

Fashioning the Early Modern Courtier (Cambridge, 16 May 18)

St John's College Cambridge, May 16, 2018

Valerio Zanetti, Herzog August Bibliothek

This one-day conference will explore the ways in which clothing contributed to the gendered (self)-fashioning of the courtier in early modern Europe (ca. 1550 – 1750), examining both its symbolic significance and its action on and interaction with the body.

Recent historical research has emphasised how early modern courts were crucial sites for the elaboration and diffusion of specific corporeal models aspiring to shape the ideal man and woman. Fashion, then as now, provides a very material setting that has the power to promote specific patterns of thought and action.

Our speakers will explore how male and female courtiers skilfully constructed their identity and negotiated their social status through sartorial trends and beautification techniques. Rooted within a broader culture of corporeal interpretation, fashion represented an effective way of asserting political allegiance and even expressing criticism *ad hominem*. Sovereigns could assert their power by clothing the royal entourage and enforcing vestimentary policies. Courtiers in turn could play a role in shaping the image and body of the monarch through gift-giving.

Embracing a corporealist perspective, we endeavour to integrate a semiotic reading of dress with accounts of its fundamentally embodied nature, both in its creation and in its wearing. Symbolic sartorial practices engaged directly with the material body, re-shaping and de-forming the silhouette. Clothes and accessories could provide support and protection, whilst sometimes constituting a hindrance to even the simplest of movements.

We will also investigate the diffusion of new fashions, materials, and techniques. Circulation patterns within the court will be analysed alongside interactions with the city and mutual influences between international centres of power. We will reconstruct the complex network of tailors, craftsmen and merchants which orbited around the court, moving across all social classes and providing a key point of connection between aristocratic courtiers and urban bourgeoisie. We will also consider alternative dissemination mediums such as portraits, early examples of single-leaf broadsheets and bound books displaying fashion plates.

Gathering an international group of speakers including fashion curators, makers, and academics from a variety of fields, the aim of our conference is to challenge traditional top-down models of fashion circulation as well as provide a more nuanced and complete narrative bringing into play all the different actors involved. We also seek to demonstrate how a study of the clothed body provides a privileged gateway into the world of court politics and a unique opportunity to access the

courtiers' embodied experiences.

PROGRAMME

9:15 Registration

9:45 Welcome address

10:00 - PANEL 1

Mark De Vitis (University of Sydney) / The Fashioned Body as Materialised Critique at the Court of Louis XIV

Jemma Field (Brunel University London) / Between Scotland and England: The Journey of Elite Female Fashion in 1603

Catherine Stearn (Eastern Kentucky University) / She-Wolves in Queen's Clothing: Exploring the Relationship between Dress, Female Courtiers and Monarchical Authority at the Court of Elizabeth I

11:15 Coffe & tea

11:30 - PANEL 2 A

Natasha Awais-Dean (King's College London) / Three Houres a Buttoning: Embellishing Male Dress in Early Modern England

Sarah Crowe (Goethe University & Staedel School, Frankfurt) / The semiology of the ruff in the early Dutch golden age to 1648

Jane Partner (University of Cambridge) / Reading the Early Modern Body: The Case Study of Textual Jewellery

PANEL 2 B

Lacy Gillette (Florida State University) / Cataloguing the Character of Couture: An Examination of Jost Amman's Sixteenth Century Printed Costumes

Abigail Gomulkiewicz (University of Cambridge) / From Subject to Monarch: Male gift-giving at the court of Elizabeth I

Juliet Claxton (King's College London) / 'His wife was the rich china-woman that the courtiers visited so often': the role of the merchant at the Stuart Court

12:45 Lunch

13:30 KEYNOTE / Evelyn Welch (King's College London)

14:45 - PANEL 3 A

Rebecca Morrison (QMUL and the V&A) / The Diplomacy of the Dress Fitting: exploring relationships between the mantua-maker and client in the construction of eighteenth-century court dress

Astrid Castres (École nationale des chartes, Paris) / Producing garments for the Court: Innovations and technical transfers in Parisian fashion workshops during the 16th Century

Moira Dato (European University Institute, Florence) / The Lyonnais Silks as Objects of Conspicuous Consumption in 18th-Century French Court

PANEL 3 B

Beth Walsh (University of East Anglia) / The late Stuarts and their political cravats

Isabella Rosner (University of Cambridge) / 'Grave Hogen Mogen, High and Mighty Frogs!': The Mysteries of Seventeenth-Century Frog Pouch Fashion

Kimberley Foy (Durham University) / Points of Connection: Lace, Internationalism, and Political Authority in England, 1565–1625

16:00 Coffee & tea

16:15 - PANEL 4

Marc W. S. Jaffré (University of St Andrews) / Adorned with stones of inestimable size and value': Tailors, Taste and Fashion at the Court of Louis XIII, 1610–1643

Lindsay Dupertuis (University of Maryland) / Dressed for Battle: Military Costume and Aristocratic Fashion in Sixteenth-Century Italy

17:15 KEYNOTE / Maria Hayward (University of Southampton)

18:00 Closing remarks

18:15 Wine reception

To attend please register here: <https://fashioningtheearly.wixsite.com/moderncourtier>

Reference:

CONF: Fashioning the Early Modern Courtier (Cambridge, 16 May 18). In: ArHist.net, Mar 26, 2018 (accessed Jan 22, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/17694>>.