Garments of Majesty: Looking into the Wardrobe Accounts of Henry, Prince of Wales

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With the critical climate of early modern studies increasingly sensitive to material culture, clothing certainly is a fitting subject for analysis: this paper considers the convergence of fashion and self-fashioning at the early Stuart court. Between 1610 and 1612, all eyes at court were fixed on the promising ascendant, Henry, Prince of Wales, *and* his clothes. Henry's clothing purchases were diligently recorded by his master of the wardrobe, Sir David Murray, whose 1612 exchequer roll details to the very stitching the fashions chosen for the Prince of Wales's emergence toward majesty. Murray's assiduous record keeping was matched only by his careful service to the prince himself, who held his wardrobe man in choice trust (Cornwallis, *Account*).

The period from the prince's creation to his untimely death was among the most intensive campaigns of self-fashioning in the early Stuart period, leaving a trail of staggering bills from mercers, tailors, embroiderers, hosiers, haberdashers, silkmen, shoemakers, spurriers, furriers, and other artificers of clothing. Henry's clothes were signifiers of fashion and policy that gave material expression to his political aspirations, his interests, and his identity. I am considering the concept of identity here in terms similar to sociologist Gregory P. Stone's argument that 'One's identity is established when others *place* him as a social object by assigning him the same words of identity that he appropriates for himself or announces.' (23) Identity formation, as symbolic inter-actionists have long argued, is a function of communication, and I am concerned with discussing the significance of clothing to this process in the context of the early Stuart court. Just as identity and power are constructed through the adoption and employment, even the imposition, of language, so too with the adoption of fashion trends and the wearing of livery.

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Unlike his father, Prince Henry was a notably stylish figure, concerned with keeping up to date with the latest European fashions, and this was an important arena of courtly discourse in which he distinguished himself. This sense of style was captured in portraits such as Robert Peake's 1610 rendering of the prince with his jerkin fashionably unbuttoned, revealing a handsome doublet beneath (Arnold 20). Adherence to fashion was of course of great importance to courtly life, and courtiers paid out extraordinary sums to maintain an appropriate wardrobe. Malcolm Smuts has neatly illustrated the scale of this concern, pointing out that 'Even a simple black suit appropriate for court might cost as much as £50 in the early Stuart period—as much as the annual rent of a substantial town house' (92). Smuts's estimation is actually conservative. As an example, the statesman Sir Ralph Winwood had a suit made on the occasion of the infamous Somerset wedding in 1613, 'of only doublet, hose, and cloak, all black and without any kind of gold, silver, or embroidery, that cost him above fourscore pounds.' For the same year, Winwood paid only £56 rent for a country house with a 'handsome garden and orchard' (John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, March 3, 1614, in *Letters* 103-4). The stiff cost of maintaining a proper wardrobe led Winwood's friend and frequent correspondent John Chamberlain to lament, 'how unreasonable things are risen here [in London], and what a chargeable world we live in' (John Chamberlain to Alice Carleton, December 30, 1613, in *Letters* 102). Nor were simple black suits the norm; rather, elaborate designs and extravagant materials set the tone. By the time he had reached the age of sixteen, Prince Henry's wardrobe for one year amounted to nearly £6000 (SP Dom. 14/57 ff. 142-44).

Prince Henry's creation ceremony was one of the most significant occasions when his identity was defined through fashion. The very term *creation* implies a sense of artifice and construction that is readily applicable to the elaborate ceremony of investing royalty and nobility with increased social and political status. The awesome cost of Henry's creation robes offers one indication of the unbridled expense that the young man was willing to authorize in order to present a flawless image of emergent majesty. But even in this atmosphere of seemingly limitless spending, there were moments of cost consciousness, or at least moments of surprise when the bills came due. The 1609-10 wardrobe account, for example, catalogues an expenditure of more than £1080 for the powdered ermine lining of Prince Henry's creation gowns—this for the *lining alone*. The household manuscripts indicate that the prince checked and authorized each household record personally, and to the record of the aforementioned fur lining a marginal note is added in what appears to be Henry's hand, protesting 'this is most unsesonable and can not be indured' (SP Dom. 14/57 ff. 145).

Given the intrinsic self-indulgence of wearing such garments, it is perhaps unsurprising that some chroniclers of the creation proceedings noted that the

prince and his entourage took an inordinate amount of time in making themselves ready for the ceremony. Accounts of the delay range from Daniel Price's euphemistic report of a 'whiles tarryance' to William Camden's less sympathetic but likely more accurate observation that the group was expected for 'to to long' (Nichols 2: 327-28). One imagines the group nervously circulating about the preparation rooms scrutinizing their reflections in fine looking glasses such as the one recorded in Henry's wardrobe account for 1611-12 (PRO E 351/3085 fo. 9r.). As the knights of the bath and the prince busily framed themselves out in the dressing quarters, it must have been a difficult matter for them to have come to respond to the celestial expectations for the ceremony. And not everyone was impressed. The Puritan M.P. John Noies, who saw the ascendant in his costly ermine-lined robes and others dressed to the height of their station wrote cynically that in his own simple garments he was 'like a crowe in the middle of a great manie of golden feathered doves'. With tongue in cheek, Noies wrote to his wife, 'Yf I should take in hand to write of the apparell and facions of the ladies and maydes of honor I should be as foolishe as they were vaine, and therefore I saye no more than this that they were unspeakable brave, and intollerable curious' (Williamson 68).

The cost of fashioning oneself for courtly life was tremendous, but great prestige could be won back on the investment. Stylish attire and good looks were significant factors in the advancement of courtiers such as Robert Carr and George Villiers, who held the king's attention as his favorites and obtained vast political power while still in their early twenties. While a means of gaining notice and prestige on the one hand, fashion could also inspire and facilitate conflict. Prince Henry was angry and jealous over Carr's relationship with King James and made his feelings known not only through his sharp correspondence and condescending demeanor toward the favorite, but also by ridiculing his clothing. In response, Carr 'changed his taylors and tiremen many times and all to please the Prince who laugheth at the long grown fashion of our courtiers and wisheth for change every day' (Ashelford 57). John Chamberlain later referred to Carr's clothing in a letter to Sir Ralph Winwood, reporting that 'the Lord of Rochester's chamber at Whitehall was robbed, but what he lost is not known, for they left his gay clothes and whole pieces of cloth of gold and rich stuffs' (March 10, 1613, in *Letters* 126). Behind Chamberlain's witty evaluation of the crime is a telling analysis of Carr, and also of the courtier's life: so long as he had his gay clothes, he was intact, or could at least maintain the illusion of power.

Of the court's preoccupation with fashion, Jane Ashelford has written that

> The court was the perfect stage for the man who wanted public acclaim for his finery, but he would have to be a wealthy man indeed to sustain his stay at court for over a week. Many changes of wardrobe would be

> required, and any lessening of the quality of the outfits and any repetition would soon be noticed and commented on. (44)

Performing the courtier's part was expensive, and much more so for the performance of majesty. Just as costumes were among the greatest expenses to be met by contemporary theater companies, majestic finery was a great burden on the coffers of the theater of politics.

Prince Henry's negative reception of Carr's clothing and Carr's subsequent efforts to dress more stylishly corresponds to Gregory Stone's notion that 'we dress *toward* or address some audience whose validating responses are essential to the establishment of our self. Such responses may, of course, also be challenges, in which a new program is aroused.' (28) The fashion system of the early Stuart court was a program of identity formation subject to variable reception and open to revision. As with the initiation of any discourse, there is the risk that the offering or announcement of oneself in a given mode of fashion will be repulsed. Through his ridicule of Carr's clothing and fashion *faux pas*, Henry enacted a dismissal of the favorite's performance of the courtier's role. This duel of fashion and aesthetics certainly resulted in unreasonable wardrobe bills for both men. The struggle was as much about wealth as it was about fashion sense; but beyond material concerns, Henry was also attacking an obstacle that had arisen between him and his father. Thomas Howard, earl of Arundel, seems to have directed his own political and social frustrations out on Carr's clothing as well as he conveyed some of the details of Carr's famously intimate association with the king to Sir John Harington: 'the [king] leaneth on [Carr's] arm, pinches his cheeks, smoothes his ruffled garment, and, when he looketh at Carr, directeth discourse to diverse others.' It is notable that Howard found James's attention to the favorite's 'ruffled garment' a point worth mentioning—he was not the only courtier to notice that Carr drew a measure of his charm out of the wardrobe.

Just as dress can be seen to engender discourse and conflict, so too with undress. Aggravating the tension between Prince Henry and Robert Carr was a competition for the affections of Frances Howard, the Countess of Essex. Arthur Wilson relates an occasion of courtly love turned courtly conflict when the Countess, perhaps as an invitation, dropped a glove while dancing at court. The glove was offered to the prince,

> but the *Prince* refused to receive it, saying publickly, He would not have it, it is *stretcht* by another, meaning the Viscount: this was an aggrivation of hatred betwixt the Kings Son and the Kings Friend. (55-56)

In refusing the glove, Henry also attached intense sexual meaning to it as a symbol not merely of the Countess's person, but of her most intimate parts. In

this symbolic imagining, the prince finds not himself within the Countess's most secret parts, but Robert Carr, who is once again present as a stubborn obstacle in the path to human affection.

What is perhaps most clearly articulated in the examples above is that Henry 'naturally resented the attention and affection given to Carr,' because, as David Bergeron has observed, 'James bestowed on Carr the love and attention that might have been given to his family.' (105) Considering the close relationship of clothing and fashion to identity formation and self-fashioning, it is not surprising that such personal issues as disappointed love and family difficulties are revealed through the metaphor of clothing. Just as Henry rejects Carr's courtly conceit through a negative reaction to his clothing, Frances Howard's validity as a worthy lover is rejected through the fashion metaphor of the stretched glove.

Beyond the realm of courtly love and contest, fashion was also a field of expression for foreign policy and religious symbolism. As he reached his majority, Prince Henry's philosophy of fashion seems to have become more inclined toward plainness. The Venetian Ambassador proudly described the prince's adoption of the Italian style of dress as a practical choice, with the innuendo that the fashion decision was also a statement of foreign policy:

> The Prince has abandoned the French dress and has taken to the Italian; in this he has been followed by the Duke of York and by the larger part of their households. He says he will always wear it, as it seems to him more modest and more convenient in itself and less costly for the suite, as he cannot endure the changes of fashion that come every day from France. The Spanish Ambassador, in conversation with his Highness, congratulated him on having adopted the Spanish dress, but had for his answer that it was really nearer Italian. (*CSP Venetian, 1610-13* 122-3)

At a time when Henry increasingly patronized Italian styles in art and architecture, it is appropriate that he would also adopt the Italian dress. The claim to frugality, however, was likely more affected than real, as these modest suits in the Italian style often cost as much as £100 for the doublet and hose. Murray recorded at least eighty such suits in the wardrobe account within a two-and-a-half year period (PRO E 351/3085). It is interesting to speculate on the direction that Henry's wardrobe and aesthetics may have developed had he lived. Judging from his conservative, perhaps Puritan orientation, it seems possible that he may have shifted from the brand of high-fashion royal imagery that fascinated him in his teenage years to an increasingly plain style of dress more indicative of contemplation than conceit. Such a turn would have been Prince Henry's most significant challenge to early Stuart fashion.

Of the prince's habits of dress, William Haydon wrote that 'he loved to goe

handsome and well cloathed: yet without any maner of superfluity or excesse. But as for his servants and Gentlemen that were neare to his person, he was some what more curious, taking pleasure to see them go richly apparelled.' (9) Haydon's assessment is well supported by Sir David Murray's wardrobe accounts, which include significant gifts of clothing and livery to associates and household members. Such transactions were central to the patronage system at court and within guild society. Toward this point, Peter Stallybrass has written that 'the gift of clothing was the constitutive gesture of social organization,' a gift 'more binding than money' (292). And in a similar context, Patricia Fumerton has observed that the self-fashioning and self-disclosure intrinsic to the exchange of gifts and ornaments at court was 'a political "game" as intimate, earnest, and full of connivance as a game of cards between close friends' (68). Just as this game could be played as an affront to enemies, it was a necessary ritual in the creation and maintenance of alliances.

It is clear from the gifts of clothing recorded in Prince Henry's wardrobe accounts, that the prince always gave generously to Lord James Hay, the notoriously 'prodigal' master of King James's Great Wardrobe. The Lord Hay was a 'gorgeous' man who knew clothing and fashion and who had come from Scotland as a trusted friend of the Jacobean court. Hay moved freely among the households of the royal family, enjoyed access to both the king and the prince, and was known to be a 'great favorite of the King's' (Akrigg 98-9). One way that the prince showed his esteem for Hay and simultaneously engaged him in the reciprocal obligation of patronage was through gifts of clothing, something dear to his heart and necessary to his occupation.

In the 1610-1611 season, the Lord Hay received from the prince two fine suits of doublet and hose, one ash colored with gold and silver lace and the other a more sober combination of black satin and velvet. For these gifts, David Murray recorded a cost of just over £170 (PRO E 351/3085), which was comparable to what Henry spent on his own rich clothing. During the same year, Hay performed in the twelfth night presentation of *Prince Henry's Barriers*, an event that 'presented the prince as the exponent of a policy diametrically opposed to the royal one ... fiercely Protestant and anti-Hapsburg' (Strong 141). Despite the seeming duality of Hay's position between the courts of the king and prince, he remained in great favor with James and received a yearly benevolency of £5000 on Michelmas 1611 (Akrigg 172-73). Hay remained closely aligned with the prince through 1612, and he received 'a sute of blacke silke grogeraine' which was without a doubt very fine. Throughout this period, Hay continued in his capacity as master of the Great Wardrobe and served as a powerful link between the courts of the king and the prince.

Although it has been said that he 'took no delight in pleasants and jeasters' (Haydon 31), Prince Henry presented Archie Armstrong, the king's fool, with

the professionally useful gift of a 'coate and whoode of severall cullers' (PRO E 351/3085) during the 1610-11 season. This gift of motley livery invites speculation about Henry's relationship to Archie. Fashion at court in the form of the fool's motley coat takes on a distinctly political function as the colours are, in effect, the livery of discursive licence. Archie's gibes and sharp wit must have been mediated by obligations of dual patronage while he performed at King James's court in what amounted to the prince's livery. The most obvious reason for presenting Archie with a gift may have been self protection; but we should also credit the prince with the political sensibility to recognize that by charming the king's 'all licens'd fool' he gained a unique and potentially subversive foothold at his father's court. 'It paid,' as G.P.V. Akrigg has observed, 'to be on the right side of Archie,' whose 'wit could be devastating' (168).

In keeping with David Murray's detailed record keeping, which only became somewhat scattered as he tidied up affairs and tried to calculate expenses after Henry's death, there are some very elaborate descriptions of the livery purchased for lower members of the prince's household, and it is clear that attractive apparel for the liveried men was a priority. The established social conventions for royalty and nobility indicated that 'it was essential for a nobleman to be accompanied by a large number of liveried attendants when making a public appearance' (Ashelford 110). The prince's footmen, bargemen, coachmen, and pages were all liveried with spangles, ribbon, cloth, and finished suits corresponding to their household rank (PRO E 351/3085). Two pages named in particular, James Murray and another called only Primrose, received fine suits, with Primrose's cloak 'laide wth cullered purple silke lace' (PRO E 351/3085). Until 1597, it had been illegal under sumptuary law for servants to wear silk, but this law was amended so that the servants of nobility and royalty could have their livery ornamented with silk devices (Ashelford 110). Clothing his pages in elaborate livery that incorporated not only silk, but also the purple of monarchy, Prince Henry saw that his representatives would make a majestic impression. Also prominent among the prince's liveried servants were his singing boys, his musical representatives, for whom new costumes were purchased each year. These costumes are described in the most elaborate detail of all the livery entries in Murray's wardrobe account. Suits of ash colored doublet and hose with jerkins, cloaks, and boothose of gray, all garnished with carnation and sky colored silk purled lace are recorded in addition to two other suits in green, with cloaks laced six times about with broad green silk and a host of accessories (PRO E 351/3085). Prince Henry clearly took a great deal of pride in his musicians and singers, and was conscious of the important contribution that such a comely group made to the image of his court.

Even following the prince's death, there is a continuing record of livery purchases for the servants, who needed suitable apparel to process in the funeral cortege within which 'The Corps of the Prince, lying in an open-chariot, [was

drawn along the streets] with the Prince's Representation thereon, invested with his robes of Estate of purple velvet, furred with ermines [and] at his feet, within the said chariot, sat Sir David Murray, the Master of the Wardrobe.' (Nichols 2: 498) Dedicated to the last, Murray even burned sensitive papers for the prince, protecting the image he had worked so hard in fashioning. Following the events of Henry's death and funeral, Murray reconciled the accounts of the wardrobe for the exchequer. The record, like the emergent court, is truncated, closing with an account of the 'Blackes and other neccesaries provided after the Prince's death'. The emptiness of settling these final accounts is apparent in the unfinished business that Murray set down—as the orders of the household indicated he should: a series of several 'sutes cut out but not made up at the prince's death'. Indeed, the prince's wardrobe was alive with the spectral force of majesty even after the prince himself was dead.

Of Henry's enactment of the courtier's part, it is clear that clothing was a means of enacting courtly grace and opulence and that courtly fashion often represented the enactment of political and ideological discourse. This discourse was frequently oppositional and reflected concord and conflict between and among families, peers, lovers, and within oneself. Certainly the pressures of performing the courtier's part were immense, but Prince Henry was a consummate actor on the stage of fashion, setting trends and enacting potent discourse through his wardrobe. Through the exchange of clothing and livery, Prince Henry maintained formal and informal social structures that enhanced his emergent court and connected him with the larger Jacobean scene and the City of London. Recognizing fashion as a framework where he could establish his identity apart from his father, Henry projected his emergent majesty to the limits of his station and beyond. Fashion functioned as a vehicle for chivalric discourse, courtly love, foreign policy, and political patronage at Prince Henry's court, and we are fortunate to have Sir David Murray's detailed records that we may better imagine the grandeur of the scene.

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