Matthaus Schwarz’s Costume Book and Gender Performativity
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Deciding to write a research paper on exclusively one primary source initially intimidated me, but Fondren Library offered me the resources to tackle this paper and fully develop my ideas. Primarily, I heavily depended on Fondren’s wealth of books to build this paper. Most importantly, Fondren always had Matthaus Schwarz’s costume book on hand, an edition with full-color copies of each portrait Schwarz commissioned. This book was the key to my entire paper, and due to its size, I needed to spend hours poring over the book and closely analyzing the portraits. Because Fondren had the book so easily accessible, I did not need to worry about finding the complete portrait collection elsewhere. Furthermore, as the book was on course reserve, the Fondren staff was extremely patient with me repeated checking it out, handing them the worn Post-It note on which I had written the call number with a small pencil also from the library. Fondren guaranteed me a quiet space to work at any time of day, so I always had the productive atmosphere and table I needed in order to spend intimate time noting the details in Schwarz’s portraits. Finally, when I had to construct an image index to accompany my paper, Fondren had easy-to-use scanners for me to copy and save each relevant page in a high-quality image.

Not only did Fondren give me crucial resources to work with my primary source, but I could also rely on the library for supporting evidence. Fondren’s database and journal subscriptions were perfect for finding articles to contextualize Schwarz’s book and understand measures of masculinity in early modern Europe. Writing a research paper using the costume book alone wouldn’t have been a true research paper, just pure speculation. Instead, with immediate access to academic articles, I could utilize the years of work from scholars like Will Fisher and Ulinka Rublack, who were critical in giving background on Schwarz’s book and comprehending how this primary source helps historians looking to study gender in early modern Europe. In addition to the secondary source work of these scholars, Fondren Library offered an English translation of Baldessar Castiglione’s The Courtier. Castiglione’s book was published around the same time Schwarz began his costume book, and having another contemporary primary source describe desirable attributes of elite men brought a new dimension to what Schwarz would have considered masculine.

Fondren’s supporting resources such as articles and shelved books were critical in thinking out my argument to begin with. Not only did Fondren offer multiple copies of Judith Butler’s work, but when I found it difficult to digest her writing, I could access articles that offered explanations in better words and other perspectives on her theory. I could also find Butler’s opposite: Joan Scott, who argued historians should view gender as constructed. Without access to this academic debate, I couldn’t have begun to understand how to approach Schwarz’s portraits. Overall,
without the reading, space, and technology available at the library, putting together this paper would have been far more stressful and of a far inferior quality. This paper truly wouldn’t have been possible.