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Faction and Fashion: The Politics of Court Dress in Eighteenth-Century England

Dr Greig took as her starting point a 1795 article from the *Morning Chronicle* which denounced the number of contemporary press reports about the fashions being worn at court. Such coverage was a common feature in eighteenth-century English newspapers, reflecting an intense popular interest in the subject which can be confirmed from other sources, including private correspondence. Greig's topic was not the changing fashions themselves, but the cultural significance of that enduring interest. As she pointed out, this challenges older assumptions about the supposed lack of interest in courtly display under the Hanoverians, and adds weight to recent attempts by a number of historians to reinterpret the English court in this period. Greig's theme was that court dress could indeed convey political messages. Attendance at court was a mark of respect for the monarch. That was why informed observers took such care to note who attended court ceremonies at moments of maximum political sensitivity. Dressing as splendidly as possible made those statements of support more visible. Such nuances became even more important when Hanoverian heirs created rival, reversionary courts. Or they could equally be used to disguise differences. When George III recovered in 1789, those whose politics might be thought suspect made an extra effort to dress magnificently, in order to demonstrate their loyalty. In a world in which politics had become public, in which the press helped shape opinion and in which the court played a less central role, the semiotics of court dress became more complicated than ever. **AB**