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TAMY TAZI

CAFTANS

Photographies / Photographs
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SKIRA

TAMY TAZI

Respecting tradition without turning her back on the present was the challenge Tamy Tazi had to face. Heir to a rich and important ancestral heritage, Tamy learned how to embrace her own time without rejecting anything from the past. I have known Tamy for more than forty years, and I have always been impressed – as was Yves Saint Laurent – by her love for the culture of her country, her deep familiarity with the knowledge and skills of the local craftspeople, and her understanding of clothing meant not only to make women beautiful but to accompany them in their daily tasks. While many Moroccans seem to prefer the spell of European culture to their own, Tamy Tazi looked to her own roots for inspiration. And she was right to do so. Whereas Yves Saint Laurent sprinkled Moroccan references in his work, it can be said that Tamy followed the same route, but in the opposite direction. That is where her merit lies. She could, as others did, have offered only kaftans and *djellabas* – she was talented enough to do so. Instead, she understood that she could achieve more, that the clothes she created were not to be stuck in the rut of tradition, but worn by the women of today. Though remaining true to the spirit of the garments, she altered their cuts and changed their details, producing collections like no other, on every occasion. For all these reasons, Tamy Tazi occupies a unique place in Moroccan culture, and is a true designer.

Pierre Bergé

INTRODUCTION

Fate offered me the privilege of crossing the path of Tamy Tazi. It was one of those coincidences that become etched permanently in your mind, and which are strongly associated with keen emotions. It was an exceptional meeting, and a confirmation of Céline's avowal that "Man is avid for new encounters, and yet only a few have the power to magnify his life...".

The gestation of the book *Caftani* (Daniel Rey, Idea Books, 2009) was nearly complete. It was to be a vast panorama of the caftans of the past and present, dedicated to the creators who perpetuate the legend of the "*habit du lumière*" of Morocco. Several top Moroccan stylists had contributed to the book already, and each of them had urged me to involve Tamy Tazi, the most skilful interpreter in the creation of caftans, and the only true guardian of the country's oldest sartorial traditions.

Over the weeks, Tamy Tazi, the disciple of the infinitely beautiful, played the role of the unattainable to perfection, remaining silent in response to my requests to meet her. Then came the day when fate intervened in my favour: my path chanced to cross hers, and I was told that she expected me in her workshop.

No noise, no confusion. Unlike the other places of creation I had visited up till that day, Tamy Tazi's workshop was a distillation of silence, the same quiet that I had encountered in those temples of haute couture, the ateliers of Valentino and Roberto Capucci. A door left open offered me a glimpse of the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary of her silver-fingered embroiderers. My eyes wandered in the hope of dispelling the apprehension I felt at meeting the Grande Dame whose praises Yves Saint-Laurent never ceased to sing. But my fear was groundless: from the very first moment Tamy

extended respect and gentleness, antidotes to the intimidation that her notoriety had inspired.

Not for a single moment during my description of the concept of the book *Caftani* did her gaze leave me. She listened, dared to point out the shortcomings in my history of caftans, and disapproved my drawing attention to designers overly inclined to alter the original character of Morocco's favourite garment. Clearly, I was going to have to review my copy and approach perfection if Tamy's flair was to grace my book.

She closed the layout of *Caftani* and her expression became more friendly. The moment had arrived to render our meeting extraordinary and to pass on, to her mind, to a more serious subject. "Your book will certainly be remarkable and I place my caftans at your photographer's disposal, but I would like something altogether different from you". Her reserve having melted, Tamy allowed her memory to run free. She was offering me a lavish invitation to investigate and appraise her entire artistic career... Céline's avowal rose to my mind. "I should like the course of my history to be recorded for posterity, that a book document my passion for caftans". Once again Tamy's expression became more serious, as though she were issuing a challenge. "Make haste to finish your book and come back and see me when it is finished. A long journey awaits you...". Tamy Tazi had just entrusted me with the production of the only book to trace her remarkable artistic trajectory.

Daniel Rey

TAMY TAZI

CAFTAN-COUTURE

Vêtement vernaculaire, le caftan est devenu chez les grands bourgeois marocains robe d'apparat, tenue de cérémonie, costume au sens fort du terme – sens qui l'apparente par l'étymologie à « coutume », autrement dit à la Tradition. Dans ce milieu occidentalisé, porter un caftan c'est souvent endosser pour les grandes occasions la pérennité des formes et des usages. Le Maroc, on le sait, se prévaut de cela : d'une dimension conservatoire, qui est hypostasiée au titre de l'identité. L'occasion est trop belle de relever ici, du côté de la séduction et du style, les idiosyncrasies d'un pays qui s'honore de sa mixité culturelle comme de sa continuité historique et prétend perpétuer ses mœurs et ses usages – voire honorer l'antique, comme disait Delacroix, tout en vivant son siècle, aspirant de toutes ses forces à sauter par-dessus la Faille, l'espace-temps abyssal du Déroit qui le sépare de l'Europe. Assumer donc, notablement, une dyschronie qui peut schizer les consciences et diviser la société. Vivre ainsi plusieurs temps, plusieurs fuseaux historiques à la fois, avec ce que cela implique de collisions, de bricolages, d'incongruités, de violence mais aussi de puissance créatrice et de singularité. La postmodernité peut souscrire à ce type d'agencements hasardeux. Et la mondialisation a fait du multiculturel son élément. Le moderne (celui qui décrète ce qui n'est désormais plus possible, pour reprendre une définition de Barthes) se voulait plus radical : il tranchait, faisait rupture. Sachant que ce n'est pas sans risque que l'on croise des fils aussi dissemblables ; que dans les sociétés coutumières telles que celle-ci, l'hétérogénéité se laisse difficilement apprivoiser. Des esthétiques éprouvées de part et d'autre ne font bon ménage que s'il y a accord ou jeu en l'essence des choses, au niveau du principe : dans l'ordre des proportions, le choix des couleurs et des matières, dans une tension vers la pureté des lignes et le renouvellement des formes. Le kitsch petit-bourgeois que l'on rencontre souvent aujourd'hui n'est autre qu'un palier dans la course à la modernité : le moment ingrat qui, loin de la verve populaire et de la virtuosité brouillonne des souks, répercute le mauvais mélange, la disgrâce d'un mimétisme qui jure, comme la bêtise (de là qu'il ne soit apprécié qu'une fois ce moment surmonté). Mais il est des

TAMY TAZI

CAFTAN COUTURE

The caftan is inherently a “vernacular” garment but in the course of time the Moroccan bourgeoisie has progressively transformed it into a garment of pomp, a form of ceremonial dress, and therefore a “costume”, in the true sense of the word, thereby bringing it etymologically closer to the concept of *custom*, otherwise known as Tradition. In today's Westernised environment, when the middle classes wear a caftan on important occasions, they are in fact displaying their support of age-old forms and customs. Moroccans are proud of having perpetuated tradition, of having raised it to the status of identity. Moreover, the caftan offers a wonderful opportunity to survey the idiosyncrasies of a country that still cherishes its ties with the Ancien Régime, taking pride as much in its cultural mix as in its historical continuity. While perpetuating its traditions and customs and even “honouring ancient times”, as Delacroix used to say, Morocco is taking an active part in the present as it strives to bridge the Fay, the deep chasm of the Strait, that separates it from Europe both temporally and spatially. It is therefore also attempting to accept the dyschrony that can create a split in people's conscience and divide society, and, in doing so, to experience different historical periods at the same time, with all the inevitable consequences of approximations, clashes, incongruities, and violence, but also creative power and uniqueness. Post-modernity can condone such haphazard combinations, and globalisation has made multiculturalism one of its most representative elements. Modernism (which, according to Barthes, is the principle that decrees what is no longer possible) aspired to a more radical approach: it aimed to split and rupture things, realising that there are always risks involved in trying to weave such diverse threads together; aware that heterogeneous elements are very difficult to reconcile in societies deeply tied to tradition, such as the one in Morocco. And knowing that efforts to create an aesthetic patchwork backfire unless there is harmony and playfulness in the essence of things at the level of principles, such as respect for proportion and the choice of colours and materials used, with the aim of creating a purity of line and renewing forms. The penchant for kitsch among



Cette tunique en bourrette de soie blanche est inspirée du vêtement que portaient les mariées de Mahdia (en Tunisie). Elle présente de larges rubans de soie couleur indigo et turquoise, ainsi qu'une broderie formant plastron. Un grand pompon bicolore termine l'échancrure garnie de boutons et de brides. Des lignes turquoise soulignent le bas de la tunique qui est relevé, sur le devant seulement, d'une bande de dflira et de hautes floches turquoise et bleues. Des floches semblables sont montées sur les emmanchures. Les côtés et les fentes sont également marqués par des dflira.

This tunic made of white noil was inspired by the garments worn by the brides from Mahdia (Tunisia). It displays various large ribbons made with indigo and turquoise silk, and also an embroidery pattern which marks out the front part of the dress. A large two-coloured pompon is placed at the end of the front opening, which is ornamented with buttons and cords. A few turquoise lines point towards the lower part of the tunic, which is held in place by a dflirat strip, and by several turquoise and blue tassels positioned high up only on the front of the garment. These same tassels are sewn on the sleeves. The sides and slits are marked by several sets of dflirat.





Saroual et haut en crêpe georgette bleue.
Bijoux : ceinture, bracelets, fibule, boucles
d'oreilles, bague et boîte de Coran portée en
bandoulière sont en argent.

Saroual and top in blue georgette crepe.
Jewellery: belt, bracelets, clasp, earrings, ring
and Koran box slung over the shoulder are
all in silver.

the *petite bourgeoisie* – a frequent sight these days – is merely a phase in the race towards modernism: a disgraceful phase that belies the population's innate creative genius and the heady chaos of the *souk*, leading to poorly matched ideas and inelegant imitation (which is why their inventiveness will only be appreciated once this phase has passed). Only in essential and rare instances does a mix achieve the sublime and thrive on the multiple components that compose it: the kind of harmony that manifests itself here pre-supposes an advantageous backdrop that vaunts a plurality of language and of taste, a true grasp of forms, and – most importantly – an unrestrained interaction between intuition and technical know-how, factors that ultimately lead to elegance, whereby the differences (of rules, temporal values, and meanings) either disappear, or are used to great advantage.

Caftan-couture expresses this process very effectively. It flourishes at festive events, where members of the bourgeoisie observe one another while remaining sharply aware of their own vulnerability. More precisely, when a hundred or so families invited to a prestigious wedding appraise and acknowledge each other, tie and untie their bonds, so to speak. We should interpret this kind of display as an "accursed share", as the mark left by a class of prominent citizens and *nouveaux riches* who love to spend and show off. It is a sort of parade characterised by people wearing dazzling and highly traditional clothing, and by the sheer length and splendour of the celebration. Luxury plays a very important role here: it is the famous citified luxury that Ibn Khaldun considered as civilisation's most glorious form of expression. He acknowledged it as one of history's driving forces, though, in his view, splendour and refinements also represent the beginning of the path that leads to decline. At the same time (it can hardly be repeated often enough), this thoroughly modern display is an achievement: an opportunity only recently conquered by women to appear as they really are in all their gracefulness, no longer merely in each other's company or among their family members, but also among everyone else, especially men to whom they are not related. These are men who no longer earn praise through their military accomplishments, as they once did, nor through their religious ascendancy and virtues (which likewise occurs less often with the passing of time): they earn it, rather, through their power and money, by spending extravagantly, above all through their wives – who lend themselves brilliantly to the game, after they have ensured alliances between families, and conquered their share of freedom.



Tunique en soie blanche enrichie de broderies de Meknès dans les tons de bleu, violet et marron sur le buste et les manches courtes ; l'encolure est garnie de boutons et de brides.

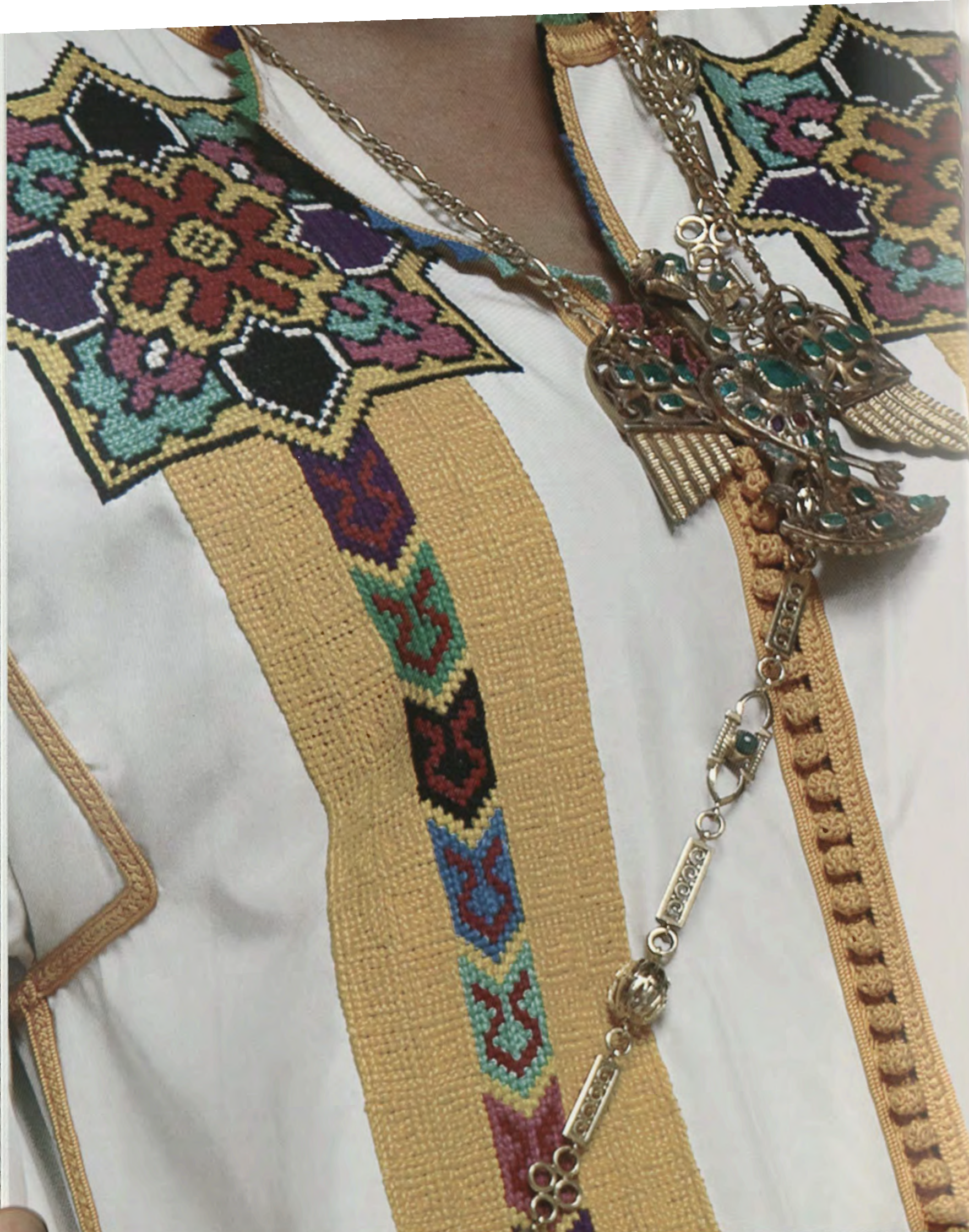
Pages 32-33
Détail des broderies de Meknès.

White silk tunic embellished with embroideries from Meknes in tones of blue, purple and brown on the bust and short sleeves, the neck is decorated with buttons and loops.

Pages 32-33
Detail of the embroideries from Meknes.

It is all very well for dyschronic societies to lay claim to their past and use it for ideological purposes but they often possess a short memory (any clash between different historical periods usually leads to repression). Moroccans have forgotten (or at least they pretend to have forgotten) that until just a couple of generations ago men and women did not come into contact with each other unless within the family structure. They have forgotten that the rules imposed by their tradition kept a tight grip on their lives, and stuck to them all the way down to the smallest details, even to the way they created their laces and embroidery. Here, as in other parts of the world, people scrutinised young women's virtues by inspecting their trousseaus, by examining whether or not their fine needlework was able to exalt silks and fabrics. Through their embroidery, young women could reveal, along with their good taste, a certain refinement in character and manners; they could demonstrate the extent of their dedication and caring, and their sense of moderation, a distinguishing quality of Sunnis. Women humbly exercised their *sabr* in the shadows as they hung by a thread — no figure of speech could indeed be more appropriate. *Sabr* is the virtue of silent perseverance firmly preached by the Qur'an, and which gave form to their lives.

Perhaps women were illustrating their condition as they inscribed geometrical and floral motifs on fabric, as they meticulously reproduced perfectly regular, conventional designs, and thus appended their mute signature. This is how they came to terms with the length of their lives, how they followed the dawdling course of their existence: dreamily and lost in time. Embroidery can be thought of as a form of recital. A recital that emerges through the power of the performer's voice (its timbre, tone, or chosen intensity). The text instead plays a secondary role: women often had no control over their destiny, it was usually planned for them in advance by the males and never by the women themselves, and — most importantly — their existence was always subject to God's will. Their lives were made of fragile, close-knit, tiny stitches of all-encompassing delicacy, of dedication and modesty as fundamental principles; they renounced all forms of abrupt change and side escapes, they counted their threads and their days, they carried on with their mending, and performed the same actions again and again. They were never inventive, they merely followed the guidelines laid down by their female ancestors, just as *they* had been taught during their own childhood: there was no more effective means of moral instruction, nor one more suited to their lives as recluses. Did they know how to write or count? No proof of this remains. We are left, however, with hand-



Détail des broderies de la tunique
de la page précédente.

Detail of the embroideries on the tunic
on the previous page.

kerchiefs, cushions, hangings, and a collection of everyday objects that irresistibly conjure up fairy-tale characters originating from the depths of time: captive princesses, abandoned lovers, excess young women and slaves, or just wives, desperate wives, patiently awaiting some small sign of acknowledgement.

Although it is often belittled or underestimated, embroidery is anything but a minor form of art. It does not exclusively pertain to this country's female population, far from it (objects made from leather, such as saddles, shoes, bags, are embroidered as well by men), but it does provide the most effective explanation of their history: these anonymous inscriptions decorating the edges of a few items of clothing and furniture — just the edges, as if they belonged to the edge of all things and all time — should be acknowledged as a very precious heritage. These decorations are a remnant of the pleasures and days spent in the harem's half-light and represent a disciplined and graceful translation of the condition of women. They are like a flow of chatter comprised of flowers, colours and charming arabesques that tell of loving devotion and invocations and the domestic horizon that circumscribed their existence. Far from the phantasmatic orientalist elements that people usually associate with this world, what we have here is a "hyper-cultural" *savoir-faire*, revealing, almost confidentially, through its shades and patterns, the subtleties of an entire universe: in contrast with the erotic connotation of harems and the excesses they are believed to harbour, the handicrafts of women, namely, that which, meticulous and graceful, fashions and adorns — something which is inconceivable for us — daily life, homes and the passing of time: a manner of inhabiting existence and of signifying presence. Metaphors belonging to the textile world have always possessed a metaphysical meaning and embroidery has always been associated with feminine mythology, essential yet concealed, like something that is closely related to destiny. We need to learn how to decipher this hidden language, a language we lost the key to in barely a few decades. Among other things, it reveals several phases of history: one can guess at the numerous cultural layers, overlappings, and preferences; the manifold cultural influences have sown their seeds in the course of time and their fruit has developed at random. (The influence of Andalusian tradition was important, as was the influence of Ottoman style, which was either introduced by Circassian *favourite*s — or through Algeria.) In a discreet and almost detached manner, anonymously and quietly, the art of embroidery asserts that beauty is a necessary ingredient in private life. What is more, it demonstrates the inseparability of what is good from what is beautiful in what has to be protected.



Ce caftan en jersey de laine couleur cyclamen est orné d'une broderie de maâlem apposée sur des appliques de velours d'un ton plus soutenu. Le motif de cette broderie est inspiré du décor d'un siège ottoman. Collier de boules dorées et feutre (Collection privée).
En bas, détail.

This caftan made of cyclamen-coloured wool jersey is decorated with embroidery created by a maâlem (master craftsman); the embroidery is positioned over velvet ornamentations presenting a stronger tone. The embroidery's motif was inspired by the kind of decoration found on Ottoman chairs. Necklace made with golden spheres and felt (Private collection).
Below, detail.

Thus it expresses the true nature of women while revealing, through its delicate qualities, the civility of a life spent among people of the same sex or family.

There are always those who are ready to describe, when it comes to issues of gender in Islam, the moral authority of mothers and wives behind walls or beneath *hijabs*. They continually tell us that the veil of appearances is misleading. This is not the topic of discussion here, but we will say that – *in this sense* – the embroidery women created or had made for themselves can be considered the female component of the garment. Its purpose is not, however, merely decorative: along with the kind of fabric, it is what differentiates one garment from another. Decorations made of real gold, lacework and embroidery call attention to a unique cut, one that historians trace back to the Andalusian Moors, or even further back, to Ziryab, a man famous for his outstandingly good taste and who, during the ninth century, brought the refined manners of the Abbasid court to Córdoba. The traditional form of the caftan, either by itself or with a *dfina* (a transparent top), has remained unchanged: with some minor differences, they retain their





Ce caftan en jersey de laine jaune d'or est agrémenté de broderies turquoise dessinant des festons et des bothé (palmes du Cachemire). Au centre, deux rangées de dfira sont rehaussées de boutons et de brides en passementerie.

This caftan made of golden-yellow wool jersey is decorated with turquoise embroideries (palm trees from the Kashmir region). At the centre, two rows of dfira are exalted by buttons and ornamental cords.

T-shape, regardless of the gender, age, ethnic background or social status of the wearer. This cut has actually evolved very little over the centuries, or from one region to another. If you spread it out, it displays a simple design possessing an almost abstract kind of elegance. This feature, akin to that of kimonos, would be enough on its own to explain the garment's timeless qualities. With its squared sleeve-edges and parallel sides, it is the perfect example of a structured article of clothing: the body of the garment is accentuated, emphasised by the cords of the *dfirat* and the *sfifat* (rather slender laced braids) or by the rhythm of the *zwaq* (a pattern or, more rarely, arabesques that make the garment longer). These "embroideries" not only serve the purpose of hiding the stitching or of arranging the decorations, they also *create the garment's lines*. They are really much more than superfluous decorations, in the same way that the purpose of *zel-liges* or of beehive stucco-work was to prevent architectural works from looking stark or modest. In both cases, in the colours used for the fabric like in those used for the walls of a building, the figures and ground can meld, interchange and become intrinsic to one another. In Tetouan, especially, where the front part of the caftan is replete with golden or silver decorations that trace the Tree of Life, it would not be enough simply to describe it as a decoration. The same goes for Jewish costumes, where gold abounds on necklines and in diagonal bands on skirts (Leo Africanus explained that Jewish artisans had the monopoly on goldworking). Masterfully drawn figures endow the garment with allure and style; and the outcome of this is that they are bolstered or, rather, exalted by the rigorous design of the cut.

And if we continue the analogy with architecture, we observe that here, as elsewhere, people live within their clothes in the same way that they inhabit an interior according to a tradition of spaciousness and convenience. Caftans are more practical than they may seem, and they have something else in common with kimonos, in that they can easily be cut, folded and stored; they can also be exchanged or handed down — no matter what their size is — from one generation to the next (on special days, young women can borrow the clothes that were worn by their female ancestors, who astutely stowed them in lavender-filled crates). Lastly, they are unchanging costumes worn by men and women alike that also disguise the body's shape. Actually, unlike Christianity, Islam didn't chastise bodies: it eroticised them by veiling them. On the other hand, it did subdue women. This is certainly the reason why no truly feminine costumes have been

Détail des broderies du caftan en jersey
de la page précédente.

Detail of the embroidery on the jersey caftan
on the previous page.





Ce kaftan en jersey de laine couleur violette est inspiré des djellabas rustiques portées par les hommes du Rif. L'échancrure présente un kittane bicolore suivi de trois dffira (rouge, vert turquoise et bleu). Ces trois tons se prolongent dans les pompons qui rythment la ligne du kaftan. Les contre-côtés, les emmanchures, le bas des manches et les fentes sont également soulignés par les dffira et le kittane. Long collier d'amulettes en bandoulière ; collier berbère, boucles d'oreilles anciennes de Tétouan (Collection privée). À droite, détail.

This kaftan made of violet wool jersey was inspired by the rustic jellabas belonging to the men from the Rif region. The front opening presents a two-colored kittane (tunic) followed by three sets of dffirat (red, turquoise green, and blue). Pompons extend from these components, in the same tones that play across the main body of the kaftan. The inner layer, the sleeve edges, the lower part of the sleeves and the slits are also all exalted by various sets of dffirat and by the kittane. Long necklace made up of amulets, meant to be worn across the shoulder; Berber necklace, ancient earrings from Tetouan (Private collection). On the right, detail.



created in this country, even though segregation and reclusion (harem) could have encouraged it. In other words, nothing instead, a hierarchy within the same type of things. And, once embroidery (in the general sense of the term, that is to say highlights the edges of the fabric) to create a *distinction*: it is and braids, which might be thought of as accessories and not separate (genders in particular) or exalt (a whole outfit, for example colours, lattice patterns or arabesques. But that is not all: something that asserts individual differences. It displays the mastery of the craftwork and – more rarely – it reveals the specificity of the cut or, if you prefer, the body of the kaftan, obeys the rules



*Caftan en soie naturelle gaufrée rouge, agrémenté d'un travail de chbika (dentelle marocaine à l'aiguille) dessinant des feuillages dans les tons de vert et de rouge sur fond d'or.
À droite, détail du buste.*

Pages 62-63

Détail de broderies dessinant des vagues dans différents tons de bleu et de fuchsia.



*Caftan in natural red gossamer silk, trimmed with chbika (Moroccan needle-point lace) to create a pattern of foliage in tones of green and red on a gold ground.
On the right, detail of the front of the caftan.*

Pages 62-63

Detail of the wave-shaped embroideries in tones of blue and fuchsia.





Ce caftan en soie gaufrée couleur fuchsia présente une broderie quasiment du même ton : des feuillages y sont posés sur une frise de losanges cyclamen et or. Au centre, des boutons demi-boule départagent les symétries sur toute la longueur. Le châle en crêpe georgette est également brodé sur le pourtour. Le bas du vêtement et les fentes sont ornés d'un liseré de dars, dentelle exécutée par des femmes.



This caftan made of fuchsia embossed silk displays an embroidery pattern almost in the same colour: several leaves were placed here over a frieze made of cyclamen-coloured and golden lozenges. Various half-spherical buttons separate the symmetrical elements at the centre along the caftan's full length. The shawl made of georgette crepe is also embroidered along the edges. A "dars" edging, a kind of lace produced by women, was placed over the garment's lower part and around the slits.

that is to say, it not only obeys the rule of indifferentiation (sexual, regional, social and so on), it also bows down to the supremacy of the *Ummah*. This decorative form of art offers a reading of the organisation of society through analogy.

Should we deduce, then, from this indifference to gender, that with modernity, women have come to appropriate a masculine outfit? In the same way that they have recovered *djellabas*, which were initially only worn by men, or *haiks*, a drape they held between their teeth (also worn by men – Delacroix's famous "*sublime vivant*" – but which, in view of the confinement of women, greatly resembles some kind of expedient, a form of packaging). The answer is yes. We should, however, once more take note of the caftan's continuity. It is through the caftan, as well as most of the traditions that pertain to private life, that women accomplish their symbolic function: despite the fact that they have almost nothing specifically their own in terms of clothing, they have remained the guardians of tradition, thereby overcoming time and perpetuating identity. Nowadays, in affluent circles, men prefer to wear Western clothing: they have abandoned traditional garments, wearing them only during official ceremonies at the Royal Palace or in Parliament, for instance, or when they go to the mosque or at funerals; but they no longer wear them during lavish, grandiose celebrations such as weddings or baptisms. These members of the bourgeoisie want to be modern, Westernised, free of the layers of the past. Wearing a *djellaba* means expressing a certain *gravitas*. In any case, both hypotheses (the one that speaks of an evolution for women because of their use of elements from the world of men, and, on the contrary, the one that says that no change has occurred at all) have their strong points: as often happens when facing gender-related issues, ambivalence is found. The dyschrony of Morocco emerges once again, which seems to change its significance according to the viewpoint adopted. Like women, the whole country seems to waver between these two positions as it deals with coexisting historical periods. Unless, by way of conclusion, we recall the words of the old Sicilian prince of Lampedusa, which illustrate better than any other the state of the Ancien Régime: he stated in short that things must change if they are to remain the same.

In the photographs taken by Jean Besancenot in the 1930s, the women appear either to be somewhat plump, or very dignified, just like in Europe in the same period. They are "moon-faced", to use a term found in Arab poetry, and, if they don't have a



“cypress waist”, they are dressed in the manner of sultanas. The viewer can guess the loose-fitting cut of the garments but above all we notice the sumptuousness of the fabrics. Silks and brocades are topped with muslin veils or by some other type of fabric that *dfinas* are typically made from. *Dfinas* are tunics that are as light as air in the same shape as caftans and decorated with embroideries. Women wear several skilfully folded scarves over their hair and flower arrangements. Intertwined fringes, locks and braids of false hair are held in place by head ornaments that hang low over their kohl-darkened eyes. The hues are lively, chosen on the basis of how they look when placed one above another; black is rarer. They wear rings on every finger and carry all sorts of accessories: *takhmil*, thick cords used to roll up the sleeves (wide sleeves which are sometimes in layers), heavy necklaces, coins and amulets, tassels and tufts, bracelets on their wrists and their



Cet ensemble traditionnel est en mousseline de soie blanche brochée de pastilles dorées et imprimée de fleurs et de feuillages. Sur la dfina, la chbika reproduit les grappes de fleurs (roses, rouges, jaunes et mauves) du tissu, en les rehaussant et en y ajoutant des pastilles en fil d'argent. Bijoux anciens (Collection privée).

Pages 86-87
Détail de la tenue en mousseline.

This traditional outfit is made of white silk muslin; the silk is brocaded with golden pellets, and displays a print presenting flowers and leaves. Across the dfina, the chbika reproduces the clusters of flowers (red, yellow, and mauve roses) belonging to the fabric, by enhancing them and by adding pellets of silver wire. Antique jewels (Private collection).

Pages 86-87
Detail of the muslin outfit.

ankles. You can sometimes catch a glimpse of the cloth their brocaded *sarouels* are made of. The most traditional of these women use the *hzam*, a very large, even massive, brocaded silk belt as a corset, and seem to be the appurtenance of the ornaments themselves rather than the other way around. Arabesque swirls and rosettes echo all the way down to their ornate slippers, pursuing one another along the fabric, the golden part of the trimmings and the belts, atop which the same motifs are repeated in continuous variations. They seem to have all been drawn in one swoop, with the single trace of a line. Or rather, they sing with a single voice, frenetically performing vocal exercises in exhilarating modulations. Nor do these pretty women conflict with their surroundings; the same motifs may be carved, woven, or painted, and heaped together, just like overflowing garlands, atop cushions, chests, doors or ceilings. The choice of composition and textures expresses a kind of art based on rhythm and abundance, to the extent that we could almost imagine these women as ornaments in the space that surrounds them. One thing is certain: these rather idle beauties primarily kept busy by adorning themselves.

Later on, travel stories became a motif on Moroccan costumes. In describing the women he encountered in the street, Marmol (1573) conjured up the image of "very long, carefully folded *calençons*, which they use to make their legs look pretty: because," he says, "their garments only reach halfway down their legs". Only a century later, women were forced to wear the *haik* under religious pressure. Some "Islamists" had already started attacking the way women dressed, had locked up their bodies and controlled their movements. At the end of the seventeenth century, according to Louis XIV's ambassador Pidou de Saint Olon, "men wear over their shirts [and over their cloth *calençons* which only reach down to their knees] a sleeveless caftan or cloth coat in whatever colour they prefer; a silk scarf girds this coat. Over the caftan, which is only buttoned down to the belt, they wear a *hayque*, which is a piece of fabric made from very fine white wool [...], which they use to cover their heads and bodies: they wrap it round and round, underneath and over their arms, in the manner of the drapery of ancient figures." For Westerners, this drapery carried with it the image of antiquity. Ibn Khaldun instead thought that caftans, these stitch-free garments, preserved the primitive characteristics of Bedouin culture. While the shape of the sleeves and the length and width of the caftan have all varied in the course of time, the garment's essential features have remained the same.



Cette tenue traditionnelle en satin duchesse de soie couleur vert empire est travaillée avec des fils tirés : ils forment une rivière or et argent qui dessine des carreaux sur le plastron et descend en triangles le long du corps et au bord des manches. Trois zigzags soulignent l'encolure et les pourtours sur toute la longueur du vêtement.

Pages 94-95
Détail du buste.



This traditional outfit was created with duchess satin made of empire green silk and is ornamented with drawn threads: they form a golden and silver river, which shapes several plaquettes over the frontpiece and travels downwards, creating various triangles along the garment's body and along the sleeve edges. Three zigzags decorate the neckline and the edges along the entire length of the garment.

Pages 94-95
Detail of the bust.

Clothing trends (or temporary fads) that evolved in harems were undoubtedly the result of the efforts that women made to express themselves, and imitate and outdo others. All this betrayed the absolute need to stand out among rivals or in the midst of sisters. It seems as if these trends mostly concerned colours and fabrics, however, it is clear that fashion was not a system like it is today. This is particularly true in the case of Moroccans, who are more assiduous than others in following the whims of Parisians and not seeming like provincials. But even today caftans do not fully belong to the fashion world. They are situated somewhere in the middle, between their enduring characteristics and the desire for renewal, between crafts and art, between elements binding them to the past and the avant-garde and – last but not least – between Eastern and Western culture. In greater detail, caftans cannot be linked to fashion unless they are considered as haute couture: only a happy few are able to enjoy the privilege of wearing a model bearing a famous label, a model that represents the work of a designer and is the result of an exceptional tradition. What we are talking about is a handmade sartorial treasure, crafted in ateliers in limited quantities, using the most valuable kinds of fabric. It is a perfectly finished work made by a group of specialised artisans, each of whom works on them specific techniques or details. But similarities between caftans and haute-couture dresses do not just lie in ethnographic elements, nor the exceptional opulence that distinguishes their very restricted number of owners who take pride in them as if they were coats-of-arms. These two types of garment are also comparable in that they were designed for the same glamorous environment, and for their cost and the way they were made: they are the stunning products of ateliers that belong to another era, the results of a manner of creation that combines classicism with invention. Both kinds of clothing embody an aesthetic search, one that is both essential and coded and relates them closely to art. Consequently, just as for all true art forms, they evolve randomly, following a meandering road that leads them out of the stateliest salons into the streets and *souks*. So much so that, once deconstructed and vaguely interpreted, at the end of a season or two, they lose their aristocratic traits and become available to everyone. Finally, one last point stresses their rarity, one that adds a touch of melancholy: the constant warnings and refutations of their encroaching disappearance. The existence of these costumes can be as fleeting as twilight. And more than ever in this age of mass culture, high-tech and pretence, because of their magical, vestigial nature, they resemble a museum piece.



Dfina et caftan en taffetas de soie vert moiré travaillé avec chbika en fil d'or et guirlande de feuillage vert et orange ; les bords sont ornés de zigzags verts et orange. Le caftan est garni de boutons en tissu et de zigzags de couleurs assorties à la chbika.

Pages 102-103
Détail.



Dfina and caftan in watered green silk worked with gold chbika and a garland of green and orange foliage; the edges are embellished with green and orange zigzags. The caftan is enhanced with cloth buttons and zigzags in colours that match the chbika.

Pages 102-103
Detail.

Tamy Tazi is the creator of caftan-couture, she has completely renewed Moroccan costumes and turned them into precious creations. Before her, in the 1960s, others had launched the modernisation movement. The path Tamy Tazi has pursued in her lifetime speaks for itself, however. She studied Philosophy and Literature in Granada after following her father to Spain and Northern Morocco. Her father was Marshal Meziane, a great Rifain who shone during his exceptional double military career on both sides of the Strait. Her mother, Fadela Amor, was a dazzling beauty and the daughter of a member of the Fes bourgeoisie in Melilla who works in his factory making military uniforms for Alfonso XIII's army. Adored by her husband and with a whimsical nature, she raised her five daughters and three sons near the garrisons in a radically new spirit: her daughters participated in horse-riding competitions and went to university. She herself moved from one city to another, had a talent for gardening, and designed her own furniture and the plan for her home in Rabat. She experimented with painting, did knitting for the entire household, and adjusted as best she could to the paradoxical existence that hinged upon her husband's career. With no money of her own but in an honourable situation, a Muslim in a Catholic country, and, what is more, a determinedly Catholic one, she was, in some ways, in exile, but at the same time she managed to blend in perfectly with her surroundings. Although her place was next to the seat of power, she was nevertheless quite unlike the people around her: an outsider at first in Spain, she experienced the same situation later on in Morocco, where she returned once she was older, as someone who had lived in European society. She frequently moved from one society to another, but was admired, protected and courted by the wives of the officers under her husband's command; she was served by a large number of helpers, servants and orderlies. Was she inclined to be eccentric? If so, this trait must have been encouraged by her status, both at home and away from home, in the excessively ceremonious environment typical of regiments, prefectures and ministries. When the family left Melilla, they moved to Madrid, passing through Valencia and some of the smaller towns in Navarra, following the front line, before returning to Chaouen in Morocco. They spent nearly ten years in Larache and in Ceuta. After crossing the Strait once more, they moved to La Coruña and then to Santa Cruz de Tenerife, where Meziane took up a position as *Capitan general* (a military governor whose job was to oversee the Galicia and Canaries provinces). The family romance of this nomadic life, with chapters of war and peace and moving between cultures, is full of eventful episodes, including several



Deux ensembles en satin duchesse de soie.
 À droite, une tenue (caftan et dfina) de
 couleur rouge, bordée de slifa or et rouge et
 agrémentée de grandes volutes finies par des
 picots verts et bleus. La ceinture présente un
 dessin coordonné. Le caftan est parcouru de
 boutons traditionnels de passementerie.
 Bijoux : collier (collection privée).
 La tenue de gauche, en satin duchesse de soie
 couleur rubis, présente une dfina avec un
 dessin de tiges et bourgeons exécuté au fil
 d'argent par un maâlem.
 Le caftan est garni de boutons et de brides
 formées par de traditionnels slifa.

Pages 110-111
 Détail d'un des caftans.

Two ensembles in silk satin duchesse. The one
 on the right is a set (caftan and dfina) in
 red edged with red and gold slifats and
 trimmed with large volutes finished with
 green and blue picots. The belt has a
 matching pattern. The caftan is lined with
 slifats and traditional braided loops.
 Jewellery: necklace (private collection).
 The outfit on the left is made in ruby-
 coloured silk satin duchesse. It has a dfina
 with a pattern of stalks and buds made by
 maâlem using silver thread.
 The caftan features buttons and loops
 formed by traditional slifas.

Pages 110-111
 Detail of one of the caftans.

tragic ones. This uprooted existence had a powerful but also fruitful effect on Tamy Tazi: she was able to distance herself from social norms to the extent that she remained unclassifiable. In this position of power she was all the more able to remain open to others and to change. "We lived exclusively within the family, under my father's protection. Back then", she says, "I was already designing my own clothes: a young, pretty milliner came nearly every day to dress someone, to mend clothing or cut out patterns. I sat by her side and we sewed my dresses with the fabric we bought by the kilo at the time".

When Morocco gained its independence, the family went back to Rabat. Tamy Tazi settled in Casablanca after she married Jalil Tazi, a young businessman who had just arrived from France. Once more, her environment and cultural points of reference changed. The city still bustled with nationalist fervour but French remained its spoken language and society remained tied to Parisian trends and fashions. Tamy Tazi was president of a horse-riding club, she travelled (notably to Japan, a country that made a strong impression on her), read extensively (Moroccan and Spanish history, American literature, current affairs), raised her three children, and led the carefree and cosmopolitan life of the 1960s. Back then, *Vogue* magazine acknowledged her as one of the most elegant women of her generation. Tamy Tazi never had a muse to inspire her, like other great designers, she simply dressed well and looked wonderful in her clothes. She studied clothes patterns using herself as a model and delighted in seeking her own personal style. In a nutshell, she created her own persona with a blend of precision and insight that allowed her natural beauty to emerge. Her strength was based on intelligence and character, on the desire to fashion herself with her own hands. Her aesthetic flair was apparent in her homes and looks and prompted her friends to ask her to dress them. She started out by dressing women who were members of Europe's high society, women who were enchanted by the mixture of Oriental and trendy elements they found in her velvet, jersey or wool apparel. Hence, her career began with the freedom and high standards typical of great amateurs. Fernando Sanchez, a New York designer with a passion for Morocco, encouraged her. She fashioned caftans, *sarouals*, Moroccan coats and *selhams* (hooded capes), and was immediately successful. In 1977, she purchased the Joste fashion house, the only haute couture *maison* in the country, founded by Josette Achille, where Couture and Pret-à-porter creations by Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Dior were exhibited. The most beautiful dresses designed by



Cette tenue traditionnelle en crêpe de soie imprimé « panthère » est bordée d'une large chbika qui reprend le motif en l'assortissant de fleurs orange sur la dfina, sur les doubles manches et sur le châle, ici noué à la taille. Collier d'ambre et de corail (Collection privée). À droite, détail.

This traditional outfit made of silk crepe presenting a leopard print is lined by a large chbika, which displays the same motif and matches it with orange flowers, across the dfina, the double sleeves, and the shawl, which is tied into a knot at the waistline. Amber and coral necklace (Private collection). On the right, detail.



these creators during those glorious years were reproduced with extreme care: outlying towns always strive to do their best. Josette Ferbos' arrival in the company in 1981 was an important moment. This energetic and experienced woman from Bordeaux took over the management of Joste as well as of Tamy Collections, the caftan brand. She completed the atelier's transformation by stressing the importance of the finishings. The two *maisons* under the same roof and under the same management strove for excellence: on one side, once the fashion house had abandoned Dior, were Yves Saint Laurent's splendid creations; on the other were caftans, which became increasingly refined as research and sophistication grew. Tamy Tazi became friends with Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, two people known for their love of Morocco. When Yves Saint Laurent died, she left his brand aside to dedicate herself entirely to Tamy Collections.



Tenue (composée d'une dfina et d'une kamis) en dentelle d'or ; la dfina est ornée d'une broderie en fil d'or exécutée par un maâlem. Elle est apposée sur des appliques de dentelle verte pour souligner le motif. À droite, détail.

Ensemble composed of a dfina and kamis in gold lace. The dfina is decorated with gold maâlem-crafted embroidery affixed to the green lace appliqués to emphasise the motif. On the right, detail.



Josette Ferbos passed away after a sudden illness in 2009. This book is a tribute to her loyalty and to the workshop she has long time led.

Thus Tamy Tazi launched caftan-couture by successfully combining various elements from two different traditions. One of these, the Moroccan tradition, had until then only undergone limited changes: there were small regional differences (although Fes is the town that set the tone in the middle-class areas), and caftans had only undergone a few minor transformations in cut and choice of colour. People had no desire for new things, they wanted authentic high-quality, thoroughly handcrafted creations. Tamy Tazi's work broke away from the past, and, most importantly, it achieved a great deal. What became no longer possible? What did her modern approach reject and look down on? What did the rules of good taste forbid? They forbade frills, beads, sequins



Cet ensemble traditionnel en soie imprimée et brochée est agrémenté d'une broderie en fil d'or piquée de fleurs de couleurs ainsi que de rangées de dlira or et orange. Bijoux anciens (Fondation A. Slaoui).

This traditional outfit made of printed and brocaded silk is decorated with golden embroidery sprinkled with coloured flowers, and also with rows of orange and golden dlirat. Antique jewels (A. Slaoui Foundation).

and other adornments, such as gilded decorations, excessive quantities of twisted threads and braids (most braids were imported; they were originally destined for the chasubles worn by priests, but skipped – ironically enough – from Church to Harem, from one “sacred” environment to the other). Kitsch and trinkets, which some Oriental people were only too fond of, were therefore banned. These either stood for fast-earned wealth or, in more ancient lands, were associated with decadence. In any case, they had to be relinquished. Once the constraints imposed by a tyrannical tradition are ousted, all limits disappear, excess asserts itself, including in terms of zeal and virtuosity. Tamy Tazi also discarded heavy and semi-stiff fabrics and the thick bulky apparel typical of the past since women’s figures had become slimmer; similarly, the overly rigid square cut was jettisoned as the shape needed to be adjusted to suit the figures of young, lively, emancipated women, to set them off triumphally. Some of her caftans were inspired by Ottoman culture or include elements reminiscent of the fashion of Yves Saint Laurent. Distinguishing features were their splendour and glamour, making them the ultimate costume. However, the original design of the garment was usually kept in its purest form, and Tamy Tazi had to take care not to distort it by randomly adding on eclectic postmodern features, a common occurrence nowadays. Tradition supplies a stock of specific traits, offering components that anyone can toy with and interpret. The rules of the game are strict and designers must be careful to use their creativity within the limits: a caftan must remain a caftan and not be transformed into a singer’s dress or Viennese ball-gown, despite the fact that by doing so it can make the dreams of a pretty debutante blossom.

In Tamy Tazi’s hands, this Moroccan garment receives a balance of proportions and harmony that flatters the body in a particular way, in a style all her own and following the unwritten laws of Couture. She never uses gratuitous or apparently liberating features, nor inappropriate fancies. Respect for the caftan’s geometrical nature preserves its true cultural identity and meaning, and acts as a bulwark against the extravagance of fashion, customer fads, and all the whims and fancies individuals cling to. Designed by Tamy Tazi, a Moroccan jacket made from cashmere, cut close to the body, with round sleeves and which comes with a waistcoat in the same style, becomes a garment that is both luxurious and comfortable. The outfit originally worn by sailors from Rabat or Salé has been completely softened, eliminating all the braid and gold



Tenue traditionnelle en satin duchesse vert émeraude. La dfina présente sur toute sa longueur ainsi que sur le pourtour des manches une double chbika dont la plus large est agrémentée de roses fuchsia et rouge et de feuilles vertes ; le caftan est parcouru d'une fine chbika et de boutons demi-boule en satin. Bijoux : collier avec émeraudes et rubis (collection privée).

Pages 136-137
Detail.

Traditional outfit in emerald green satin duchesse. The entire length of the dfina and edging of the cuffs are decorated with a double chbika, the wider of which is trimmed with green leaves and red and fuchsia-coloured roses. The caftan has a narrow chbika and satin hemispherical buttons. Jewellery: emeralds and ruby necklace (private collection).

Pages 136-137
Detail.

and the starchy look that gave it the look typical of the Turkish militia. Another garment, made of black velvet, resembles something between an evening coat and a short caftan (reaching halfway down the legs), which people used to wear in the past: the cut is slightly flared, and the closures made from large cords matched by trimmings (*kittane*, *dfirate* and *bliblate*) turn the style of the garment into something extremely contemporary. At times the caftan is simply suggested by the cut, with hardly any embellishments at all, as if it were enough to apply a few of the caftan's most subtle identifying traits on the lace or sari fabric it is made of to render full justice to the outfit. However, the opposite is equally true: other garments are exalted by very colourful needlework or embroidery coupled with drawn-thread hemstitching that either adorns the front or runs along the costume's entire length in golden and silver borders of embroidery. Throughout her long and inspired career, Tamy Tazi has explored many options to satisfy the need for elegance. The quality of manufacture can certainly be measured by the attention paid to the finishing as well as to the many invisible or barely visible details that make a difference. These details enable us to discover the secrets of haute couture production: for example, they may consist of skilfully created hems used to attach embroidered lace, festoons that either have slightly frayed edges or that are delicately exalted by hemstitching; handmade buttons that are either very small or the size of peas, just as the Ottomans liked to wear them. The care that goes into calculating the embroidery required, and into symmetrically matching the features from one side to the other, is evident: for instance, a lining that barely peeks through different panels becomes of essential importance: it is a flash of silk on the other side of an astonishingly light piece of cloth; it is a contrast created by a lovely hue against a partial facing or lining that is casually revealed by the motion of the body.

The choice of fabric is crucial and the spectrum very wide, although it is becoming progressively reduced, like haute couture itself. In the past, people in Fes used wool fabrics, festive brocades and lampas woven with gold. Even then people did not hesitate to import silk from Lyon or to use the finest upholstery textiles for making their caftans. *Dfinas* were made out of muslin or cotton voile, in hues of white or ivory. They concealed the body's shape by wrapping it with an extra layer. Their transparency muted the shades and the brightness of the gold, as if, among other things, it were also necessary to conceal one's wealth; as if no one should ever reveal everything immediately, but



Ce riche ensemble traditionnel en soie brochée et lamée or sur fond rose présente sur sa dfina une broderie en guirlandes de fleurs en relief exécutée par un maàlem et des dfira en fils d'or. Les broderies dessinent des volutes le long du vêtement et sur le contour des manches. Le caftan, plus sobre, est bordé de dfira, de boutons et de brides en passementerie d'or. Un grand châle complète cette tenue d'apparat. Collier de perles et de rubis (Collection privée). À droite, détail.

This rich traditional outfit made of brocaded, gold-laminated silk, placed over a pink background, displays maàlem embroidery representing overlaying flower garlands and a golden dfira. These garlands appear as swirls along the garment's entire length and along the sleeve edges. The caftan, which is more simple, is lined with a dfira, with buttons and ornamental cords decorated with gold. A large shawl completes this ceremonial outfit. Pearls and rubis necklace (Private collection). On the right, detail.



should rather conceal such richness under a s formation as possible, or offer no more than through *mousharabeyah*. To reveal too much courage discretion, through veils and flower desire by delaying pleasure. The latter enco modesty, a general reserve that becomes neco munity. Therefore the *dfina*, this gauzy veil l own (the shape is the same as the caftan's) n doxical lining, one that masks and protects v

In Tamy Tazi's creations, the *dfina* either as the caftan: the imitative effect is lost and



Deux tenues traditionnelles : le mannequin debout porte une tenue en satin duchesse de soie vert émeraude avec une double chbika dont la plus large est garnie de fleurs fuchsia et orange et de feuilles vertes. Le mannequin assis porte une tenue en taffetas de soie vert moiré. La dfina est parcourue dans toute sa longueur et sur le pourtour des manches d'une double chbika en or dont la plus large présente une guirlande de ramages verts et des fleurs orange. Bijoux : chaîne et pendentifs avec émeraude (Collection privée).

Pages 150-151

Détail de la chbika de droite.

Two traditional outfits: the standing model wears an ensemble in emerald green silk satin duchesse with a double chbika, the wider of which is adorned with green leaves and orange and fuchsia-coloured flowers. The seated model wears an outfit in green watered silk taffeta. The entire length of the dfina and edging on the cuffs are decorated with a double gold chbika, the wider of which is trimmed with a garland of green foliage and orange flowers. Jewellery: chain and pendants with emerald (private collection).

Pages 150-151

Detail of the right chbika.

layer. Tamy Tazi's *dfina* does not act as a veil, it becomes a redundant accessory whose function is to exalt the body; all that remains of its traditional aspects is its "sign". Or perhaps, by placing emphasis on it, Tamy Tazi has upended its original purpose and now uses it to flatter a woman's sensuality. The fabrics she chooses with this in mind are remarkably fluid and light. They are both traditionally opulent and at the same time marvellously flexible; when they are placed together they neither thicken nor crush the silhouette; rather, they purify it. It was thanks to Joste that Tamy Tazi was able to have access to the rarest fabrics: she could choose duchesse satin, the finest laces (they were eventually doubled with tulle for greater strength), silk, cashmere veils, moiré crepes and taffetas, she could take her pick from all of the dazzling pieces of fabric or prints that the last great European manufacturers create for haute couture. They serve the fashion world from one season to the next and look as if they had never been affected by the upheavals of the modern age: they embody time regained, of *grandes soirées* in Venice, durbars held to honour maharajas, and princely balls. These fabrics confer on the caftans a blend of magnificence and sensuality that has always been attributed to the Orient and which now makes its reappearance, in doing so reviving a lost imaginative universe. Is there anyone in Morocco or Europe who still remembers that muslin comes from Mosul in Iraq, or that damasks were created in Syria? It is for the designer to draw attention to these fabrics in return. Like a medieval illumination, the embroidery along the edge of the fabric both attracts and distracts the eye. The style of the cut works the same way: and all that is needed is a simple cut to exalt these extraordinary fabrics. Moreover, these outfits are always accompanied by large brocaded shawls, making the final result even more elaborate. A red and golden yellow ensemble displayed during the Moroccan clothing exhibition organised by the Saint Laurent Foundation (2008) included two pieces of silk muslin and a *selham*, made of dazzling brocade to match. The examples are many: a "butterfly caftan" made of silk organza decorated with vaporous floral motifs that look as if they had been painted with watercolours; or an outfit cut from a sari of ivory white and golden silk, in a sumptuous yet at the same time sober style, a piece that could easily seem as though it had just leapt out of a Mughal court.

Obviously, there are different caftans for each season, and some are meant for less lavish occasions: they have no *dfina* and are made with fabrics that are less imposing and better suited to everyday life. Silk velvet, wool jerseys for the winter, silk bour-



Ce caftan en brocart d'or imprimé rouge et noir présente une broderie rouge et or en festons et arabesques. La forme très particulière de ce vêtement est inspirée des caftans ottomans. Bijoux anciens (Collection privée).

Pages 158-159
Detail.

This caftan made of golden brocade with a red and black print displays red and golden embroidery consisting of blanket stitches and arabesques. The highly unusual shape of this garment was inspired by Ottoman caftans. Antique jewels (Private collection).

Pages 158-159
Detail.

rette and linen for the summer. And cotton, though in smaller quantities because it creases. In particular, Tamy Tazi uses indigo or light-blue cotton veils and figured cotton, as worn by the peoples of the Sahara. When caftans are worn without *difinas* (something that no properly educated woman would have dared to do in the past), they become less solemn, more similar to indoor-wear, long and comfortable. They are both elegant and, though not for everyday, easy to wear. They are given a more refined air by *zwaq*, lively colourful arabesques that dance the length of the braid. Through these simple garments the modernity of the approach is appreciated.

As a general rule, each kind of embroidery exalts a specific kind of fabric. Tamy Tazi invests her creative efforts especially in that area, by exploring new patterns for the braids and silk cords, and in the choice of colours that will complete a costume and turn it into something unique. Moroccan light has inspired a number of great colourists (Matisse and Saint-Laurent, just to mention two of the most famous in their respective fields). This country is among the very few to have developed a culture truly based on colour. A simple dip into the *souks* will convince anybody of the existence of this talent, one that elsewhere, and more specifically in the Western world, is becoming increasingly rare. One can never lament enough how impoverished colours have become in Europe over the last few decades. And, as philosophers claim, in the same way that we are ignorant of the true capabilities of the human body, we are also unaware of the power that colour can exert: how its vibrations affect our cells and our dreams (Hindus are convinced of this), how it extends into the cosmos, and the kind of correlation it has with the other senses. Lastly, nobody knows the effects of the lack of colour. Global commodification has damaged this essential aspect of the visible. The rule of black in the fashion world accompanies this process, and has further encouraged this general loss of energy. Streets in Paris and other capitals have plunged into greyish uniformity. Nowadays we are obliged to visit museums, flower-markets or have access to luxury products to find a nice shade of crimson, Neapolitan yellow, pure indigo, "tender pink", "opal" or "sombre iris", all these "little clouds, exquisitely coloured" in Proust's description of Odette's and Albertine's dresses. Given this situation, Morocco could offer a source of regeneration. Undoubtedly, Yves Saint Laurent's dazzling discoveries in the world of colour partly owe their boldness and elegance to his visits to Marrakesh (Majorelle blue speckled with different



*Ensemble traditionnel en panne de velours
et imprimé d'un motif panthère dans les
tons de vert et lamé or. La dfina est
ajustée dans toute sa longueur d'une
chbika dessinant des volutes de fil d'or sur
fond vert ; le mannequin tient à la main une
cape de brocart coordonnée à l'ensemble
défilé au Carrousel du Louvre, Paris,
le 10 octobre 1999).*

*The traditional outfit in panne velvet
printed with a panther motif in gold lamé
and tones of green. The full length of the
dfina is trimmed with a chbika with volutes
in gold thread on a green ground. The model
holds a matching brocade cape (fashion
show at the Carrousel du Louvre, Paris,
on 10 October 1999).*

shades of ochre, purple, and the ash-green of its famous gardens). One thing is certain, he encouraged Tamy Tazi's penchant for lively colours and unusual combinations. It was he who supported her pursuit. She mastered this complex skill in a special way; it is the kind of skill that can enhance a motif, it can make fabrics sing, make a theme whirl, suggest the accents of a pattern, or introduce new contrasting and lively features. All the more so since the range of embroidery threads she uses is extremely varied: Tamy Tazi can choose from an astonishing colour chart; the brightness of the silk only makes the hues even more dazzling. She explains: "I avoid tone on tone and monochrome techniques. I tend to choose bold colours. Moroccans aren't especially fond of beige, brown, grey or khaki, all those dull hues. I prepare my spools or my reed bits, I play with the four or five tones I need, and whenever I have any doubts, something that rarely happens, I have a few embroidery samples put together".

In ateliers, embroidery is entrusted to women. Men instead dedicate their time to the *zwaq* and to that alone, as is the tradition. They are also entrusted with fastening the *sfifat* and the *dfirat*, laces that the women weave with silk threads. The threads are previously wound on terraces, in empty spaces large enough for this operation to be carried out. Why the gender-based division of tasks? Perhaps the simplest explanation is that in the past women worked indoors while men were able to work outdoors, thus men were the ones who received the orders and decided which motif should be used to please a client. Most of the caftan's trimmings were *zwaq*, and sometimes *tarz n'ta'* — a kind of decoration also found on leather — but there are no embroideries strictly speaking, or lace (*chbika*), or the drawn threads introduced by Tamy Tazi. Interestingly, women did not embroider their caftans in the past. Instead, they used their skills to decorate the articles in their trousseaus: they embroidered hangings, placemats and other furnishings, or accessories like veils, scarves and bath-towels, all of which they only used once, on their wedding day. They decorated handkerchiefs for henna, or the belts belonging to their fiancé's *sarouals*, but hardly ever their own caftans: this task was handed over to artisans. In short, they embroidered everything except the garment they wore most often. Does this confirm the idea that the costume was originally meant to be used by men? Is it another sign of the social conservatism typical of Sunni lands? The question has yet to be answered.



Buste d'un caftan en satin de soie rose dont la décoration est inspirée des anciennes broderies de Tétouan.

Front of a pink silk satin caftan with decorations inspired by ancient embroideries from Tetouan.

Tamy Tazi has involved herself in this art through the medium of the caftan. Bringing these different fields together is in itself a small revolution. This way, caftans become creative objects in themselves: they represent a specific style, a special kind of research. At the same time, they remain closely connected to tradition, a fact that reveals their fundamental value and versatility. Tamy Tazi draws from a highly diversified heritage, a world that modern values have come to threaten over the course of the last three or four decades. She unearths and develops techniques that have either been forgotten or are on the verge of being forgotten. Through her interpretative skills, she brings back to life an assortment of expressions that young emancipated women either consider unimportant or outmoded. What's more, she restores vitality and elegance to this cultural language. In her combination of embroidery and clothing, she exalts this form of art and places it under the spotlight, kindling women's enthusiasm for the work that both lay at the heart of their grandmothers' lives and decorated their homes. Tamy Tazi establishes a connection between women's work and their bodies, creating a harmonious balance based on awareness and sensuality. This kind of reconnecting process is not simply important from a symbolic point of view, it possesses a founding value in caftan-couture; the array of possible choices expands, colours and drawings become more complex, imagination can roam freely. Developed and taking a wide variety of forms, whether hemstitched, cut out or applied, motifs that were previously only used as contours are liberated, brilliantly designed and change the style of the garment. The skills that created them make them stand out: they are like a signature.

Women today are unaware of the fact that the pretty stylised floral bouquets decorating their caftans are borrowed from the *tenchifa*, a pieces of cloth that women from Tetouan used to cover mirrors with the purpose of hiding them during grand celebrations, thus preventing them from reflecting curses or attracting the evil eye. Similarly, most women do not know that the apparently modern type of embroidery that uses the asymmetrical buttonhole stitch actually belongs to the Jewish tradition (as it had fallen by the wayside, the atelier had to make every effort to reconstruct the original stitch). Or they are unaware that a pattern decorated with coloured pompoms is embroidered just like the *djellabas* belonging to the men living in the Rif. How can they be expected to connect a *zwaq* garland with a fine leather binding or, alternatively, a new interpretation of a leafy motif over a painted wooden door? Who, except a few clever



Tunique et pantalon en panne de velours marron relevé, le long du buste, de broderies de fil d'or à motif cachemire, le long du buste ; des ganses d'or parcourent le devant de la tunique (défilé au Carrousel du Louvre, Paris, le 10 octobre 1999).

Tunic and trousers in brown crushed velvet highlighted with gold-embroidered motifs typical of Kashmir on the front. Gold braid down the front of the tunic (fashion show at the Carrousel du Louvre, Paris, on 10 October 1999).

artisans, pays any attention to the swirls and tendrils following their winding harmonious path? Tamy Tazi is well acquainted with Moroccan craftsmanship, and textiles even better. Through endless research she has assembled a beautiful collection of embroideries and weavings. Often exhibited in Europe (at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris in 1996 in particular), this ensemble of ancient pieces has helped her to become familiar with all of the regional variations. Most of them (embroidery styles originating in Salé, Meknes, Tetouan, Chefchaouen, Rabat and, to a smaller extent, from Fes: the latter style has become more commonplace in the course of time) may be found on certain caftans: they are combined with new colours and materials and interpreted in different ways. In particular, Tamy Tazi has reintroduced the *chbika*, which she frequently uses. This was originally a strip of needle knots that discreetly adorned the thin white edging of shirt collars or front-pieces seen in certain *gandouras* (another type of garment worn only by men), a discreet ornament used only on men's clothing. At first, Tamy Tazi combined it on caftans made from fabrics so fine that they are unsuited to the application of embroidery. The technique (a lace, and not a crocheted strip, which is the common belief) became increasingly refined until it became the *maison's* trademark: marvellous golden lacework and nettings of flowers and leaves that repeat the printed motifs found on the fabrics, such as irises, wisterias, acanthuses and autumn leaves. Nettings capture exquisite figures: arabesques, herringbone patterns, coloured nuggets, interlacing and waves that support the cloth and may be attached with rows of coloured picot stitches. The embroidery becomes increasingly refined, increasingly hard to create: it is a threaded line transfigured by openwork, delicate motifs and filigree. "When I have to create a new embroidery pattern", Tamy Tazi explains, "I begin by examining my documentation: I usually find a source of inspiration by exploring Moroccan craftsmanship, or Ottoman culture, or sometimes Japanese and Indian culture (from which I developed my own version of the *bothé*, for instance). I trawl through African culture more rarely. I interpret these elements and adapt them to my own needs: my tentative search may last for months, with a constant back and forth between me and the atelier. I have to take into account the constraints imposed by the repetition of the pattern, the nature of the fabric and the angles. I choose my colours and reproduce them on paper before handing the drawing over to be photocopied. An embroiderer will need three months' work, no less, to create the almost ten metre-long embroidery strip needed to complete an outfit (a caftan-*dfina* ensemble)".



Fin de défilé à Paris. Madame Tamy Tazi et quatre mannequins (défilé au Carrousel du Louvre, Paris, le 10 octobre 1999).

Pages 178-179

Deux tenues : celle de gauche est en satin duchesse de soie vert turquoise avec des broderies de maâlem dessinant de puissantes volutes d'or ourlées de picots bicolores brique et vert, le tout parcouru de slifa or et vert ; celle de droite se compose d'un caftan avec dhina en brocart de soie imprimé et lamé dans deux tons de rouge, avec des broderies de maâlem à motif cachemire d'or.

Pages 180-181 et 182-183

Les mains de l'artisan maâlem, en train de broder au fil d'or une tenue en satin de soie.

The end of the show in Paris. Madame Tamy Tazi and four models (at the Carrousel du Louvre, Paris, on 10 October 1999).

Pages 178-179

Two outfits: the one on the left is in turquoise-green silk satin duchesse with volutes embroidered by a maâlem in gold thread with green and brick-red picots, the whole enhanced by gold and green slifats. The one on the right is a printed silk brocade and lamé caftan and dhina in two tones of red, with maâlem embroidery work of Kashmiri motifs in gold.

Pages 180-181 and 182-183

The hands of the maâlem craftsman as he embroiders a silk satin garment with gold thread.

A young woman arrives hesitatingly at Tamy Tazi's *maison de couture*, led there by her grandmother. Twenty years of age at most, in jeans, she has certainly never worn a traditional caftan, much less a ceremonial caftan. She is soon to be married, a modern fiancée: there's no whispering, no fear, although she does appear to be just a bit lost in thought. She doesn't speak. Her grandmother, a woman in her fifties and a regular customer at the *maison*, fills the silence – compliments, eager phrases, fluttering hands that burn with impatience. A few months ago she picked out silk brocade with a white background and a matching *chbika* for her grand-daughter, who still has not seen the dazzling piece that is meant for her, which is draped on a mannequin and still concealed by a white cover. She is obviously reluctant to face all the ceremonial traditions typical of weddings, does not have the slightest idea what this important ritual means, and certainly does not know how to wear this restrictive garment. What she imagines is a pharaonic costume covered with pearls and emeralds, entrapping her like a box. She is certainly dreading the moment of the hieratic pose she will have to adopt, one that will place her at the centre of everyone's attention and expectations, and mark the most important moment of the ceremony and, supposedly, her life. Maybe what she really loves is the idea of it all, not the event itself, like all those people who prefer to indulge in flights of fancy rather than making their wishes come true. Or she might be one of the girls of her generation who dream of a Viennese ball gown. As it is, she must conform to tradition, and she does not go about it gracefully. But her eyes reveal what is concealed by her silence. The veil is raised and she is presented with her outfit: an apparition, splashed with gold and silver, an Oriental tale recounted by moonlight. She is stunned. Then, caught up by it all, she amuses herself with the details (the zipper under the buttons that will make it easier to put the dress on) before slipping it on. They lead her before a large mirror. When she looks into it, she does not recognise herself, and, without a word, she starts dancing, dancing....

