



Jason Allen-Paisant

NEW COMMISSION

Boasty / Dreaming of silk wescuts / Sir Gregory Page-Turner

In 2023, Manchester Literature Festival and Manchester Art Gallery co-commissioned Jason Allen-Paisant to create a trio of exquisite, sensual and playful poems inspired by paintings and garments in the gallery's collection and recent Dandy Style exhibition.

Jason performed 'Boasty', 'Dreaming of silk wescuts' and 'Sir Gregory Page-Turner' for the first time at an intimate event at Manchester Art Gallery on 14 October 2023. He also discussed fashion and style, identity and fluidity, poetry and language, the Black male body and its presence in a compelling conversation with host Malika Booker.

Manchester Literature Festival and Manchester Art Gallery also commissioned Modify Productions to produce three short films capturing Jason performing his new work inside the Gallery. You can watch the films on the MLF website [here](#)

Jason Allen-Paisant has published two collections of poetry with Carcanet; *Thinking with Trees* and *Self-Portrait as Othello*, winner of the 2023 Forward Prize for Best Collection and the T.S. Eliot Prize. He is a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Critical Theory and Creative Writing at the University of Manchester.

www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk

www.manchesterartgallery.org

Copyright © Jason Allen-Paisant 2023

Manchester Literature Festival and Manchester Art Gallery would like to thank Jason, Malika Booker, Carcanet Press and Modify Productions. Jason wishes to thank Malika Booker for her feedback and advice during the editing process.

Boasty

a new kind of aristocracy

—Charles Beaudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life'

I run my fingers over the embossed
lines of electric red, white, and black check,
& feel the velvet touch me

in my dreams. I & I a rude boy, see me
in ma clean suit & shine brogues &
trilby hat a kotch 'pon di side,

with bright, bold, bombastic
colour, I & I a fashion aristocrat,
boasty inna my soul.

I want to tell you: there's pressure
behind this style you know,
for I&I come from a set o' people

who done know how fi dress up.
Yes, we West Indian people
we insist on

dressing up. Call us extra,
but we sartorially fit, we
too fashionable & full of it,

this vibration forever elevatin' we
beyond the crowd – call it
swag.

Dreaming of silk wescuts

I am amused myself with being a flaneur, a dandy, a man of fashion
—Oscar Wilde, 'De Profundis'

Every button I do up brings me closer to feeling my skin draped
in the velour of the waistcoat,
sprawled on a luxury armchair

in some great house across the oceans. Its white richness
is like a bath of milk. It *is* beautiful, oh my god it is.
The sound it makes to my fingers? *Kuscheln*.
I stand to look on it – gaze – taking my time

to consider this court suit, lavishly
embroidered by French needlewomen,
for Thomas, Gentleman of the Privy Chamber

to George III, George III
after whom a whole brocaded architecture
is named in an Empire on which the sun
would never set. But those French women too have a story,

their labour hidden under such beauty. Consider, now,
the Edenic design
featuring narcissi, lilies of the valley
and forget-me-nots. Though I seem to see there

some guango and indigo, thronged by the bees.
For Thomas, son of Manchester
textile merchant at Worsley estate,
there must have been: a touch of tropical paradise,

its birds, & their singing, in lands overlooking
the bright blue sea. In this Empire,
people brought back botany, conferred
Latin names on distant flora, adorning themselves
with faraway landscapes.

But the silk too has its story, a labour
hidden under such beauty. But it *is* beautiful,

oh my god it is, the delicate touch of the silk threads
on my flesh. I want the extra-vagance – the waste –
of the waist-coast. I want its subtlety

and complexity all over me. Every button I do up
brings me closer... I'm a pair it with my barathea blazer,
my skinny jeans, and some silver high top sneakers.
I'm a style it out.

Sir Gregory Page-Turner

Can what you wear help you be who you want to be?

—Lubaina Himid

I want the erotic brilliance
of the embroidery, the voluptuousness

of its flowers. I spend hours
slipping into your body. To conjure

the feeling of standing
in the inside of you –

to see them – your red coat,
your stockings and shoes

when I look down on myself.
Let me invoke, here, costly

gold threaded embroidery –
the glittering effect of the silver trim,

Sir Gregory Page-Turner, Sir.
I insist on having a Grand Tour

myself, in this lifetime –
to sit for my portrait in Rome

or some other marbled city,
with sumptuous fabrics

by Saboye, who will style me
with an air of confident ease,

capturing my new-found royalty
I check myself into the rooms

of your coat and spend time
running the silver thread

of the edges up and down, oh
the luxuriousness of my movement;

the lining: an erotic beauty,
without sacrifice.

(Copyright © Jason Allen-Paisant 2023)