

Men of Decorum and Distinction Pages' Livery and the Education of Aristocratic Manliness

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Abstract:

In view of the fact that today's leading fashion designers are tearing down the aesthetic barriers which have separated women's and men's fashion since the nineteenth century, this article argues that the idea of hegemonic masculinity, which displays superiority by renouncing flamboyant fashion, represents a rather young and transient notion of manliness. For centuries, in the early modern period, many sons of the noble elite learned a more versatile ideal of manliness while being raised as pages at aristocratic courts. Fine dress, elegant posture, and aristocratic demeanor were as important as physical strength, courage and a sense of social priority. By using ceremonial and educational instructions, archival and pictorial records, this paper will investigate the construction of aristocratic male gender in the context of the page's education, function and dress at court.

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Introduction

Judging by today's fashionable menswear, created by leading designers, the notion of masculinity seems to be changing. The "great masculine renunciation" of fashion and beauty, formulated by Carl John Flügel (Flügel 1930), which has ruled male fashion for the past 200 years, seems to be becoming obsolete. The collections of top designers of menswear such as J.W Anderson (Fall 2013), Balenciaga (Spring 2017), and Gucci (Fall 2017) no longer disassociate male dress from the aesthetics of female fashion while searching for alternative male images (Barry 2014). Looking back to the early modern period one notices that the ideal of aristocratic manliness had accepted for centuries a wider notion of male appearance and behavior than the tight gender restrictions ruling fashion since the nineteenth century. The education and dress of young noblemen being trained as pages at European courts since the late Middle Ages offer a valuable insight into the construction of a more multifarious masculinity. By using ceremonial and educational instructions, archival and pictorial records, this paper will investigate the construction of gender in the context of the page's education, function and dress at court.

Education at Court

The tradition of training and educating young noblemen as pages at court existed in Europe from the fourteenth century until the end of WW I. Aristocratic parents sent their young sons, sometimes as young as the age of six, to foreign courts in order to have them educated in a manner befitting their social position. Some parents also sent their daughters to distant noble households for similar reasons. However, the education and service at court as a page remained a privilege of young aristocratic boys, and paved the way for their future careers. In exchange for their education, the pages worked as servants.

The education was usually completed upon reaching adulthood, when the young nobleman was accepted as a full member of the court society (Kraus 2002, 172). In his book of court ceremonies from 1733, Julius von Rohr (von Rohr 1733, 257) described the commencement ritual of a page which reflected the traditional values of chivalry (in German called "Wehr-

haftmachen" = to enable a person to defend oneself: von Rohr 1722/1990, 257). Publicly acknowledging the page's good services, the head of the household handed him a fine sword, sometimes also new clothing appropriate for the nobility, a fine horse and money. The young man was then declared "cavalier" (in English: gentleman), a rank at court which allowed him to sit at the dining table during official events. At some German courts the young "cavalier" was gently slapped in the face, which was meant to recall the medieval dubbing ceremony. According to von Rohr this slap confirmed his manliness as a nobleman and his loyalty to his master. In some cases, the young man had to demonstrate his virility by drinking a large glass of wine (von Rohr 1733, 257).



Fig. 1:
Georg Engelhard Löhneisen: „Neu-eröffnete Hof- Kriegs- und Reit-Schul“, Nuremberg: Paul Lochner 1729, engraving, frontispiece: [7] (Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt, Wittenberg). Public Domain.

In general, the education of the pages had to fulfill four major goals: physical prowess, military skills, basic academic knowledge and aristocratic demeanor. The frontispiece of Löhneisen's book of instructions for young noblemen at court, dated 1729, illustrates these goals (fig. 1). Piles of books, a globe, tools of geometry and of surveying, as well as the drawing of a fortification, refer to the academic education. Behind this scene, a young man is demonstrating his knowledge of good conduct by respectfully bowing to a well-dressed gentleman obviously of high rank. Horse riding, dressage and fencing, as seen in the print's background, were typical aristocratic sports and traditionally represent an important part of the

education at court. This may be the reason why the pages were generally kept under the supervision of the chief equerry (Motley 1990). Both sportive and competitive activities were training for physical strength and the courage needed in hunting and warfare, and thereby maintained the ideals of manly knighthood. Profound scholarly education was usually not the main focus of a page's training (Asch 2008, 142-51; Pollnitz 2015). The academic lessons included basic reading, writing, languages, history (especially aristocratic genealogy) and mathematics. Pages learned the basics of ballistics and the construction of fortifications as part of their military education. However, the German emperor Leopold I decreed in 1661 that his pages should also be trained in rhetorical skills, such as disputing, explaining, arguing, and defending their own opinion (Wührer and Scheutz 2011, 665). These intellectual proficiencies were important skills for noblemen, enabling them to verbally assert their superior position in society, and prepared the progeny for future leadership positions.

While physical strength, rhetorical cleverness and courage are typical traits of what has been regarded as true masculine character that has ensured men's hegemony in society for centuries, the education of pages also included distinct feminine skills: elegant posture and a sense of beauty and decorum. Dancing lessons taught the basics of ballroom dances and, more importantly, drilled the correct physical posture. Young noblemen and women alike had to learn how to move their limbs and body in the right way. They were urged to walk elegantly and very slowly. The young pages were not allowed to dash around. Instead, they had to learn how to stand gracefully in beautiful ballet-like poses. These abilities were regarded as important physical signs of aristocratic conduct and of high aesthetic standards which both sexes had to master (Gernot 2001, 110). The plate in Löhneisen's instruction (fig.1) for young noblemen shows a number of men in the appropriate beautiful (in German "zierlich" = beautiful in a delicate sense: Gernot 2001, 110) posture. They place one foot in front of the other at a right angle in ballet-like manner, thus creating an elegant S-shaped curve.

The young noblemen also had to learn how to control their emotions. They were not permitted to chatter, curse, shout, interrupt the speech of others or laugh out loud. Stipulations for good behavior and for the sense for propriety dominate the written directions for pages that have survived from several German courts (e.g. Többicke 1983, Mutschler 2005). According to the books on rules and instructions for pages, polite and elegant demeanor, which one might consider today as typical feminine virtues, received the most attention during the page's training as "homme honnête" (Kollbach 2009, 174-76).

Service at Court

The pages' service at court enhanced their aristocratic education by practical training. The young boys learned self-control and discipline while observing the strict rules of ceremony and subordination in a complex system of hierarchy. Pages worked in different functions at court and side by side with livery footmen. Pages of the chamber (in German: "Leibpagen" and "Kammerpagen") helped during the official levee of their master in the morning and going to bed in the evening. At times, they had to read the Bible out loud to their master, which furthered their religious education. Pages of the chamber always stayed close to their master or mistress and accompanied them during travels. Riding pages attended the stables and escorted their masters on horseback.

Silver pages ("Silberpagen") served dishes and drinks during meals (Zedler 1706-1751, vol. 8, 211). Von Rohr describes the silver page's role in the complex ceremony of serving water during festive banquets: the page had to hand a jar of water to the chamberlain ("Kammerjunker") who passed it on to the lord-in-waiting ("Kammerherrn") who gave it to the Lord Chamberlain ("Hofmarschall") who finally offered the water to the highest ranking guest. Thus, the young men learned the strict hierarchy at court by being part of its performance. Pages were expected to watch and listen to the conversation at table thereby absorbing fine table manners as well as polite and gallant conversation (von Rohr 1733, 108).

The bearing of a lady's train or that of a ruler during official occasions also belonged to the ceremonial tasks of pages (fig. 2). The bearing of the train was regarded as an important indication of a person's position at court and was prescribed in detail by ceremonial books. The rank within the court hierarchy decided which and how many persons carried the train at certain occasions. This was still the case during the coronation ceremony of Elizabeth II in 1953, when sons of peers dressed up as pages and carried the train of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, highlighting her special position at the court of the United Kingdom.



Fig. 2:
Nicolas Arnould : Recueil des modes de la cour de France, 'Femme de qualité en habit D'esté', 1687, hand-colored engraving on paper (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA). Public Domain.

Hunting pages assisted during hunting events and could thereby study this distinctively aristocratic leisure activity (fig. 3). Another page's duty was the delivery of confidential messages. A French fashion plate by Nicolas Bonnart depicts a lady handing a secret love letter to her page (fig. 4). Thus, the page learned the intricacies of gallantry by keeping secrets and watching the practice of courtly love. All of the pages' duties described above amounted to an intensely practical training in courtly behavior.



Fig. 3:
Henri II Bonnat: „November“, The Twelve Months, 1678, etching and engraving (©The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license).



Fig. 4:
Nicolas Bonnat: Recueil des modes de la cour de France, 'Dame de qualité en habit desté', 1678-1693, hand-colored engraving on paper (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA). Public Domain.

Livery: An Education in Courtly Elegance and Decorum

The pages' livery played an important role in aristocratic society. Pages clad in lavish livery served as an ornament of beauty at court and as a symbol of social prestige. In his instructions for the young nobleman, Löhneisen points out that the master and his servants should always be dressed in fine clothes when they appear in public and at court in order to gain respect and a good reputation (Löhneisen 1729, 62-3). The more attention a ruler paid to the display of magnificence, the more pages he kept. While the imperial court in Vienna under Emperor Charles VI favored pious frugality, and kept only eighteen pages (Hübl 1912, 12), in deliberate contrast, Louis XIV, king of France, staged his court as the epitome of magnificence and expanded the number of pages from seventy-six in 1669 to ninety-one in 1680 (Motley 1990, 178).



Fig. 5:
C.E. Kayser: Royal-Polish page, costume plate, 1719, pen in black, gouache and watercolors
(Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv. no. Ca 100, leaf 42, photo: Andreas Diesend).

The Saxon Elector Frederick Augustus, King of Poland, known as Augustus the Strong, regarded magnificence of dress as an important tool to further political ambitions (Mikosch 1999). When he organized the extravagant wedding celebrations for his son, also called Frederick Augustus, who was marrying archduchess Maria Josepha of Austria in 1719, he hired additional pages and temporarily raised their number to fifty-seven. According to archival records, all pages received lavish new clothes. Their liveries quite distinctively symbolized the two households of Augustus the Strong. Pages of the royal-Polish household were clad in the Polish style. Their red and blue dress was trimmed with silver-gold braids (fig. 5).

The household colors do not necessarily represent heraldic colors. Red-blue-gold do not reflect the Polish coat of arms being red white or silver but continue the colors of the Electoral-Saxon Household under John George IV (Mikosch 1999, 308). Augustus decided for yellow-blue-silver as the colors of his household when he became the new Saxon Elector in 1694 (Mikosch 1999, 277). The pages representing the electoral-Saxon household wore as “ordinary” dress the so-called “cavalier’s dress” (in German “Kavalierskleid”) consisting of *justaucorps*, waistcoat, *culotte* and a coat (fig. 6). Their livery was made of blue and yellow cloth and decorated with blue velvet and silver trimmings, the colors of the electoral-Saxon household. Furthermore, nine hunting pages wore “cavalier’s dress” of green cloth with silver trimmings (Mikosch 1999, 289-90).



Fig. 6: Design for the ordinary dress of a “Silber-Page” of the Electoral-Saxon Household, 1719, pen in black, gouache and watercolors (Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Dresden, 10026 Geh. Kabinett, Loc. 762, vol. 1, leaf 70, photo: E. Hackspiel-Mikosch).



Fig. 7: Design for a footman of the Electoral-Saxon Household, 1719, pen in black, gouache and watercolors, (Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Dresden, 10026 Geh. Kabinett, Loc. 762, vol. 1, leaf 75, photo: E. Hackspiel-Mikosch).

The livery of the servants, which included the pages, visualized hierarchy and social distinction at court, and was reflected in the estimated costs of the garments. Archival records document the different costs according to rank. While the expenses for a regular footman’s livery were calculated at 80 taler (fig. 7), the Saxon page’s “ordinary” (fig. 6) outfit amounted to 153 taler and his full-dress livery even cost 216 taler. The rich silver trimmings were the most expensive items and their abundance indicated the superior position of the pages within the livery servants’ hierarchy. 118 silver tassels decorated the buttonhole of the pages’ ordinary livery and clearly set the pages apart from the regular servants. The tassels on the pages’ dress correspond to the ceremonial regulations for the wedding festivities of 1719 which set clear signs of hierarchy. Accordingly, only guests with the rank of a prince or princess were allowed to decorate their carriages and horses with tassels (Mikosch 1999, 293).



Fig. 8:
 Anna-Maria Werner: pages of the electoral-Saxon court in „old-German“ habit at the solemn entry of Maria Jsepha, 1719, detail, around 1730, drawing, pen and brush (Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv. no. C 6743, photo: Herbert Boswank).

During court festivals, the pages learned how much attention was paid to tradition and the symbolic communication of men's dress. This applies in particular to their historicizing full-dress or state livery which was called "old-German" or "Spanish" at the Dresden wedding festivities of 1719 (fig. 8-9). Combining elements of sixteenth and seventeenth century dress, the outfit consisted of a semi-circular cloak in the manner of the Spanish *cappa* and was made of yellow cloth lined with blue silk, and trimmed with silver-blue silk braids. The short doublet and trunk hose of yellow silk were also inspired by the Spanish fashion of the sixteenth century while the lace ruffle made of point de Venice recalls seventeenth-century fashion as do the boots.



Fig. 9:
 C.E. Kayser: page of the electoral-Saxon court in „old German“ habit, costume plate, after 1719, pen in black, gouache and watercolors (Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, inv. no. Ca 100, leaf 36, photo: Andreas Diesend).

Dresden copied the style of historicizing full-dress livery that was worn at the French and Viennese courts in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century as is depicted in Charles Lebrun's monumental portrait of Chancellor Pierre Séguir and his pages, 1660 (Louvre), and in Abraham a Sancta Clara's costume book "Neueröffnete Welt-Gallerie" published by Christoph Weigel in Nuremberg in 1703. Alluding to the grand Spanish court ceremony, "Spanish" dress was regarded appropriate for the most solemn state occasion. In 1719, the pages appeared in their full-dress "Spanish" outfits during the solemn entry of the bride and at the festive reception in the castle of Dresden where they served refreshments. By recalling historical tradition and emphasizing magnificence at court the page's picturesque dress heightened decorum at court and helped to legitimize aristocratic rulership. In Dresden, these garments were kept in the Royal Wardrobe which reflected their special esteem at court (Mikosch 1999, 291).

After the French Revolution, aristocratic manliness was frequently criticized as being too effeminate and focused too much on appearance and prestige. However, one may also argue that the education of pages at court produced an idea of masculinity which is more versatile than the stern idea of middle-class manliness renouncing showy dress, an idea of gender that has ruled Western society only since the nineteenth century. During the early modern period, young noblemen learned on one hand ideals of chivalry, such as physical strength, prowess and the demeanor of social superiority. They were taught to take their place in a strict hierarchical order and used the bonding among their fellow pages in order to build influential networks for the rest of their lives. As members of the social elite, many pages made brilliant careers as adults. They rose to high positions at court, in the military, in administration or politics, from which women were excluded. Thus, they fulfilled the ideal of traditional hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, they also learned the importance of physical beauty and of lavish dress as crucial signs of ceremony and decorum at court. The ornateness of the pages' dress was never called into question within the aristocratic society, nor was the pages' masculinity. Today's fashion seems to rediscover the more multifaceted idea of masculinity, as exemplified by the highly ornate menswear collection of Dolce & Gabbana of Fall 2012 featuring heavy gold embroidery and demonstrated by lavish outfits of male fashionistas photographed by street photographer Scott Schuman at the Milan fashion show on 1 March 2017 (www.thesartorialist.com).

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