects—perhaps with the exception of the dice necklace worn by Fortune in Charles d’Orléans’s Fortunes Stabilnes that I discussed in chapter 2—in medieval practice the game of dicing maintained a distinct vestimentary feature. The custom of wagering
one’s clothing during a gambling game was one of the most highly troped elements of literary gambling scenes. Summing up a dice game that takes place during a feast at Arthur’s court, for example, Wace’s mid-twelfth century *Roman de Brut* declares: “Tels i puet aseeir vestuz / Ki al partir s’en lieve nuz” [“The man who sat down to play clothed might rise naked at the close of play”].\(^{83}\) Centuries later the fifteenth-century *Tale of Beryn*, an anonymous continuation of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, characterizes its gambling mercantile hero in similar terms: as coming home “al naked” each night after dicing with his friends.\(^{84}\) In the period between these two texts, the rich selection of dicing poems offered by the goliardic poets of the thirteenth century, a popular genre in medieval England, effectively codified the association of dicing with clothing. In these poems clothing is presented as the *lingua franca* and main currency of the dicer: players cast dice for each other’s garments, brag about their fine attire, shiver and complain when they are denuded, cheat one another out of their cloaks, parody ecclesiastical sumptuary laws, and curse their opponents with vestimentary eradication: “colum cuius regit Clotho, / quod sepe nudatur” [May Clotho wield her spindle / So that his garments dwindle].\(^{85}\) In the context of these poems, experiencing the naked back—*dorso nudo*—of dispossession is a gambler’s rite of passage and ultimate ethos.\(^{86}\) It is also, moreover, a practice that explicitly corresponds to Fortune’s own powers of dispossession; in “O Fortuna,” for example, one of the most famous dicing poems of the *Carmina Burana* manuscript, the gambler’s naked back—perhaps like Boethius’s stripped protagonist—is depicted as a deliberate rebuke of that goddess’s powers, when the speaker-poet declares to Fortune: “nunc per ludum / dorsum nudum / fero tui sceleris” [now through the game / I hold my bare back / to your wickedness].\(^{87}\)

Many literary portraits of the English galaunt seem to capitalize on the same sophisticated cultural playfulness depicted by early dicing poems, in which the linked activities of casting dice and changing or exchanging clothes stand in for and comment on the larger problems posed by Fortune’s wheel about material possession and worldly transience. While I have kept my discussion in this chapter to the way in which the galaunt appears to have epitomized this trope, adding to its significance by situating its aesthetic upheaval in contemporary contexts and events, the symbiotic connection between clothing and dicing can be seen in other contexts as well. If we glance at Lydgate’s poem “That now is hey some tyme was grase,” for example, which depicts the ever-changing, ever-fading “freshenys” (34) of all things, we can see how it speaks wordlessly to the ethos of the “fresh” galaunt as a larger symbol of the always passing, often edifying transitory world:
ENGLISH GALAUNTS AND THE AESTHETIC EVENT

Nowe clothed in blake, nowe clothed in grene;
Nowe lustye, nowe in sobernes;
Now clothe of golde that shynyth shene,
Nowe rede, in token of hardynes,
Nowe all in white, for clennes,
Nowe sise, nowe synke, nowe ambbes aas;
The chaunce stondes in no stabulenes,
That now is hey some tyme was grase.
(97–104)88

In this passage the trope of vestimentary change sets the rhythm and pacing of temporal transformations and adjustments, while three dice mark the speed with which change, or “chaunce,” can arrive. Like the highly wrought literary styles of the galaunt poems I have discussed, Lydgate’s use of the visually arresting anaphora here—whose visual and metrical form breaks, appropriately, after the dice are cast—insists on the aesthetic nature of change, presenting a rhythmically compelling arena in which dressing and dicing play out in aesthetic terms the effects of passing time on the material things of the world, including—perhaps—lyric verse itself.

CONCLUSION

The medieval dicer’s practiced skill at losing his shirt seems a curiously appropriate end to a book that began with Boethius’s theories about the transcendent possibilities of material dispossession. Boethius’s text, I argued in chapter 1, teaches that losing one’s objects—being stripped of one’s goods and clothing, for example—provides a unique opportunity for an individual to examine the value of the lost or changed object as well as the cyclical habits and practices of attachment that have evolved in relation to the object. As later writers take up the trope of vestimentary change, especially within the culture of the emerging fashion system, its potential to express the experience of the transitory material world and the knowledge gained by that experience persists and even grows. Changes in the sartorial symbolism of the goddess Fortune as the Middle Ages progressed present one example of this development, as I discussed in chapter 2. And in chapter 3, we saw two thirteenth-century writers, a bishop and a satirical poet, examine the ideal of divine stasis through contemporary stylistic changes in ecclesiastical attire. Likewise, Griselda’s stability in the face of changes in Fortune’s temporeel richesses are used by Chaucer to examine the changing consumer practices
and rights of ownership of contemporary women with regard to their garments, as I discuss in chapter 4. My discussion of the English galaunt’s radical use of clothing in the current chapter concludes this line of argument by demonstrating the way in which late-medieval poets used this figure to playfully rethink the teleology of misfortune that is always already encoded in medieval discourses of clothing and of aesthetic novelty.

In many ways the form of cultural play that I uncover in the late-medieval galaunt poems has been ever present throughout the chapters of this book, most overtly evident in the way the texts themselves poetically stage their concerns. From the alternating prosimetric form of Boethius’s Menippean satire to the bilingual verses of the macaronic lyrics, and from the excessively ascetic poetics of Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale to the excessively ornamented styles of Durand’s biblical allegory and the galaunt poems, the texts that have been examined in these chapters urgently draw their readers’ attention to the inherent variability of literary form. For the writers of satirical verse and of the extended allegorical descriptions of fashions worn by Fortune, this volatility of form speaks to a playfulness essential for the poem’s topic and tone. Even in the texts we might tend to read more seriously, however, such as those by Durand and by Boethius (although an argument has been made that the Consolatio has been read far too seriously), these formal features express a literary dynamism—especially in the interplay between prose and poetry in Boethius, and the imaginative hermeneutic contortions and extensive amplificatio in Durand—that playfully involves the reader in its own creative endeavors. As these texts demonstrate, stylistic playfulness is one of the more consistent literary responses to cultural pressures involving fashion as a phenomenon and change as a concept.
Plate 1  This illumination, from an early-fifteenth-century French translation of Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae*, takes to new heights the standard trope of vestimentary change in the iconography of Fortune's wheel (c. 1410). By permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Cambridge, Trinity Hall MS 12, fol. 3r.
Plate 2  An early-fourteenth-century manuscript of William Durand’s *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* depicts the bishop’s order of vestments in a historiated initial T at the top of the page (detail). An ape mimics the bishop’s dress in the bas-de-page (see figure 3.1). © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. London, British Library, Add. 31032, fol. 33v.
Plate 3  Syon Cope with Opus Anglicanum embroidery (1300–1320).
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