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Brilliant Bodies: Fashioning Courtly Men in Early Renaissance Italy.

University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2022. Pp. 240 + 36 col., 50 b/w ill. ISBN 978-0-271-09060-3 (hardcover) US\$109.95.

Brilliant Bodies: Fashioning Courtly Men in Early Renaissance Italy by Timothy McCall considers the history and visual impact of masculine sartorial “brilliance” in Italian court culture during the fifteenth century. The author contends that fitted tunics made of dazzling materials and worn over tights magnified power, wealth, inherent sexuality, and even virtue within what he describes as homosocial princely settings primarily in Milan, Ferrara, and Naples. Lavishly illustrated with contemporary paintings of garments long since vanished, this scholarly volume arrives at a moment when fashion culture has been increasingly recognized as an intellectually viable field of study.

The four chapters and epilogue are organized by theme rather than a specific patron or court. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on power dressing in the form of gaze-inducing male attire made of silken velvet brocades woven with gold thread and embellishments such as sparkling buttons, gems, and fur. Tunics were worn by *signori* for public and private display; clothes were also a source of imitation and rivalry with other aristocrats throughout the peninsula and beyond.

The Sforza family of Milan figures prominently here. Described in his youth as a “living sun” (4), Duke Galeazzo evidently wore a splendid blue-green tunic embellished with gold fleurs-de-lis during a stay in Florence with his ostensibly Republican ally, the magnificent Lorenzo de’ Medici. The tunic survives in the 1471 oil painting *Portrait of Galeazzo Maria Sforza* by Piero del Pollaiuolo. The Sforza claimed the rich colour of mulberries, similar to the crimson sleeve seen in the portrait, for the exclusive use of his family and supporters to further ensure differentiation from the Lombard populace. Chapter 2 presents the gems, real and simulated, that adorned both armour and fabric and made bodies, including that of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, child and heir to the Duchy of Urbino, increasingly luminous.

In chapter 3, McCall considers in detail the brilliant effects created for courtly attire. Women, who were subject to misogynist diatribes about excessive expenditure and self-presentation, dressed in floor-length skirts. For men, the main elements were tailored hip-length tunics: the *giornea* (open at the sides) and the tight-fitting padded doublet. The ensembles often featured insignias and

dynastic colours. The *giornea* could be worn over pieces of armour with a doublet underneath and cinched at the waist to create a slender, alluring silhouette facilitated by the sophisticated cutting of fabrics. Legs were covered by fitted tights (*calze*). Tinkling sequins (*tremolanti*) were attached to these luxurious garments to create additional shimmer. For the elite, no sumptuary laws restricting expenditure applied; the author observes that enacting them visually reinforced the social order in relation to the untitled populace. He concludes with commentary on the phenomenon of exposed male legs. Also to note is the Roman precedent of tunics over bare limbs well known to Renaissance artists.

The implicit sexuality of this attire is showcased in an elaborate fresco cycle by Francesco del Cossa in the 1460s for the large reception room of the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara. The scenes chronicle activities of Borso d'Este and the duke's younger entourage. The painter deploys a naughty formula: the legs of men in tights and their horses are juxtaposed in a variety of positions, including from behind, and, it may be added, close to the viewer.

"Blanched Beauty, Nobility and Power" is the title and topic of chapter 4. A more youthful Borso d'Este returns as an example of the way in which white skin and light hair exude a radiant aristocratic beauty that McCall correlates with "noble." Comparison with the means through which women visually communicated requisite virtue and beauty would be useful here. The author segues to perceptions of dark-skinned Moors from around the Mediterranean and their role in courtly life and imagery.

The volume concludes with an epilogue titled "Black is the New Gold." It leads with a familiar portrait of the stylish Philip the Good of Burgundy, who is dressed in rich black fabric with fur trim and a gold necklace (ideated by Rogier van der Weyden in 1450). Also mentioned is Alfonso I of Aragon, who supposedly wore black when he conquered Angevin Naples in 1440. One could emphasize that the king's plain black day dress was comparatively clerical in appearance and intended to express Spanish piety rather than the understated *richesse* of Duke Philip, his ally and supplier of art. Also mentioned is the fiery Neapolitan-born Spanish general Francesco Fernando d'Avalos, Marquis of Pescara and husband of Vittoria Colonna, who is dressed in elegant black for a painting circa 1520. The author proposes that these fashion choices represent the beginning of a shift in men's fashion to a monochromatic palette fully realized in the nineteenth century.

Strikingly absent throughout is passing reference to the changing visual continuum in which the attire under discussion would have been experienced. Residences began to change in appearance in the early Quattrocento when hangings, heraldry, and armour were joined by collections of ancient coins and marble fragments together with new translations of Greek and Roman texts. This duality is seen in the frescoes mentioned above for Borso d'Este, who had been educated by a humanist. The duke and his entourage wear elaborate tunics and tights, but they are seen in painted spaces *all'antica* with rounded arches and classical columns; the scenes are separated by fictive Corinthian pilasters. Elite patrons sought architects capable of reinventing Roman buildings, within which the language and look of the court would also change.

McCall's book is beautiful, provocative, and stylishly written. The thematic organization of chapters in this case means, however, that commentary on a single topic is scattered throughout the book; this is further compounded by the apparent splicing of previously published essays with additional material. Tangential minutiae, while of interest, also undercut clarity of presentation, thus resulting in a choppy read. The book is, nonetheless, important for historians of the Italian Renaissance and dress history generally. For others, there is much to learn and enjoy between the flamingo pink endpapers of *Brilliant Bodies*.

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