To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Lauren Holt Matthews entitled "Poetic Performances: Tracing Castiglione's Theory of Courtliness in the Poetry of John Donne and John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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POETIC PERFORMANCES: TRACING CASTIGLIONE'S THEORY OF COURTLINESS IN THE POETRY OF JOHN DONNE AND JOHN WILMOT, THE EARL OF ROCHESTER

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dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Zach,

my parents, Brad and Renee Holt and my sisters Rebecca and Rachel,

my grandparents Wayne and Charlotte Holt and Delbert Clark,

and in memory of Betty Clark, Helen DuVall, and Eva Holt

whose continued guidance and support have helped me succeed

and who have each taught me their own lessons of perseverance.

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abstract

In *The Book of the Courtier*, Baldesar Castiglione outlines the three criteria that courtiers and would-be courtiers must implement to fashion a successful performance, one that helps them maintain or strengthen their social status: *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione*. Each of these elements enables and supports the others; the success of the performative act relies on the courtier's mastery and manipulation of these three characteristics. Their poetry indicates that John Donne and John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester both attained that high level of courtly skill – Donne through his novel use of the metaphysical conceit and Rochester through his representations of failed attempts at courtly performance. Their uses of Castiglione's performative theory are at odds – the goal of Donne's poetic performances was social mobility, while Rochester's performances were conservative reactions against social mobility. However, recognizing Castiglione's influence in the poetry of Donne and Rochester enables us to understand some of the more perplexing aspects of their verse by providing an insight into their anxieties as individuals within a rapidly evolving English society.

table of contents

chapter one 1

SPREZZATURA, GRAZIA, AND DISSIMULAZIONE:
CHARACTERISTICS OF CASTIGLIONE'S COURTIER

chapter two 23

PERFORMATIVE METAPHYSICS:
THE COURTLY IDEAL AND ITS ROLE IN DONNE'S VERSE

chapter three 49

MAINTAINING THE *STATUS QUO*:
A CONSERVATIVE ROCHESTER AND HIS SOCIAL CRITIQUES

bibliography 93

vita 103

chapter one

SPREZZATURA, GRAZIA, AND DISSIMULAZIONE: CHARACTERISTICS OF CASTIGLIONE'S COURTIER

...for the good maker or poet who is in decent speach & good termes to describe all things and with prayse or dispraise to report euery mans behauiour, ought to know the comelinesse of an action as well as of a word & thereby to direct himselfe both in praise & perswasion or any other point that perteines to the [Courtier's] arte.

As by the last remembred figures the sence of single wordes is altered, so by these that follow is that of whole and entier speach: and first by the Courtly figure *Allegoria*, which is when we speake one thing and thinke another, and that our wordes and our meanings meete not. The vse of this figure is so large, and has vertue of so great efficacie as it is supposed no man can pleasantly vtter and perswade without it, but in effect is sure neuer or very seldome to thriue and prosper in the world, that cannot skilfully put in vse... Book III § (155)
~ George Puttenham *The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589[1]

In 1589, George Puttenham published a lengthy critique of English verse entitled *The Arte of English Poesie*. In it, he delineated the numerous characteristics of good poetry and equated them with the theory of courtly performance described by Baldassare Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier*. First published in Italian in 1527 and in English in 1561, *The Courtier* was a pedagogical text that taught the refinement of courtly characteristics to its readers and enabled them to fashion more impressive courtly performances by

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[1] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*. In *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, vol. 2, ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959), 1 - 193.

mastering the three essential characteristics of the courtly performance: *grazia* – that special air that graceful courtiers have about them that sets them apart from the rest of society, *sprezzatura* – the affected guise of nonchalance and ease that courtiers adopt in order to showcase their *grazia*, and *dissimulazione* – the conscious step that courtiers must take to separate the imperfect inner self from the performed outer self that seems flawless. Puttenham believed that "Poets were [...] from the beginning the best perswaders and their eloquence the first Rethoricke of the world" (Book I, § 4). He ultimately concluded that they shared this goal of persuasion with their courtly-performing counterparts. The connections that he saw between Castiglione's courtly model demonstrated to him that the opportunity of social mobility Castiglione offered to prospective courtiers could be seized by English poets as well.

In the first sections of *The Arte of English Poesie*, Puttenham explains that the purpose of his book is to delineate the specific rules that should guide English verse, thereby elevating it to an art: "if Poesie be now an Art, [...] & yet were none, untill by studious persons fashioned and reduced into a method of rules & precepts, then no doubt may there be the like with us" (Book I, § 2). He adds, "if th'art of Poesie be but a skill appertaining to utterance, why may not the same be with us aswel as with them, our language being no less copious pithie and significative then theirs, our concepts the same, and our wits no less

apt to devise and imitate then theirs were" (Book I, § 2). To help English poets fashion the poetic performances they needed to elevate English to position similar to that held by their highly respected Italian and French peers, Puttenham created lists of poetic characteristics based on standard performative techniques, linguistic and oratorical, like anaphora, which he calls "Report" and the "Crosse-couple" a figure that he explains "takes [...] two contrary words, and tieth them as it were in a paire of couples, and so makes them agree like good fellowes" (Book III § 19).

Many Elizabethan poets like Spenser and Sidney, Wyatt and Ralegh that lived within one generation of Castiglione incorporated the techniques in *The Arte of English Poesie* into their verse. Puttenham called them "courtly-makers," a moniker he introduces Book I § 31 and continues to use throughout the rest of his study. Now Stephen Greenblatt, Robert Bender, and other critics call such individuals courtier poets.[2] The performative connection Puttenham noted between Castiglione's explanation of courtly performances and his own views of English verse motivated him to utilize Castiglione's theory to elevate the social position of English verse abroad. In *The Arte*, Puttenham explains that to take advantage of this potential social mobility, English poets must master the three

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[2] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1980) & Robert M. Bender, *Five Courtier Poets of the English Renaissance* (NYC: Washington Square P, Inc., 1967)..

essential characteristics of Castiglione's theory of courtly behavior: *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione*.

In *The Book of the Courtier*, Castiglione creates a detailed plan to guide the socially hopeful, intrepid individual through the treacherous steps he must take to reach his goal of being accepted at court. In *The Book of the Courtier*, Castiglione celebrates the inherent superiority of members of the court by requiring that the would-be courtier reading *The Courtier* as a didactic text must have innate *grazia* to perform successfully. However, providing a detailed description of a method of courtly performance that enables social mobility, Castiglione actually threatens the ontological superiority of the upper class. Puttenham recognized the potential social mobility that Castiglione's theory of courtly performance offered, and he wrote *The Arte of English Poesie* to encourage English poets to take advantage of the opportunity Castiglione's model afforded them. In the generations after the publication of *The Book of the Courtier*, English poets would use their verse to seize this chance at social mobility. Some early seventeenth century poets like John Donne, Andrew Marvell, and Richard Lovelace incorporate it, with greater and lesser degrees of success, into their verse to improve their social status.[3] Others would use their verse to respond to

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[3] Below, I explain in detail the courtly performances within three of Donne's best-known poems, "Woman's Constancy," "The Flea," and "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Other examples

the threat that these individuals represented to the established social hierarchy. The connection that Puttenham noted in *The Arte of English Poesie* between English poetry and Castiglione's theory of courtly performance remained strong throughout the seventeenth century.

Throughout the fictionalized dialogue set at the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino that is the foundation of *The Courtier*, Castiglione's speakers give advice on the characteristics of the public performance of the ideal courtier. Their suggestions encompass both the substance and the method of the courtier's performative image management. Frank Whigham describes the juxtaposition of these two aspects of the performance as a relationship between *manner* and *matter*.

Although both the *manner* and the *matter* are important elements of the performance, the socially optimistic individual attempting to become a courtier could not accomplish his goal without first mastering the courtly *manner* and the three central and interrelated concepts that define it: *sprezzatura*, *grazia*, and *dissimulazione*. Each of these three qualities is essential achieving the ideal courtly

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of courtly performance in Donne's verse occur in poems secular poems like "Woman's Constancy" and "Satyre III," and in many of the *Holy Sonnets*. For other masterful examples of a courtly performance in verse, see Andrew Marvell's "On a Drop of Dew" and "A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body." For an example of a less than successful attempt to illustrate *sprezzatura*, *grazia*, and *dissimulazione* in a verse performance, see Lovelace's "The Snail."

mien and producing *meraviglia*, or marvel, in the courtier's audience.[4] Although each of the three characteristics is important, Castiglione stresses *grazia* as the most important of the three.

In the first book of *The Courtier*, Castiglione explains that *grazia* is "the seasoning without which all other attributes and good qualities would be almost worthless" (Castiglione 65), and he uses the courtiers and courtly ladies in attendance at Urbino as models of this *grazia*:

> [...] in contrast [to clumsiness and affectation,] we see in many of the men and women who are with us now, that graceful and nonchalant spontaneity (as it is often called) because of which they seem to be paying little, if any, attention to the way they speak or laugh or hold themselves, so that those who are watching them imagine that they couldn't and wouldn't ever know how to make a mistake. (68)

The exemplars of *grazia*, the courtiers at Urbino, demonstrate in their every word and action what we now call *je ne sais quoi*, the effortless behavior that Castiglione later describes as necessarily innate, and at its most basic level

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[4] Wayne A. Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances: Marking and Festivity in Castiglione's* Book of the Courtier (Detroit, Wayne State UP, 1978) provides a fuller treatment of the view that marvel was the ultimate performative aim of the courtier.

ultimately unlearnable. In order to be able to fashion a successful courtly performance, the socially hopeful individual had to possess some small degree of innate *grazia* that he could then improve through practice and imitation. *Grazia* is the one ultimately inimitable element of the courtly performance. An individual either has it or does not. Placing so much emphasis on *grazia* allows Castiglione to sustain his implicit argument: that members of the court enjoy a natural superiority over the rest of society - an innate advantage the would-be courtier must share to join the ranks of high society.

Castiglione expands his description of *grazia* beyond the "the seasoning without which all other attributes and good qualities would be almost worthless" (65). At other points in *The Courtier*, he describes *grazia* as "that certain air [*sangue*] that makes [the courtier] immediately pleasing and attractive to all who meet him, and explains that this *grazia* should be an adornment informing and accompanying all his actions, so that he appears clearly worthy of the companionship and favor of the great" (55). Castiglione eventually explains that the courtier's performance should immediately and inexplicably draw the audience to the courtier and should make the courtier appear to have more innate *grazia* than he or she actually possesses.

This "air" is a tricky quality to master and describe because it relies on being natural; at the same time it is a learned application, an adopted

characteristic. The tension between the innate and the learned spreads out from discussions of characteristics like *grazia* to infuse the entire book, a pedagogical text that claims to teach individuals how to hone these characteristics it describes as essentially inborn. Castiglione attempts to reconcile the ambiguity inherent in the *natural* "air" of *grazia*, which he explains courtiers must *learn* to reveal in their performances, by refining his definition of his target audience to include only those individuals with innate *grazia* who could best use his instruction. Castiglione explains that innately perfect courtiers, those courtiers born with the ability to comport themselves perfectly in every situation, do not need the guidance that the courtiers' dialogue offers. Consequently, he characterizes their ideal pupil, the type of individual who stood to gain the most from their discussions, as an individual "who [is] not perfectly endowed by Nature" but who is nonetheless endowed by Nature at least with some very small degree of *grazia* (55). The ideal reader of this didactic text, then, is an individual who "can, through care and effort, polish and to a great extent correct their natural deficiencies," who inhabits the liminal space "between such supreme *grazia* [as exhibited by the innately perfect courtier] and such absurd folly [as one born with no grace whatsoever]" (55). Castiglione explains that the *grazia* possessed by such individuals, though it is "a natural, God-given gift, [...] even if it is not quite perfect [,] can be greatly enhanced by application and effort" (65). On

balance, Castiglione's refinement of his audience implies a belief in, if not the *perfectibility* of the individual, then at least in his *improvability*. If the socially optimistic individuals Castiglione describes as members of his ideal audience adopt his theory of courtly performance, they will be rewarded as they evolve into individuals who are capable of managing themselves at court.

For Castiglione's courtier-reader, *grazia* cannot be achieved without "enterprise, application, and effort" paired with observation and imitation of those courtiers who surround him (Castiglione 65). "Ruled by the good judgment that must always be his guide, [the courtier should] take various qualities now from one man and now from another [...] acquiring this *grazia* from those who appear to possess it and tak[ing] from each one the quality that seems most commendable" (65-6). According to Eduardo Saccone, "Castiglione holds the observation and imitation of existing models, the best possible models, to be essential to" improving the performance of one's *grazia*.[5] However, this constant work will not pay off if the courtier does not exhibit his newly-honed skills of *grazia* carefully. To fashion judicious performances that display his

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[5] Eduardo Saccone, "*Grazia, Sprezzatura,* and *Affettazione* in the *Courtier*" in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture,* eds. Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1983), 54.

grazia to its best advantage, the would-be courtier must utilize *sprezzatura* and *dissimulazione*.

Sprezzatura, which Castiglione terms a "novel word" [*una nuova parola*], is first described in Book I § 26 by Count Lodovico Canossa in possibly the most frequently quoted passage of the text. Count Lodovico begins his explanation by stating that he has:

> discovered a universal rule which *seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words*: namely, to steer away from affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practice in all things a certain *sprezzatura* which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless.[6] (Castiglione 67)

He continues to explain that he is certain that "*grazia* springs especially from this [*sprezzatura*], since everyone knows how difficult it is to accomplish some unusual feat perfectly, and so facility [or *grazia*] in such things excites the greatest wonder [*meraviglia*]" (67). Even though this explanation of *sprezzatura* is the best-known, Castiglione actually defines two distinct characteristics of this "novel"

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[6] Emphasis is mine.

concept, the second of which occurs in Book I § 28 as something of an addendum to the first. He states:

> So this quality which is the opposite of affectation, and which we are now calling *sprezzatura*, apart from being the real source of *grazia*, brings with it another advantage; for whatever action it accompanies, no matter how trivial it is, it not only reveals *the skill* of the person doing it but also very often causes it to be considered *far greater than it really is*.[7] (69-70)

Besides clarifying the term generally, the codicil combines with his earlier remark, linking *grazia* and *sprezzatura* to make the connection between them even more explicit. Additionally, Castiglione explains that *sprezzatura* is "true art [that] does not seem to be art," the ability to perform in such a way that the contrived performance seems natural (67). A demeanor that does not maintain an appearance of *mediocrità* "pass[es] the bounds of moderation" and makes the courtier's "*sprezzatura* affected and inappropriate [, causing it to have] exactly the opposite effect of what is intended, namely, the concealment of art" (68). In other words, *sprezzatura* is an affected guise, a performance that, to succeed, must seem natural, unaffected, graceful, nonchalant, uncontrived, and effortless. Essentially, this concept encompasses and pairs contrasting ideas like art and

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[7] Emphasis is mine.

artlessness with contrivance and innate talent, which all work together within the courtier. To be an exemplar of *sprezzatura* – and ultimately a paragon of courtliness – the courtier's actions must appear to be innate or natural while actually being very cultivated and practiced.

The most striking quality that these often contradictory characteristics of *sprezzatura* have in common is their repeated focus on action, on the active performance of the courtier. Castiglione explains the features of *sprezzatura* through his descriptions of the actions of the model courtiers at Urbino. However, his explanation of exactly *how* one should go about putting *sprezzatura* into practice is less clear because the key to successfully completing the outward performance of *sprezzatura* rests in the completion of an internal performance that outward descriptions cannot measure. Successful examples of *sprezzatura* require *dissimulazione*, the internal, contemplative counterpart to *sprezzatura*'s active physicality. While it would seem that the courtiers at Urbino would take careful pains to discuss this characteristic that serves as the foundation of the external aspect of successful courtly performances, they only occasionally describe it as the deliberate action that bolsters the courtier's attempt at *sprezzatura*.

Dissimulazione helps defuse the paradoxical aspect of the artless art, the non-affected affectation that is *sprezzatura*. It is the internal, contemplative

performance that enables then supports the external, active performance of *sprezzatura.* Federico Fregoso broaches the notion of *dissimulazione* during the second evening of the fictive festivities from which Castiglione adapts the dialogue in *The Courtier*; Fregoso explains that "although [the courtier] may know and understand what he is doing, in this also [he should] dissemble [*dissimulare*] the care and effort that are necessary for any competent performance" (Castiglione 120). *Dissimulazione* acts as a kind of buffer between the role that the individual must play and his own personal knowledge that he is in fact playing a role, affecting a new style that best fits the situation he faces (124). In other words, the courtier should put on the courtly role so completely, dissemble so well, that, though his audience of fellow courtiers may suspect that he is dissembling and recognize his *sprezzatura* as an act that relies on successful *dissimulazione*, they are not able to tell what part of the courtier's display is dissimulation and what part of it is a glimpse of his "real" attributes.

By requiring the would-be courtier to examine, accept, and then dissemble his personal flaws, *dissimulazione* reconciles an individual's external, active courtly performance, his *sprezzatura* – a concept seemingly fraught with pretentiousness and artifice – with his awareness that he is in fact affecting a role. *Dissimulazione* enables the courtier to acknowledge his performative *sprezzatura* as a mask he is donning. This contemplative, internal performance gives him

complete control of his actions and helps him temper his *sprezzatura* so that his actions do not morph into affectation, "that rough and dangerous reef." By effectively utilizing *dissimulazione*, the internal, contemplative aspect of his performance, and in turn successfully exhibiting the concrete side of performance, *sprezzatura*, the courtier can judiciously reveal his *grazia.* Assuming that the would-be courtier has the requisite measure of *grazia, dissimulazione* becomes the most important aspect of his performance, without which the physical aspect of that performance would fail completely. Thus the courtier achieves courtly success by using *dissimulazione* to consciously fashion his courtly image to elicit the praise and marvel of his courtly audience without seeming to actively seek it out.

As the example that prefaces this discussion testifies, Puttenham noticed the potential for social mobility implied in Castiglione's model of courtly performance, and in *The Arte of English Poesie* he encouraged Elizabethan courtier poets to take advantage of this opportunity to promote English verse abroad. In an argument that bespeaks the increased awareness of the subject and its malleability that was emerging in the Renaissance, Puttenham explained that English poetry could become more respected in England and beyond if it consciously fashioned itself to align with the model of courtliness that held sway throughout Europe - the model that takes center stage in *The Courtier*. As stated

above, many Elizabethan poets living within one generation of Castiglione took Puttenham's advice to heart and became what Stephen Greenblatt, Robert Bender, and other critics now call courtier poets. Included in these ranks are the likes of Spenser and Sidney, Wyatt and Ralegh. They internalized the prescriptions for courtly action in *The Courtier* as well as the adapted rhetorical techniques described by Puttenham to fashion poetic performances that included both the *matter* and the *manner* of the courtly characteristics that represented the values espoused by the highest echelons of European society.

Generations after the publication of *The Courtier* and the heyday of Elizabethan courtier poets like Spenser and Ralegh, the model of performance demonstrated and described in *The Courtier* continued to influence English society. The influence of *The Book of the Courtier* spread across Europe in the years after its publication and subsequent translations.[8] According to Peter Burke, its reach extended beyond Europe into Russia and Japan.[9] Evidence still exists to prove its popularity at universities across Europe, where it was used both as a behavioral guide and a convenient tool to hone students' rhetorical skills in preparation for their civic roles within society. Evidence for the

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[8] For a concise summary of the influence of *The Courtier* across Europe, see Burke's essay entitled "*The Courtier* Abroad: Or, the Uses of Italy" in the Norton edition of *The Book of the Courtier.*

[9] Peter Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier: The European Reception of Castiglione's* Courtier. (Cambridge, UK: Polity P, 1995), 142.

popularity of *The Book of the Courtier* with established courtiers, statesmen, monarchs, and would-be courtiers survives in written accounts of private library holdings, letters, and other documents.[10]

Its impact on English poets remained particularly strong during the early part of the seventeenth century, especially on those poets who felt they could gain something by mastering the tools of courtly performance in their verse. The poets writing in the early part of the seventeenth century realized that, although Puttenham's suggestions used Castiglione's performative model to gain Continental respect, they could apply the same instructions to their own verse and thus improve their positions within the established social hierarchy.

Even though the implications of social gain imbedded within Castiglione's theory of performance motivated both Elizabethan and early seventeenth century poets, early seventeenth century poetry does not mimic its Elizabethan forebears. Whereas the Elizabethan poets reflected both the *manner* and the *matter* of courtly behavior described by Castiglione within their verse, poets writing in the early seventeenth century fashioned their poetic performances around the *manner* of the courtier as described by Castiglione without echoing

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[10] For instance, there were a number of copies at Cambridge as well as written records (including letters and marginalia) left by statesmen and courtiers from across Europe that illustrate its far reaching popularity and influence. For a more expansive explanation of the publication history and known readership of *The Courtier* in Europe and abroad, see Burke's *The Fortunes of The Courtier: The European Reception of Castiglione's Cortegiano.*

the *matter* of Elizabethan poetry. This shift does not weaken their performances. While it is important for the would-be courtier to demonstrate within his performance the socially accepted *matter* and thereby reflect the values of the courtly audience, it is more important for this individual to master the courtly *manner*. As courtly definitions of what constitutes proper performative *matter* changed alongside the values of the upper class, the courtly *manner* remained static. Although the sets of values illustrated within the poems from both Elizabeth's and the Stuarts' reigns are not the same, both generations of poets continued to share a similar set of guidelines that governed the *manner* of their performances, they fashioned them according to Castiglione's three guiding principles: *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione*.

The social mobility that attracted Puttenham's attention generations before also intrigued poets from the early part of the seventeenth century. In response to this opportunity, these poets self-consciously began to fashion poetic performances according to Castiglione's theory of courtly performance, as always, to improve their social and political status. Poets used their verse as a platform for their courtly performances in a number of ways, the majority of which relied on the persona that the poet created. By using a conscientiously fashioned persona to deliver his performance, the poet maintained performative control, allowing him to deliver the performance on his own terms. This was

opposed to individuals in a courtly setting who had to perform whenever they saw an opportunity, regardless of how they felt about their performance at that particular moment. Early seventeenth century poets who wanted to improve their social status fashioned speakers that possessed characteristics they would like their courtly audience to associate with them. At times, these poets placed their speakers within situations that displayed the *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* of the poet through the speaker. By placing their speakers in a courtly setting and creating situations for them that best illustrated their courtly characteristics, the poets drew attention to their own *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione*. Poets had to utilize *dissimulazione* to craft a poetic performance that demonstrated their *sprezzatura* and that highlighted their natural poetic genius, their *grazia*. Consequently, for the early seventeenth century poet who harbored ambitions of belonging to the courtly class, every poem provided a chance to create a courtly performance that demonstrated his own courtliness and take him one step closer to his social goal.

Poets from the early seventeenth century like Donne and Marvell, whose poems reflect a desire to climb the social ladder, through the courtly performances they showcase, threatened the established social hierarchy. An underlying assumption that they deserved to be accepted into courtly society lurked behind each courtly performance they enacted. Each time they created

another poetic performance of the courtly *manner* that was meant to help bolster their social position, hopeful courtier-poets like Donne implied that membership in the highest echelons of society should not be based solely on an indescribable, effortless characteristic that aristocrats naturally possess. Instead, their belief in the persuasive power of their courtly performances insinuated that high social standing should instead be based on merit; consequently, individuals like themselves with a flair for the performative deserved to hold the highest positions within courtly society. This threat prompted in the later seventeenth century, established courtiers like John Wilmot, the second Earl Rochester, and Rochester's performative allies Charles Sackville, the Earl of Dorset and later Lord Buckhurst, Sir Charles Sedley, and George Villiers, the second Duke of Buckingham to create their own poetic performances intended to discredit the performances of socially optimistic individuals. Ironically, these courtier-poets used the same methods to discredit courtly aspirants that poets like Donne tried to use to ingratiate themselves with the nobility. These rakish court wits incorporated Castiglione's three tenets of courtliness into their poetic performances, but instead of craving a position within the societal elite, their goals for their conservative poetic performances were to reinforce the established social hierarchy that placed them in a position of superiority, to quell any meritocratic murmurings, and ultimately to reaffirm the exclusivity of the court.

Threatened by the social mobility that Castiglione implied in *The Book of the Courtier*, later seventeenth century poets like Rochester and Buckhurst performs their courtliness in ways very similar to those used by early seventeenth century poets. Sedley and Rochester, for instance, both wrote lyrical poems that highlighted their *grazia* through their mastery of *dissimulazione* and *sprezzatura*.[11] Although they performed in the same *manner*, the two groups did not share their motivations. Most performances of later seventeenth century courtier-poets were combative and were meant to re-exert the social superiority of the courtly class by drawing attention to the vast difference between their own performances and those attempted by socially hopeful individuals like Rochester's "Lord All-Pride." These courtier-poets could have achieved this by demonstrating a mastery of *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* in very public ways that forced the rest of society to watch their performance. However, many performed through their verse, which generally ridiculed the performances of aspiring courtiers. By deriding their competition in verse, they also illustrated their ability to manipulate language into lyrical performances of persuasion. To complete this poetic lambast, Rochester, for instance, occasionally created courtly personas who reported on the often ridiculous failed performances they

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[11] For specific examples of this kind of poetic performance, see Sedley's "To Celia" and Rochester's Song "Absent from thee, I languish still."

encountered in the dramatic situation of the poem. These performances generally depicted socially hopeful individuals whose attempts to display *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* only served to highlight their courtly ineptitude. At other times, these courtier-poets masqueraded in their verse as failing would-be courtiers. These performances mocked would-be courtiers as a group through the exaggerated performative failures portrayed in the poem. However, in poetic impersonations like the one in "A Very Heroical Epistle in Answer to Ephelia," the courtier-poets like Rochester, Sedley, Sackville, and Buckingham ultimately failed to completely dissemble their courtly characteristics. Rather than draw attention to the ineptitude of would-be courtiers, these attempts at poetic masquerading highlighted the vast gulf that separated the true courtier with his innate *grazia* from the characteristics of the socially awkward individuals whom they tried to mimic. Each of their attempts to deride the actions of their socially aspiring competition through poetic masquerades, even though it failed to successfully utilize *dissimulazione*, helped to stabilize the established social hierarchy. In other words, *these* failed courtly performances actually helped them achieve their ultimate goal of affirming the social hierarchy.

Early seventeenth century poets like John Donne who so masterfully incorporated *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* into their performative verse forced their later seventeenth century counterparts into action to safeguard their

newly reestablished court culture. Although derisive poetic masquerades like those created by Rochester might have helped fight off the advances of the ultimately inept would-be courtier, they would not be sufficient ammunition against Donne's courtly performances. Donne's verse demonstrates early seventeenth century poetic performances successfully fashioned after Castiglione's courtly *manner* to achieve and maintain a higher social position. Within his verse, Donne performs through the actions and courtly performances of carefully crafted personas, through the poetic devises he utilizes to evoke the *meraviglia* Castiglione stressed, and most importantly through his own mastery of *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* that shines through his verse. The careful craftsmanship indelibly etched into Donne's poetic performances – no matter how hard he might have tried to use *dissimulazione* to erase it – reveals the contemplative preparation and self-consciousness with which he approached his method of courtly performance.

chapter two

PERFORMATIVE METAPHYSICS: THE COURTLY IDEAL AND ITS ROLE IN DONNE'S VERSE

... to continue in perfect consonances produces satiety and offers a harmony which is too affected; but this disappears when imperfect consonances are introduced to establish the contrast which keeps the listener in a state of expectancy, waiting for and enjoying the perfect consonances more eagerly and delighting in the discord of the second or seventh, as in a display of nonchalance.

~ Baldassare Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano*[1]

To know how to live by the booke is a pedantery, and to do it is a bondage. For both hearers and players are more delighted with voluntary than with sett musike. And he that will live by precept shalbe long without the habite of honesty.

~ John Donne, personal correspondence[2]

John Donne specialists too often find themselves enthralled as much by the poet's life as by his work.[3] As a result, they get mired down in biographical examinations of his verse, ultimately sacrificing close textual analyses in favor of biographical ones. The biographical nature of these readings often causes

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[1] Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (NYC: Penguin Books, 1967), 69.

[2] Helen Gardner and Timothy Healy, eds., *John Donne: Selected Prose, Chosen by Evelyn Simpson* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967). Critics dispute the intended recipient of this letter about attaining knowledge and Italian literature. They cannot precisely date the letter either. HJC Grierson posits that Donne wrote it to Sir Henry Wotton in 1600. He bases this thesis on Wotton's known interest in Italian literature. However, James Shapiro does not concur with Grierson's inferential conclusion.

[3] Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1986).

scholars to view Donne's work removed from his literary predecessors and his own society. The interiority of Donne's verse is partly to blame, but ultimately Donne does not demand that scholars read his verse biographically. In fact, doing so has diverted scholarly attention away from intertextual possibilities apparent only after the poem can be viewed as the result of a creative process, not a simple autobiographical rendering of the poet's life. Biographical readings, then, cause scholars to overlook significant textual clues that explicitly connect Donne's work to earlier literary and cultural movements. Recently, scholars have broached the topic of the developing social consciousness and subjectivity within Early Modern England and within Donne's poetry from a textual perspective and have produced a number of enlightening texts as a result.[4] However, one particularly illuminating textual connection is overlooked generally and, when noticed, underappreciated: Donne's connection to the performance theory that Baldassare Castiglione develops in *The Book of the Courtier*.

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[4] Jacob Blevins, *Catullan Consciousness and the Early Modern Lyric: From Wyatt to Donne* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co, 2004), a very recent example of such work, focuses on "lyric consciousness" and Catullus' impact on Early Modern lyricists. Anthony Low, *Aspects of Subjectivity: Society and Individuality from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare and Milton* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne UP, 2003) concentrates on "the growing sense of the importance of the inner self and of the individual from the middle ages to the seventeenth century" (ix). Although it does no deal directly with Donne, Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) is perhaps the seminal work in this area of study.

The connection between Donne and Castiglione is only initially apparent through the speakers' actions within the poem. Only Peter DeSa Wiggins, in his *Donne, Castiglione, and the Poetry of Courtliness*, devotes his entire attention to illustrating an explicit connection between Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* and Donne.[5] Wiggins focuses, however, on the courtly characteristics Donne displays through his verse, like clever wit and self-deprecation,[6] concentrating on what Frank Whigham calls the "matter" of the courtier's performance, rather than the "*manner*" or style of that performance that relies on the manipulation of *grazia, sprezzatura,* and *dissimulazione*.[7] Wiggins's focus on the way Donne's personal traits are demonstrated in his verse causes his study to tend toward the biographical rather than the textual to a greater degree than is necessary. The consequence of this slight biographical slant is that it prevents him from making the connection between the *manner* of Castiglione's model courtier and the courtly *manner* inherent in Donne's speakers' performances.[8]

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[5] Peter DeSa Wiggins, *Donne, Castiglione, and the Poetry of Courtliness*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2000).

[6] Wiggins 60-86.

[7] Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory.* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984), 34.

[8] For example, see Wiggins, 26-27.

In *Ambition and Privilege*, Whigham emphatically characterizes the successful courtly performance as a reproduction of the *manner* and style of the courtier, achieved through mastery and demonstration of *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione*, rather than the matter of the courtier's behavior. He does not seem amenable to the possibility of individuals enacting the *manner* of the courtly performance in any way other than in person. By implying that courtly performances cannot be delivered through any other medium, he does not provide for the possibility of my reading of Donne's internalization of Castiglione's performative theory. Donne's verse illustrates that he displayed his courtly performance on a poetic stage, casting his speakers as his principal players and proxies. Donne's potential "real" performances, as opposed to his poetic ones, need not enter into the equation of his adoption of Castiglione's characteristics of the courtly *manner*. Speculating on these possible "real" performances is risky, and it again separates scholars from the text itself. That Donne performed *through* his speakers, *through* his verse is confirmed in the texts. Moreover, any performance attributed to Donne derives its validity from the performances of his speakers, regardless of Donne's social position or financial position as he composed the piece. The proof of Castiglione's influence on Donne is in the text.

By favoring a biographical analysis of Donne's poetry rather than a textual one, it is easy to fail to notice the aspect of Donne's verse that most obviously bears the mark of Castiglione's influence (at least initially). Approaching Donne's verse textually makes it much easier to identify the connection between Donne and Castiglione, the speakers who enact courtly performances within Donne's poems. Further investigation will illustrate that Donne adapted and incorporated Castiglione's theory of courtly performance to enact his own performances through his poetry. Doing so enables him to perform without seeming to perform; his decision reflects Castiglione's warnings to courtly performers to hide affectation at all costs or risk performative failure. To use his verse as his means of performance, Donne created masterful performances for his speakers and utilized poetic techniques that incorporated the three essential elements of Castiglione's theory of courtly performance, *sprezzatura*, *grazia*, and *dissimulazione*. The courtliness Donne gives his speakers and his poetry ultimately led his audience to the conclusion that Donne himself exhibits these characteristics.[9]

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[9] Of course, because Donne had to be able to fashion successful courtly performances for his speakers, he clearly understood how to do so. Consequently the leap between poetic technique to speaker to poem to poet is not a difficult (or, I believe, illogical) one to make.

fashioning the courtly speaker

Donne's speakers illustrate, through the courtly performances Donne crafts for them, that he used his verse to reveal his understanding of the difference between courtly *manner* and courtly *matter*, that he knew *what* to say but more importantly that he knew *how* to say it. The performances that Donne creates for his speakers illustrate that mastering the *manner* of the courtier's performance requires the ability to actively build performances on the three essential elements described in *The Book of the Courtier*: *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione*. Donne executed *his own* courtly performances by fashioning speakers whose performances within the poems included these three elements, and who, because of this, successfully mirror the *manner* of Donne's coterie of courtly readers, the audience to which he directs his performances.

Donne's *Elegies* and his *Songs and Sonnets* operate on the speaker's knowing descriptions of certain types of courtiers and their actions. In "The Perfume,"[10] the speaker describes the role of courtly personas to his lover, explaining that in court, "things that seeme, exceed substantiall" (ln 64). In "[Recusancy],"[11] the speaker begins:

Oh, let mee not serve so, as those men serve

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[10] John Donne, *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, edited by Helen Gardner. Oxford: Clarendon P, Oxford UP, 2000, 7.

[11] Donne, edited by Helen Gardner, 10.

Whom honours smoakes at once fatten and sterve;

Poorely enrich't with great mens words or lookes;

Nor so write my name in thy loving bookes

As those Idolatrous flatterers, which still

Their Princes stiles, with many Realmes fulfill

Whence they no tribute have, and where no sway. (lns 1-7)

These seven lines indict the falsely honorable established courtiers who, in line three promise much in reward to the pitiful performances of empty honor affected by the socially hopeful. In lines five through seven, the speaker also reveals the affectation behind performances enacted by individuals who believe that adopting the *matter* of a courtly performance will ingratiate them in the highest reaches of the social establishment. Similarly, the speaker in "Love's Exchange"[12] describes the reciprocal relationship between established and aspiring courtiers. Addressing Love, the speaker explains that "at Court your fellowes every day, / Give th'art of Riming, Huntsmanship, and Play, / For them who were their owne before" (lns 3-5). By including such references to the court and the *manner* of courtiers, Donne established that he understood the way that courtly performance worked, even on the individual level.

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[12] Donne, edited by Helen Gardner, 46.

Because he used his poetry as the medium of his performance, Donne intricately fashioned the image and actions of the courtly speaker, carefully balancing *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* to ensure the success of the speaker's performance, which ultimately reflected back onto him. Donne's audience influenced the final form that he gave the speaker. Arthur Marotti explains that "coterie work circulated in manuscript was often essentially self-advertising, [a deliberate] part of the social performance of an individual" (*Coterie Poet* 14). Because of the privileged position they held within society, the members of Donne's coterie knew how to judge a courtly performance. To understand fully, then, how Donne's speaker's fit into a Castiglionean framework of courtly performance, Donne's readers must adopt the mind-set of one of the privileged, courtly members of Donne's coterie and must judge their performances against the backdrop of Castiglione's precepts of courtly performance.

the metaphysical conceit: a microcosm of castiglione's courtly performance

While some of Donne's speakers, like those mentioned above, refer to performances of members of the court and individuals who would like to become members of the court, other speakers demonstrate the kind of courtly performance described by Castiglione and illustrated by *his* speakers almost one

hundred years earlier. In poems like "Woman's Constancy," "The Flea," and "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," Donne carefully crafts his speakers' performances around the three essential tenets of Castiglione's theory of courtly performance: *grazia, sprezzatura,* and *dissimulazione*. Their performances succeed because Donne successfully represents in their actions the *manner* of the courtier according to the principles advocated by Castiglione. Donne's incorporation of Castiglione's model of courtliness is not limited to the courtly *manner* that Donne instilled in his speakers' actions. Within his poetic performance of courtliness, Donne used a new performative vehicle to demonstrate each of Castiglione's courtly characteristics: the metaphysical conceit. By creating a metaphysical conceit, Donne enacted a poetic representation of his own courtliness.

The skills required to fashion a tidy metaphysical conceit mirror those needed to fashion successful courtly performances, both literal and poetic. As a poetic figure, the metaphysical conceit is a kind of self-sustaining or microcosmic courtly performance that reveals the degree to which the poet could internalize and manipulate the three essential elements of a courtly performance: *sprezzatura, grazia,* and *dissimulazione*. To fashion a metaphysical conceit, an image in which "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence

together,"[13] the poet must first possess enough *grazia* to contrive of two superficially disparate ideas and to join them in such a way that renders them comparable and that makes them approachable for the poet's expected audience. Binding the two disparate images of the conceit also requires that the poet use *dissimulazione* to circumvent the difficulty that the denotative meanings of both elements of the comparison might cause in completing any connection between them. Besides allowing the poet to suspend the denotative meanings of the images in the conceit, *dissimulazione* helps the poet get the most social mileage out of the metaphysical conceit by enabling him to deliver it nonchalantly through a mask of *sprezzatura.* A guise shaped by *sprezzatura* exhibited on a foundation of *dissimulazione* can prevent the affectation the poet risks by performing something as necessarily premeditated as the metaphysical conceit within his verse performances.

Donne often used the metaphysical conceit as a central element of his poetic performances. He demonstrated his own courtliness by seeing connections between two superficially dissimilar things, then by making those connections apparent and accessible to others. He achieved this by creating a

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[13] Samuel Johnson. "Cowley," in *The Lives of the Poets* in *Eighteenth-Century English Literature* in *Eighteenth-Century English Literature* edited by Geoffrey Tillotson, Paul Fussell, Jr., and Marshall Waingrow (NYC: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1969) 1077.

dramatic situation in which his persona could deliver the conceit in the context Donne chose that would clarify the meaning of the conceit. At times, Donne packaged the conceit within a more general courtly performance enacted by the speaker. The familiar conceit in "The Flea" illustrates Donne's practice of bracketing the performance of the metaphysical conceit within a performance he created for the speaker. However, the metaphysical conceit does not require that the speaker who delivers it do so while enacting a courtly performance. The speaker in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" enacts one of Donne's best known metaphysical conceits, his use of the compass image; however, he does not do so while attempting a courtly performance. In this case, Donne, through the speaker, compares two individuals joined together spiritually by the deep love they feel for one another, not the kind of love displayed by lustful "sublunary" lovers (13). The speaker explains that because they are "inter-assured of the mind" they will only be separated physically like to the two legs of a compass connected still by what would be its head:

> If [our souls] be two, they are two so
> As stiffe twin compasses are two
> Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if th'other doe. (lns 25-28)

As the speakers within "The Flea" and "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" are both the agents of Donne's demonstration of his *grazia.* Not only does Donne's *grazia* stand out through his conflation of the elements that make up the two conceits described above; he also demonstrates it through the poetic structure he conceived in order to highlight his own talent without praising himself distastefully. To do so, Donne must act "in such a way that [his actions] do not seem to be [performed] with [gaining praise] in view, but are so very much to the purpose that one cannot refrain from [remarking on] them" (Castiglione 59).

As mentioned above, creating a metaphysical conceit requires an ability to think of tired expressions or everyday objects in new ways. Consequently, if Donne did not use *dissimulazione* to disregard the standard conception of both elements of the conceit, the textbook definition of the two elements might obstruct his view of the deeper connection between them and threaten the creation of the performance altogether. For instance, Donne's frequent use of medical, colonial, and astronomical poems stem from his willingness to equate these new and at times shocking discoveries with comfortable poetic, social, or religious images. As mentioned above, his *grazia* prompted the initial connection; *dissimulazione* becomes essential after this step, when Donne must begin to rationalize the comparison in order to make it approachable for his

audience. The central conceit at work in Holy Sonnet 5 demonstrates this kind of innovation. The speaker describes himself as "a little world made cunningly / Of elements," a slightly new spin on penitent poetry that would not have been possible had Donne not been able to use *dissimulazione* to push past his preconceptions about religious poetry. His fascination with the flurry of innovations he frequently incorporated into his verse is also at play in the main conceit in "Hymne to God my God, in my Sicknesse." The speaker in this poem conflates his body on the physician's examining table to a map of newly charted territory avidly being studied by eager explorers:

> Whilst my physitians by their love are growne
> Cosmographers, and I their Mapp, who lie
> Flat on this bed, that might by them be showne
> That this is my South-west discoverie
> *Per fretum febris*, by these streights to die [...]" (6-10)

Because so many medical and exploratory advances were being made in the early part of the seventeenth century, the connection Donne makes is enlightening. However, it is not an obvious comparison; Donne's ability to use *dissimulazione* enabled him to make it.

After fashioning the conceit, he had to turn his attention to *sprezzatura* to utilize the conceit in such a way that it revealed his mastery of the courtly

manner, not its inevitable affectation. To employ metaphysical conceits as self-contained courtly performances, Donne incorporated them into his poetry – both in poems that featured a performing speaker whose performativity reflected back onto Donne and in poems that highlighted his own mastery of *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* as they illustrated his poetic talent. Both of these two types of poetic performances require that Donne utilize *sprezzatura* to shut affectation out of them. Within his speakers' courtly performances, then, the speaker's actions had to be tempered with *sprezzatura*, enabling the successful depiction of courtliness inside the dramatic situation and, by extension, through the poem to Donne as well. The same holds true for the poems that feature Donne's own performance as a courtly poet. Consequently, the success of the performance embedded within the metaphysical conceit and the success of the larger performances represented by the poems both depend on Donne's ability to utilize *sprezzatura* effectively.

As in other exhibitions of Castiglione's courtly performance, Donne's performances use *dissimulazione* and *sprezzatura* together to achieve the sense of spontaneity and nonchalance that Castiglione explains should accompany courtly performances. The poet's mastery of *dissimulazione* makes it easier for him to frame the performances represented by his verse in such a way that safeguards them from affectation. Donne's awareness of the artifice behind his

performances is essential to his ability to rehearse possible methods of achieving *sprezzatura.* Once he must perform the image of *sprezzatura* he contrived, however, he has to use *dissimulazione* to end the threat that his private acknowledgement of his affectation might become public if he fails to perform his *sprezzatura.* One way that Donne used *sprezzatura* to impart an impression of nonchalance and spontaneity was through manipulating his meter. By carefully incorporating technical imperfections, like occasional irregular meter, within his verse. One masterful example of this metrical manipulation is in "Woman's Constancy." Donne's incorporation of metrical variations, specifically by sandwiching his emotional irregular middle section (6-11) between sections of measured iambic feet, attests to his perceptive awareness that too much polished regularity would appear affected:

> Or, that oathes made in reverentiall feare
> Of Love, and his wrath, any may forsweare?
> Or, as true deaths, true maryages untie,
> So lovers contracts, images of those,
> Bind but till sleep, deaths image, them unloose? (6-10)

Far from hindering the success of the performance, purposeful irregularities like those illustrated above comply with Castiglione's warning that "to reveal intense

application and skill robs everything of grace" (Castiglione 67).[14] Rhythmic perfection, then, would be debilitating and would highlight Donne's affectation – the characteristic courtiers should shun above all else – instead of his courtliness.

By imbedding an impressive performance like the metaphysical conceit within an imperfect but still striking poem, Donne drew even more attention to the each of the performative valences of the poem – the performance inherent in the creation of the conceit, the speaker's courtly performance within the dramatic situation of the poem, and finally Donne's demonstration of his own courtliness through his poetic ability that displays *sprezzatura*, *dissimulazione*, and *grazia*. The metaphysical conceit is ultimately a self-contained, discrete performance, but since it is usually delivered within the poet's verse performances, the role that *sprezzatura* plays in the performance of the conceit also must support the *sprezzatura* within the larger poetic performance. Consequently, the *sprezzatura* in the conceit and in the broader courtly exhibition should envelop both performances in apparent spontaneity, thereby making them seem nonchalant rather than precisely coordinated.

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[14] Baldassare Castiglione. *The Book of the Courtier*. Trans. George Bull. NYC: Penguin Books, 1967.

The representations of courtly *manner* in Donne's poems demonstrate Donne's own mastery of the required elements of the successful courtly performances on three different but interrelated levels. First, the metaphysical conceit demonstrates Donne's courtliness because the poet must possess the knowledge of *grazia*, *dissimulazione*, and *sprezzatura* in order to fashion a compelling comparison. Secondly, the courtly performances successfully enacted by the speakers within Donne's poems ultimately exhibit *his* mastery of the three essential elements of Castiglione's model of courtly performance because *their* successful incorporation of *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* derives solely from Donne's mastery of the mechanics of courtly *manner*. As Castiglione explained in *The Book of the Courtier*, individuals assume that the courtly individual's performances only indicate the least of the his abilities:

> [...] that thing which we are now calling nonchalance, apart from being the real source of grace, brings with it another advantage; for whatever action it accompanies, no matter how trivial it is, is not only reveals the skill of the person doing it but also very often causes it to be considered far greater than it really is. (70)

The speaker's mastery of the essential elements of the courtly *manner*, particularly *sprezzatura*, the element Castiglione treats here specifically, is one aspect of Donne's own performance. As such, it might suggest to Donne's

courtly readers that he possessed the ability to perform even better than his verse illustrated. The third level, repeatedly demonstrated, in each of Donne's poetic performances is Donne's ability to manipulate *grazia, dissimulazione,* and *sprezzatura* in each of his poems as he fashions the situation that will guide his speaker's actions, and then as he shapes it to evoke the specific response he would like to evoke in his audience.

repercussions of poetic performances: the critical speaker, the implied reader, & social destabilization

Donne clearly used his poems as a platform from which he could deliver his courtly performances. The question of whether he did this to maintain an already successful social position or to climb the social ladder does not change the fact that his verse bears the clear mark of Castiglione's influence both on Donne and on the society within which Donne lived and worked. While Donne was playing the courtly game, however, he was also a destabilizing force within the social hierarchy. His poems occasionally mock established courtiers and court hopefuls. This negative depiction of the court shows up in passionate speeches throughout many of Donne's poems. In an abrasive reflection on the court, the speaker in "The Will"[15] bequeaths his truth to the court, implying, of

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[15] Donne, edited by Helen Gardner, 54.

course, that they clearly need it. He explains, "my truth to them, who at the Court doe live" (ln 11). Finally, in "A Valediction: of the Booke,"[16] the speaker derides the lack of intelligence he sees in the court. He begins the sixth stanza of the poem with his indictment:

Here Statesmen, (or of them, they which can reade,)
May of their occupation finde the grounds.
Love and their art alike it deadly wounds,
If to consider what 'tis, one proceed:
In both they doe excel
Who the present governe well,
Whose weaknesse none doth, or dares tell;
In this thy booke, such will their nothing see,
As in the Bible some can find out Alchimy. (46-54)

This is perhaps the most resounding critique of the upper classes in the *Songs and Sonnets*, probably as a result of its categorical nature and the tone of contempt, imparted both by the scope of the indictment and the speaker's diction. Together these elements illustrate the speaker's disgust with the disgraceful state of politics as he sees it. It is based on a system of artifice rather than ability and

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[16] Donne, edited by Helen Gardner, 68.

none of the politicians wants to spoil the "don't ask, don't tell" policy that they each enjoy. The speaker clearly believes that a system that does not consider the abilities of its members results in a system that is dysfunctional at best, or at worst, defunct and powerless.

These critiques of certain aspects of courtliness are not confined to the *Songs and Sonnets* and the *Elegies*. In the *Satyres*, most clearly in *Satyre* I,[17] Donne examines members of a society centered on the court and achieving recognition and acceptance in the court environment. In this poem, Donne's speaker critiques his companion's tendency to fawn courtiers and other influential individuals. He makes his companion promise not to abandon him if other, more powerful people acknowledge his presence:

> First sweare by thy best love in earnest
>
> (If though which lov'st all, canst love any best)
>
> Thou wilt not leave mee in the middle street,
>
> Though some more spruce companion thou dost meet,
>
> ...
>
> [Not] though a briske perfum'd piert Courtier
>
> Deigne with a nod, thy courtesie to answer. (lns 13-16, 19-20)

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[17] John Donne, *The Satires, Epigrams, and Verse Letters*, edited by W. Milgate. Oxford: Clarendon P, Oxford UP, 1967, 3-6.

He also accuses his companion of affecting a courtly performance on the occasions described above. He asks, "Wilt thou grin and fawne on [these individuals], or prepare / A speech to court his beauteous sonne and heire" (lns 23-24). Ultimately, the speaker indicts his companion's tendency to transparently perform differently for each type of individual they meet, depending on the social position their clothes demonstrate:

> Oh monstrous, superstitious puritan,
> Of refin'd manners, yet ceremoniall man,
> That whien thou meet'st one, with enquiring eyes
> Dost search, and like a needy broker prize
> The silke, and gold he weares, and to that rate
> So high or low, dost raise thy formall hat:
> That wilt consort none, until thou have knowne
> What lands hee hath in hope, or of his owne,
> As though all they companions should make thee
> Jointures, and marry thy deare company. (lns 27-36)

The speaker's companion, upon being thus rebuked, promises the speaker to stay by his side as they walk outside. However, once outside, he tries to distance himself from the speaker until ultimately he leaves him to talk with "a many-colour'd Peacock" (ln 92), who he describes, once he finally rejoins the speaker,

as the best judge "of lace, pinke, panes, cut, and plight, / Of all the Court, to have the best conceit" (lns 97-98). When the speaker is not impressed with this fact, his companion finds other courtly individuals to meet, "more men of sort, parts, and qualities" (ln 105). The speaker's companion, however, clearly lacking a mastery of the three essential elements of the successful courtly performance "directly came to [the speaker] hanging [his] head" in shame after being rejected by those individuals whose acceptance he so clearly desires (ln 111).

Donne also threatened the establishment he performed for through the general structure of the poetic performances discussed above, especially "The Flea" and "Woman's Constancy." The poems do this by withholding all but the most basic information about the listener and by alluding to the listener's actions. In fact, the listener has very little agency within the poem at all. Donne seems to construct these kinds of listeners in order to cast the persona in a position of power the speaker seems to have decided upon within the dramatic situation of the poem. The passivity the speakers attempt to force on their listeners as a means of exerting their position of authority in the relationship forces the reader to take on the role of the listener to fill in the blanks in order to understand the dramatic situation of the poem. On the surface, this technique might not seem threatening at all. In fact, it might seem like a smart way for Donne to recreate the immediacy that his poetic performances lack by not being enacted within a

physical courtly setting. However, because the poems display the speaker's wit – and through it, Donne's own performative abilities – the success of the speaker's performance relies on the listener's lack of performative prowess, which Donne writes into the poem by silencing the listener completely. The speaker uses the listener's lack of courtly savvy to ultimately prevail.

By using poems that demand the participation of the reader within the action of the poem, like "Woman's Constancy" and "The Flea," to appeal to the higher strata of English society, Donne achieves two dissimilar effects. On the one hand, his courtly reader can align himself with the witty, successfully performing speaker. This response creates the feeling within the reader that he is in on the joke and has a privileged understanding of the action of the poem. On the other hand, forcing the reader to identify with the listener, whose role in this performance is to be verbally vanquished by the speaker, can make the courtly reader feel less adequate than the speaker. By placing the reader in the position of the listener, Donne, as the poet, implicitly places himself in a position of authority over his reader. Regardless of whether the reader notices the condescension built into Donne's performances, the poems threaten the aristocratic notion that members of the court "naturally" possess something beyond the reach of non-noble individuals. This inverts the relationship between the aspiring courtier and the established member of the nobility, placing more

value on the socially agile individual who knows how to manipulate the system to achieve his own ends than on the long aristocratic lineage of important peers of the realm. This potential result destabilizes the social hierarchy and ultimately questions the worth of the courtier.

Another characteristic of Donne's poetic performances that is potentially hostile toward established and insular members of the court is implicit in the metaphysical conceit. The conceit not only requires that its *creator* have an comfortable command of Castiglione's three tenets of courtly performance to envision the comparison; in order to comprehend the comparison in the conceit, its *reader* must also understand the mechanics of a courtly performance and be able to use *dissimulazione* when s/he approaches a metaphysical conceit. In essence, *dissimulazione* is the element in Castiglione's performative triad that allows both the reader and the poet to think outside of the box so that they can each learn from the conceit by seeing both sides of it more clearly against the backdrop of the other, hearkening back to Castiglione's idea of the potential for a greater degree of understanding of both elements being compared to one another through the contrast they create (114).

Because Donne utilized his verse as his means of courtly performance to (at least) solidify his social or political position, his readers must be individuals in court who have the ability to accept him into their elite group. The implicit

critique inherent in the metaphysical conceit again centers on the question of whether birth or ability should determine one's place within society. The critique seems to imply that if birth or "natural worth" should in fact determine social position, then Donne's readers should have no trouble deciphering the metaphysical conceits, because they can use *dissimulazione* to suspend their preconceptions about both elements in the comparison long enough to allow the connection to sink in. Of course, it also implies the potential for the opposite to be true. If this is the case and social promotion should be based on talent, then those courtiers who could not understand the conceit should step aside to make room for others to take their place.

Donne tweaked his performances to critique certain aspects of the social changes implied by Castiglione's theory of courtly performance. Donne, whether consciously or not, used *dissimulazione*, *sprezzatura*, and *grazia* within his poetic performances to achieve or maintain courtly success. The more individuals like him who illustrated their courtliness through successful performances of courtly *manner* also demonstrated that the courtly *manner*, while not an easy role to master, is not as extraordinary as the aristocracy would lead members from the rest of society to believe.

These kinds of destabilizing performances by the end of the seventeenth century – after the chaos of civil war, regicide, and ultimately the potentially

tenuous reestablishment of the court – prompted later seventeenth century poets like John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester to fashion retaliatory performances to discredit the impersonations of courtliness enacted by socially hopeful individuals. His performative answer to the threat posed by performers like Donne was to craft poems that erased any impression among the public that courtly performance provided an opportunity for the improvement of social position. I will next turn my attention to this aristocratic attempt to shore up the walls that were intended to maintain the separation of the court and the commoners.

chapter three

MAINTAINING THE *STATUS* QUO: A CONSERVATIVE ROCHESTER AND HIS SOCIAL CRITIQUES

...masquerading carries with it a certain license and liberty, and this, among other things, enables the courtier to choose the role at which he feels himself best, to bring out its most important elements [...] while showing a certain nonchalance with regard to what is not essential. All of this greatly enhances the attractiveness of what he is doing, as when [...] a knight dresses up as a country shepherd, but rides a beautiful horse and wears a handsome and appropriate costume. For the spectators assume they are seeing what they are meant to imagine, and then when shown far more than what is promised by the costume being worn they are highly amused and delighted.

~ Baldassare Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano*[1]

Although Donne took advantage of the social mobility that Castiglione's theory provided by shaping his poetic performances around a balance of *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione*, Rochester incorporated Castiglione into his verse to oppose this social mobility by creating repressive poetic performances. Although the authoritarian performances that Rochester fashioned do not align exactly with either the *manner* or the *matter* of Castiglione's *standard* model of courtliness, they in fact do reflect the *manner* of another type of performance that Castiglione encourages established courtiers to master. Rather than requiring a careful balance of *sprezzatura*, *grazia*, and *dissimulazione*, this repressive performance demands that the courtier fashion a careful imbalance of these

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[1] Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (NYC: Penguin Books, 1967).

characteristics by consciously withholding the necessary *dissimulazione*. Judged against the characteristics of Castiglione's *customary* performative model, the authoritarian performance would fail, but in order to successfully strengthen the separation of the social classes, these repressive performances had to fail. Rochester's poetic manipulation of Castiglione's model of the repressive performance, through its ability to exaggerate the "facts" of the failed performances it attempts to recreate, gives the courtier an even more effective means of achieving his conservative goal of maintaining the social status quo.

In the above quote, Castiglione describes how the courtier should enact these oppressive performances, as well as what the courtier should expect to gain from them. In these performances, the courtier "attempted" to impersonate one of his "low" spectators to remind his audience members of their static position within the social hierarchy. To succeed, the courtier had to create a *deliberately transparent performance* that highlighted the insurmountable gulf separating the nobility from the rest of society. Because the courtiers did not dissemble their "real" selves, which would have enabled them to successfully portray the role they had chosen, they created a situation that forced the spectators to face courtly caricatures of themselves and emphasized their courtliness against a backdrop of an unsuccessfully affected low *manner*.

Castiglione discussed in detail how contrasts could work as a tool of courtly performance:

> Therefore the courtier must know how to set himself of the virtues, and sometimes set on in contrast or opposition to another in order to draw more attention to it. This is what a good painter does when by the use of light and shadow he distinguishes clearly the lights on his reliefs, and similarly by the use of light deepens the shadows of plane surfaces and brings different colors together in such a way that each one is brought out more sharply through the contrast. (114)

This cultivated performance of failure had to seem inevitable so that it would evoke *meraviglia* in the audience. By rendering the audience awe-struck, the courtier had a better chance of convincing the lowly spectators that the established social hierarchy developed inevitably in response to the varying degrees of "innate value" between individuals. He possessed that "innate value"; they did not.

Rochester's biography illustrates a number of actual performances – physical as opposed to poetic – that reflect the *manner* and goals of the repressive poses Castiglione promoted in *The Book of the Courtier*. Without connecting Rochester's behavior to *The Courtier*, James Grantham Turner, in *Libertines and*

Radicals in Early Modern England, explains that the maintenance of the established social hierarchy was probably Rochester's main motivation for performing some of his most notorious antics, like his exile-imposed tenure as Dr. Alexander Bendo (the country quack who claimed to be able to 'cure' couples' infertility problems through only one office visit and private consultation between himself and the wife), his numerous roaring binges of drinking and debauchery in the English countryside, and his frequent romps in St. James's Park.[2] He reasons that Rochester undertook these performative exercises "to define the common people as spectators [,... creating] these gestures of *cultivated anti-civility* [...]precisely to *distinguish* the Wits from the lower orders they simulate."[3]

As a member of the privileged upper class and personal friend of King Charles II, Rochester seemed to have little to gain by adhering to Castiglione's *typical* model of courtly performance. He did stand to lose a great deal, however, if other individuals took advantage of the social mobility that Castiglione seemed to offer them. It was in Rochester's best interest to take active steps to thwart attempts to break into the nobility, and he did this by adopting Castiglione's model of repressive performances. Rochester

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[2] James William Johnson, *A Profane Wit: The Life of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*. Rochester, NY: U of Rochester P, 2004.

[3] James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630-1685*. NY, Cambridge UP: 2002, 224. Emphasis is mine.

expropriated the characteristics of the lower class, then performed them unconvincingly to reinforce the distance between members of the masses whom he chose to impersonate and the "genteel" members of the aristocracy. However, Rochester did not limit these kinds of performances to outrageous attempts at impersonation like those described above. He extended these performances into his verse. Turner's focus on the historical and biographical prevented him from seeing this performative extension. By including Rochester's verse in a study of his repressive performances and connecting these performances to Castiglione's method, readers can better understand the complexity and the skill underlying some of Rochester's most bewildering poems, particularly those poems that tend to be read as verse diatribes. By fixating on performative failures, both his own and others', rather than attempting to simply boost his own social position, Rochester shifts the goals of his courtly performance away from personal improvement and focuses instead on repressive performances meant to stifle the social mobility so many individuals read in Castiglione's theory of courtly performance. He achieved this by creating poetic performances that featured performative failures. Some of these performances focused on inept potential courtiers to discredit their attempted performances. Other performances, however, focused on the masterful failures of established courtiers that successfully support the court by

highlighting the courtier's "natural worth" as they condemned non-courtly performers.

the speaker as critic

The simplest way for Rochester to illustrate examples of failed performances was through the non-participating third person speaker. Rochester could use the speaker to relate the dramatic situation in his poems as he believed they should be described to best achieve his goal of discrediting the performances of the social climber. In the Song that begins "As Chloris full of harmless thought," Rochester illustrates the failed performance of an unsophisticated pastoral nymph who forfeits her position of authority and ultimately her virginity because she cannot maintain her performance.

The speaker describes the scene of Chloris's seduction, explaining that as Chloris reclined "beneath the willows," a "comely shepherd" approached her to convince her to become his lover, putting up some small amount of resistance, Chloris's reluctance succumbs (2-3, 5-8).[4] The speaker describes the moment during the encounter in which the position of authority shifted from Chloris to the swain. When Chloris was in control, she could view the shepherd with

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[4] From this point forward, all references I make to Rochester's verse refer to the versions in David Vieth's *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* (New Haven, Yale UP: 1968).

contempt, and disregard the surprise she felt upon learning the swain's performative goal:

A sudden *passion* seized her heart
In spite of her disdain;
She found a pulse in every part,
And *love* in every vein. (9-12)[5]

The speaker explains that upon realizing her change of heart, Chloris redoubled her efforts to play the part of the disinterested lady and tried to convince the country shepherd to give up his attempts at seduction:

"Ah youth!" quoth she, "What charms are these
That conquer and surprise?
Ah, *let me – for unless you please,*
I have no power to rise." (13-16)[6]

Chloris's speech to the swain could illustrate exactly how vulnerable she felt, depending on how one chooses to characterize Chloris. However, analyzing Chloris's speech as a performance carries with it an assumption of deliberation on the part of the performer. Consequently, reading lines 15 and 16 as a purposeful performance removes the vulnerability from these lines and instead

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[5] My emphasis.

[6] My emphasis.

reveals Chloris's affected masque of innocence and alludes to the goals that motivate her performance. The lack of agency she implies in line 15 helps support this role.

The speaker describes her voice in the fifth stanza as faint and trembling (17), but the sympathy that readers might have felt for Chloris to that point falters as the speaker continues to explain Chloris's state of mind. The faintness and trembling that readers assume are results of Chloris's fear of being raped by the shepherd are actually products of the passion that created "a pulse in every part / And love in every vein" (17, 9, 11-12). According to the speaker, the only fear that Chloris actually endures at the close of the poem is the fear that her performance of innocence from stanza four will succeed and the shepherd will leave her without consummating the passion that she feels (18). The speaker clearly states that Chloris's façade of innocence and reluctance, while potentially sincere at the beginning of the encounter, was nothing but a performance from the moment that the "sudden passion seized her heart" in line 9. The speaker finally explains that Chloris's performance ultimately failed because it was transparent enough for the shepherd to see through, revealing her true desire:

> But virgins' eyes their hearts betray
>
> And give their tongues the lie.
>
> Thus she, who princes had denied

With all their pompous train,

Was in the lucky minute tried

And yielded to the swain. (19-24)

The speaker ends the poem convinced that Chloris's fate was of her own making because her performative skills were not strong enough to repress her own desires even though she understood the role that she needed to perform. Her failure then, was caused by her lack of *dissimulazione*. Because she could not effectively dissemble her true feelings, she forfeited her chance of completing a successful performance.

Reminiscent of "As Chloris full of harmless thought," "My Lord All-Pride" also features a pundit speaker who reports on the performances that surround him. However, the critique that this speaker provides is less sympathetic than the above speaker's neutral view of Chloris. Whereas "In Chloris full of harmless thought ," the speaker lets Chloris's actions more or less speak for themselves[7], the speaker in "My Lord All-Pride" harshly judges Lord All-Pride. The speaker describes "Lord All-Pride" as a would-be courtier who

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[7] The speaker's relative neutrality convinces me that s/he had no real stake in coloring his/her depiction of Chloris's actions, because Chloris's failed performance does not seem to have any real consequences for the non-participating speaker and thus no real motivation to exaggerate any aspect of her failure.

has no individual qualities that distinguish him from the rest of society.[8] However, this general lack of courtliness is not the reason that the speaker attacks Lord All-Pride; he actually does so because Lord All-Pride cannot or will not recognize that he lacks the very characteristics he attempts to showcase and because he refuses to give up his performances. The speaker justifies his disdain for Lord All-Pride by explaining that "Against his stars the coxcomb ever strives, / And to be something they forbid, contrives" (lines 13-14). In other words, Lord All-Pride does not have the measure of inherent *grazia* that Castiglione explains is essential in any successful courtly performance. Rochester's decision to depict this kind of failed performance accentuates his main goals in these poetic enactments of repression. He wanted to reiterate that members of the court possessed natural *grazia* and a mastery of *dissimulazione* and *sprezzatura*; individuals who did not illustrate an understanding of *sprezzatura* and *dissimulazione* or did not have natural *grazia*, they need not apply for membership into the exclusive courtly society.

The speaker provides two major examples of this type of insulting behavior as Lord All-Pride spurns his innate social position by attempting to

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[8] David Vieth explains in his edition of Rochester's collected verse that "My Lord All-Pride" is John Sheffield, the Earl of Mulgrave and that this poem is a lampoon on him. However, because my focus is on the characters as they are presented within Rochester's verse, I am not going to dwell on the biographical details that surround this poem.

gain praise for himself as a writer and as a courtier. According to the speaker, Lord All-Pride believes that he is an exceptional writer; however the speaker is of a different opinion. He explains that each time Lord All-Pride attempts to write, he must put forth a great effort, which ultimately fails, to combat the ineptitude with which Nature decided to grace his poetic ability: "To rack and torture they unmeaning brain / In satyr's praise, to a low untuned strain, / In thee was most impertinent and vain" (1-3). Consequently, Lord All-Pride's writing reflects the struggle he waged against his own nature, and, when his nature failed, his literary attempts were comprised of "the excrements of others' wit" (9). He displays his unchangeable lack of *grazia* both in his countenance and in his actions, causing the failure of his performances for other members of the court:

> With a red nose, splay foot, and goggle eye,
> A plowman's looby mien, face all awry.
> With stinking breath, and every loathsome mark,
> The Punchinello sets up for a spark. (15-18)

Because of his "self-conceit," he cannot countenance the idea that he lacks courtly *grazia.* Each time he performs, he "burlesques his trade" and wins nothing but "shame and [the] derision" of the members of the court (19, 21, 28). His arrogance and ignorance mark him for the speaker's indictment. These

characteristics, prevent Lord All-Pride from seeing that he lacks the essential characteristics of courtliness.

Because Nature did not bless Lord All-Pride with inherent *grazia*, his attempts to perform the part of the witty writer and the part of the courtier ultimately fail. Rochester implies here a connection between courtly characteristics like *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* with literary ability, extending the domain of the highest echelons of society into literary territory that traditionally was shared by members of different socio-economic groups. The speaker's treatment of Lord All-Pride's failures as a would-be courtier, more specifically as a court wit, demonstrate to other individuals like him that their innate worth did not match that of the courtly class and that literary competence would not carry them into the court. As a result, socially optimistic individuals could assume that their performances would meet the same end as Lord All-Pride's performances did.

In, "On the Supposed Author of a Late Poem in Defense of Satyr," similar to "My Lord All-Pride" in its scope and general tone, Rochester's speaker passes judgment on the Supposed Author while directly participating in the action of the poem. Just like the speaker in "My Lord All-Pride," the speaker in "The Supposed Author" is motivated by his desire to preserve the exclusivity and

importance of the court. Consequently, he lambasts the "Supposed Author's" attempted impersonations of the Court Wit.

The speaker describes the Supposed Author as God's satire on man, created to show the utter antithesis of the ideal courtier: "For God made [a satire] on mane when he made thee: / To show there are some men, as there are apes, / Framed for mere sport, who differ but in shapes" (6-8). That the Supposed Author - who so clearly does not possess the *grazia* essential to any successful courtly performance - would attempt to play the part of a carelessly graceful courtier strikes the speaker as ridiculous. The speaker exclaims:

> Curse on that silly hour that first inspired
> Thy madness *to pretend* to be admired:
> *To paint thy grisly face, to dance, to dress,*
> And all those *awkward follies* that express
> Thy loathsome love and filthy daintiness. (16-19)[9]

While he critiques the Supposed Author's inability to perform, the speaker illustrates his mastery of Castiglione's three elements of the courtly *manner.* From his position of courtly favor, the speaker enumerates the specific actions within the Supposed Author's performance that reveal his lack off *grazia.* More telling evidence of the speaker's motivation and the true aim of his critique,

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[9] My emphasis

however, resides in lines 16 and 17: "Curse on that silly hour that first inspired / Thy madness *to pretend* to be admired."[10] The speaker does not say "curse on you, Supposed Author." Instead he curses "that silly hour that first inspired" the Supposed Author's performance, the moment that gave him the idea that he could overcome his natural deficiencies and transcend his lower social class to join the members of the court. The speaker cannot abide the notion that the Supposed Author would deign to aspire to the social position that the speaker seems to have achieved, and he despises the Supposed Author for cheapening his own courtliness by attempting to align himself with the court.

In contrast to the speakers in "As Chloris full of harmless thought" and "My Lord All-Pride" who criticized individual inept courtiers, the speaker in "A Satyr against Reason and Mankind" delivers a categorical critique of social climbers. He describes one member of this group who performs, affecting "smiles, embraces, friendship, [and] praise" to attain "dear-bought fame" (lines 135, 144). This individual performs to attain social stature by ingratiating himself with courtiers through impersonation. The speaker explains that these performances are results of "that lust for power, to which he's such a slave, / And for the which alone he dares be brave" (145-146). In other words, such an individual becomes his own performative project. He designs his behavior

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[10] My emphasis.

around events and moments that might occur and rehearses so that these fortuitous moments can become stages on which he can reveal his generosity, affability, and kindness (147-148).

Rochester, through the mouthpiece of the speaker he created, describes and critiques the motivations and actions attendant to Castiglione's typical model of courtly performance. The social mobility Castiglione's standard model promises , even to the most deserving individuals, is too much for the speaker - and, by extension, for Rochester - to overlook. Because of this, Rochester could not create a situation within the poem that would allow the everyman courtier he describes to succeed. Consequently, the yearning that motivates the constant thought and preparation that this failed courtier uses to design his projects ultimately causes his performance to fail. Because the performer desires power and influence so much and spends so much time preparing his performance, he forgets that to succeed his performance must be tempered with *sprezzatura.* In order to exhibit *sprezzatura,* the would-be courtier must use *dissimulazione* to put off his awareness of his rehearsal as well as his knowledge that the performance is a mask he affects to climb the social ladder. The speaker explains that the performer's reputation at court, "for which he takes such pains to be thought wise, / And screws his actions in a forced disguise," does nothing to advance the performer's social position because his performance is too transparent to cover

up his yearning and striving (149-150). Instead, his practiced affectation only causes him to "[lead] a tedious life in misery / Under laborious hypocrisy" (149-152). Rochester describes a performer that attempts to utilize Castiglione's theory of courtly performance just as Castiglione described it in *The Book of the Courtier*. However, because the performer is so intent upon reaching his goal and does not use *dissimulazione* well, his performance suffers and ultimately fails because it lacks *sprezzatura*. As a result, his affectation shines through, marring the image his performance should create.

Rochester also employs the figure of the pundit speaker in two of his better recognized poems, "A Ramble in St. James's Park" and "Tunbridge Wells." As they travel down the paths through St. James's Park and the Lower Walk at Tunbridge Wells, these two speakers provide judgmental running commentaries on the individuals and performances that they encounter. Each individual that the speakers describe represents another failed performance Rochester created to critique in his verse, the purpose of which was to defend the court from its unworthy besiegers.

In "A Ramble in St. James's Park," the speaker first encounters the leader of the "Whitehall blades," an individual whose courtly performance is marred from the outset by his parliamentarian background, a deficit his lack of *grazia* does not allow him to overcome. His very presence threatens the social

hierarchy on two levels. As a representative of the faction responsible for beheading Charles I, instating Oliver Cromwell, and ending the court in 1649, the Whitehall blade is a reminder of the fragility of the court. On the other hand, as an individual trying to enact the role of a courtier, he represents the social mobility Castiglione's theory of courtly performance implied and against which Rochester reacted by creating repressive poetic performances like "A Ramble in St. James's Park" and "Tunbridge Wells."

The leader of these attempted usurpers has only a tenuous claim to the upper class based on his "near kin t' th' Mother of the Maids" of Honor to Queen Catherine (lines 45-6). The Whitehall blade attempted to become a member of the influential nobility by lingering on the fringes of the court, imitating every action and adopting every preference of the highly influential and powerful individuals that he could absorb from his position on the periphery of high society:

> In this, as well as all the rest,
> He ventures to do like the best,
> But wanting common sense, th' ingredient
> In choosing well not least expedient,
> Converts abortive imitation

To universal *affectation.* (53-58)[11]

The speaker continues to describe his performance by explaining that every move the blade makes and every word he says is governed by his attempted imitation of someone else at court: "Thus he not only eats and talks / But feels and smells, sits down and walks, / Nay looks, and lives, and loves by rote" (59-61). Because he adheres to this imitative standard of behavior, even when the action does not fit the situation, his performance is extremely apparent to those individuals around him. In short, his performance needed a greater degree of *grazia.* If he had the "true" courtier's measure of *grazia,* he would first suspect his Parliamentarian past would not be welcome at court, and second, if he did decide to perform, he would know how to tailor his performance to his situation.

The speaker's critique extends beyond the first Whitehall blade to two of his friends who do not see through his acts, the Gray's Inn wit and the "lady's eldest son" (63, 69). The speaker does not depict the performances of the second and third Whitehall blades in as much detail as he does the performance of the first Whitehall blade. Their proximity to and respect for the first Whitehall blade subject them to the same kind of censure from the speaker and the same performative failure as their friend since they construct their own courtly

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[11] My emphasis.

behavior around the transparent performance of the first Whitehall blade (63-74).

Rochester's mouthpiece in "Tunbridge Wells" describes a critical image of unsuccessful performance similar to the depiction of the inept performances presented by the speaker in "A Ramble in St. James's Park." Like the "St. James's Park" speaker, the "Tunbridge Wells" speaker provides merciless observations on the individuals he encounters on his way to the Wells. No one whose performance deserves censure escapes his critical gaze. The performances of the "natural Nokes," "the tall stiff fool that walked in Spanish guise," "the would-be wit," and the cadets each fail as the speaker sees through them and describes their absurdity (lines 11-18, 30-40, 88-113, 149-165).

The "natural Nokes," a lower-order member of the country gentry, is the highest-ranking individual that the speaker describes, but his lineage does not safeguard or guarantee the success of his performance. The ostentatious pose that he seems to revel in - he is transported along the Upper Walk to the Wells in a "coach and six" with a train of followers in tow - disables his performance because of its obvious lack of *sprezzatura.* The affectedness inherent in his showy performance draws the speaker's attention and ultimately his disparagement, explaining that "To make him more ridiculous, in spite / Nature contrived the fool should be a knight (18-19).

The speaker then describes the absurdly solemn fop clothed in Spanish dress who attempts to set himself apart from the rabble by adopting a guise of rigidity and scorn and by speaking only in empty "proverbs [...] and adages" (36). The fop, however, does not possess *grazia*. If he did, he would realize that his comportment only made him look ridiculous and that the clearest sign of his performance, the proverbs and adages, cause his performative failure. As it is, the fop fails because his proverbs and adages give away his lack of *grazia* as well as his affectation. If the fop possessed some small amount of natural *grazia*, he would be better prepared to enact the nonchalant manner created by *sprezzatura* and would give his performance a greater chance of success. Since the fop does not have this *grazia*, the speaker sees through his affected mask that is untempered by *sprezzatura*, calling his solemnity empty and nonsensical, the mien of a "buckram puppet" (33). The speaker explains that the wooden foppish performer:

> Can with as much solemnity buy eggs
> As a cabal can talk of their intrigues;
> Master o' th' Ceremonies, yet can dispense
> With the formality of talking sense. (37-40)

In fact, the speaker senses this individual's performance so much that eventually he dispenses with the third person pronouns "him" and "he" and for a time simply calls the fop "it" (33-4).

The speaker's most vivid and most accusing description of ridiculous failed performance in this poem, however, concerns the "would-be wit" (88). He draws the speaker's attention as the young potential courtier delivers two speeches to a "young damsel" he attempts to woo (86). More precisely, the discrepancy between the would-be wit's first and second speeches to his potential lover grabs the speaker's attention. The first speech is a model of courtliness, if somewhat vacuous, and he completes it without one misstep:

> ... "Madam, methinks the weather
> Is grown much more serene since you came hither.
> You influence the heavens; but should the sun
> Withdraw himself to see his rays outdone
> By your bright eyes, they would supply the morn,
> And make a day before the day be born!" (92-97)

Although these lines rely on lyrical clichés, they are still well-constructed. The measured regularity of the lines and the enjambment that helps soften the affectedness inherent in rhyme create the suspicion that they were rehearsed, but the speech does not at any point unquestionably confirm this notion.

However, once the young prospective courtier delivers his second speech, he reveals the artificial quality of the first. His second speech demonstrates the would-be wit's non-performing self, complete with coarse language and critical comments about the woman he is trying to woo:

> He, puzzled, bites his nail, both to display
> The sparkling ring, and think what next to say,
> And thus breaks forth afresh: "Madam, egad!
> Your luck at cards last night was very bad:
> At cribbage fifty-nine, and the next show
> To make the game, and yet to want those two.
> God damn me, madam, I'm the son of a whore
> If in my life I saw the like before!" (104-109)

His coarseness might indicate an absence of *grazia*, depending on whether the coarseness was an adopted or innate attribute. Either way, the potential court wit's second performance suffers from a shortage of *dissimulazione* that prevents him from putting aside his coarseness in favor of the courtly self that he mimics in the first speech.

The speaker does not begin to scorn the would-be wit until the end of the second speech. Before then, the speaker seems to regard the potential courtier with patronizing but generally good natured critique. He analyzes the young

performer as he would critique a younger, less experienced peer, from the perspective of the experienced mentor. After the second speech, however, the speaker holds nothing back, perhaps because for a moment, he had been convinced by the would-be wit's first performance. The threat that this almost successful performance represents - it was good enough to potentially convince the speaker - causes the speaker to react very critically, even though he probably would not have given the would be wit another thought had he only overheard the first speech.

Chloris, Lord All-Pride and the Supposed Author, the Whitehall blades, the natural Nokes, the solemn faux-Spaniard, and the would-be wit share the same fate. As a group these individuals' performances strike out, missing all three of the key components of the successful performance described in *The Courtier*. At times, they fail to incorporate *dissimulazione* or *sprezzatura* into their performances. Other performances reveal the performers' utter lack of *grazia.* Regardless of why the performances Rochester created for each of the characters in his poems fail, each performance that Rochester critiques through his speakers helps discredit potential courtiers and court ladies. Consequently, these failures functions as conservative performances fashioned to support the social hierarchy by convincing members of the masses of the inevitability of their social position. His poetic representations also hinder intrepid potential courtiers by

discrediting them with the members of the court and condemning their performances to failure before they even begin.

self-implicating speakers

Rochester's second category of speakers implicate themselves over the course of their poems as they relate the details of their own inept performances, regardless of whether they are conscious of their failure. These speakers either aspire to become or already are part of the upper class, but their performances do not depict the *sprezzatura, grazia,* and *dissimulazione* essential to enacting the courtly manner. Some of these speakers *cannot* demonstrate their mastery of *grazia, dissimulazione* , and *sprezzatura.* Others choose not to. Either way, the resulting performances fail to conform to Castiglione's essential characteristics of courtly performance.

The first of these self-incriminating speakers cannot enact successful courtly performances, but this inability does not prevent him from striving to become part of the upper class. Rochester's decision to use the inept self-incriminating would-be courtier to generate critiques of themselves adds another level of dramatic irony to the already unflattering picture of their failed performances. "A Very Heroical Epistle in Answer to Ephelia" depicts this type of self-implicating speaker. This poem features a speaker ironically discrediting

himself by describing what he does not realize is a failed performance. Rochester's decision to structure the poem around an unaware speaker reveals the speaker's complete lack of *grazia*, discrediting the performance contained in the letter as well as each of the performances to which the letter refers. Besides displaying a long list of qualities that contradict a courtier's manner - including glorifying one's inconstancy, self-centeredness, and arrogance - the speaker's performance within the epistle fails because it illustrates its lack of *dissimulazione*. Had the speaker's performance included *dissimulazione* it would not showcase the speaker's self-centeredness, arrogance, and lack of constancy but would instead allow *sprezzatura* to cover up these negative qualities. The speaker does use *dissimulazione* because he does not possess the *grazia* he needs to realize he possesses any characteristics that he *should* cover up with a mask of *sprezzatura*. Although *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* can all be honed using Castiglione's suggestions, the only prerequisite Castiglione establishes is that the potential courtier possess some small degree of *grazia*. Regardless of how well the speaker might have used *dissimulazione* and *sprezzatura* in these earlier performances, the lack of innate *grazia* illustrated in the letter disqualifies his past and future performances. Consequently, by depicting the speaker as he does, Rochester calls attention to the "natural" differences between courtly and non-courtly individuals.

Although the speaker's description of his failed performance achieves Rochester's goal of discrediting socially hopeful individuals, the speaker Rochester creates is not quite a convincing depiction of an inept would-be courtier. Rochester fashioned the failed performance that the letter itself represents with a little too much *grazia.* Rather than recreate the kind of ungainly poetic letter that Rochester implies the speaker would create (because of his lack of *grazia*), Rochester creates a relatively smooth verse epistle that seems incongruous when viewed alongside the depiction of the speaker that the letter provides. Because Rochester refuses to dissemble, his performance as poet playing the speaker does not align with the standards Castiglione sets for his typical model of courtly performance. The lack of balance between *grazia, sprezzatura,* and *dissimulazione* that renders this performance a failure, however, does not make it ineffective. In fact, Rochester's purposeful imbalance of *sprezzatura, dissimulazione,* and *grazia* moves this performance into another of Castiglione's performative categories altogether: the performance *that must fail* to meet the standards of Castiglione's standard performative model *in order to achieve its goals.*

Rochester's goals for this repressive performance were to discredit the failing speaker, to discourage other socially hopeful individuals from performing, and to support the established social hierarchy and his lofty position

within it. Enacting the role of the failing speaker so that he discredits his own performance helps achieve these goals. However, because Rochester's rendition of the incompetent would-be courtier does not quite mimic the degree of ineptitude he implies the speaker has, his performance draws attention to Rochester's role in the creation of the poem and his motivations for creating it. While this might seem to weaken his critique – he does have a lot at stake, so there is the possibility that he would exaggerate – it actually strengthens it. Rather than simply discrediting the speaker and other individuals like him, Rochester's failed performance calls attention to what Rochester characterizes as the "inevitable" difference between himself, a natural nobleman, and the speaker he plays, a courtly poser. The ultimate result is that this repressive performance reinforces the separation between the classes as it reasserts the idea that this separation is a predestined result of the distribution of innate courtly characteristics. Rochester's refusal to dissemble – and it was almost certainly a refusal[12] -- is calculated to seem natural, an insuppressible courtliness he simply

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[12] The assumption that I am working under here is symptomatic of my being persuaded by previous instances in which Rochester's performance illustrate that he does in fact understand and is able to use *dissimulazione* and *sprezzatura.* Castiglione explains this tendency – to assume that because an individual can do one thing well, he much be able to do other things even better – is a natural result of a successfully rehearsed courtly performance that masterfully balances *grazia, sprezzatura,* and *dissimulazione.* Nonchalance "not only reveals the skill of the person doing it but also very often causes it to be considered far greater than it really is" (Castiglione 70).

could not mask with any amount of *dissimulazione*, to highlight the speaker's lack of *grazia*.

Rochester used another type of speaker to illustrate examples of the success-through-failure repressive courtly performances: those speakers already established in court who refuse to balance *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* within their performances. Their stable positions within the upper class of society imply that these speakers have mastered Castiglione's three essential characteristics of a successful courtly performance. Two such speakers are Timon in "Timon" and Artemisia in "A Letter from Artemisia in Town to Chloe in the Country."

Timon highlights two instances in which his performances fail in the course of the poem. In the first performance, he attempts to convince an individual he calls his host that he is a nonchalant courtier with no serious ties to literary culture. In Timon's second failed performance, he seems to endeavor to quiet rumors (started by his host) that claim he writes serious poetry by playing the part of the nonchalant courtier for "A," one of his courtly peers. This second failed performance frames the first since we only see Timon's interaction with his host as he describes them it to "A."

Timon's failed performances result from his being forced to confront two contradictory roles of himself: the nonchalant courtier and the serious, talented

poet. This moment of confrontation occurs when Timon's host "seized [him] i' th' Mall, who just [his] name had got," takes Timon to his coach, and ignoring Timon's protests, demands that Timon share a meal with him and "some wits of [his] acquaintance" (6, 8). Once in the coach, the host confronts Timon with a piece of satiric verse that Timon finally admits to "A" "was so sharp it must be [his own]" (18). Timon explains to "A" that:

> I vowed I was no more a wit than he:
> Unpracticed and unblessed in poetry.
> A song to Phyllis I perhaps might make,
> But never rhymed but for my pintle's sake.
> I envied no man's fortune nor his fame,
> Nor ever thought of revenge so tame. (19-24)

However, his attempt to convince his host that he was nothing more than a courtier who only ever wrote verse to seduce a potential lover failed because Timon did not utilize *dissimulazione* in his performance for his host. By giving up his performance in lines 19 through 24, when his host presses him about his poetry, Timon affirms his host's assumptions about his poetic ability. This surrendered performance, however, places Timon far above his host based on a hierarchy of poetic talent. The social distinction between them already favors Timon. Timon did not seem satisfied with the division of authority between

himself and his host until he bested the host as a poet as well as a courtly individual implies that Timon enjoyed having a reputation as a successful serious poet, even if only among individuals below his social class. By not utilizing *dissimulazione*, he caused his performance for his host to fail from the outset.

Lack of *dissimulazione* also causes the failure of the performance Timon seems to attempt for "A," although the sincerity of Timon's performance is suspect. He justifies his failed attempt to deny his host by explaining that "He knew my style, he swore, and 'twas in vain / Thus to deny the issue of my brain" (25-26). This validation sets the stage for the failed performance he enacts for "A." Throughout the rest of the poem. Timon practically flaunts the poetic intellectualism that he attempts to deny in the beginning. He betrays his depth of knowledge to "A," especially toward the end of the conversation as he critiques the failed attempts of his dinner companions to perform the roles of Court Wits. By mocking their uninformed opinions about the stage and the state, their incorrect quotations of lines and scenes from popular – but not necessarily quality – stage productions of the time, and their coarse language, he betrays his own superior knowledge of these intellectual matters (111-112, 151-155, and 119-120). Because he did not use *dissimulazione* to hide this knowledge,

he reveals rather than denies the truth about the rumors, consciously failing his earlier performance.

The inconstancies in and the motivations of Timon's performance for "A" are clearer when read against the backdrop of the performance Timon failed for his host. Doing so supports a reading of Timon's second performance as a purposeful failure crafted to bring him praise from his fellow courtiers without requiring that Timon boast about his accomplishments. In the setting of the poem, the only necessarily "real" occurrence is Timon's discussion with "A." The encounter with his host could have easily been crafted by Timon to highlight his poetic ability while only seeming to complain about an uncouth group of "wits." Whether or not his is the case, his discussion with "A" results in Timon continuing to spread the "rumors" going around about his poetry, even though he seems to attempt to play the nonchalant courtier who wants to maintain his role. Therefore, creating the failing performance for "A" makes it possible for Timon to display his poetic talent in order to get compliments without outright bragging, which falls directly in line with Castiglione's explanation of how a courtier should praise himself. Castiglione explains:

> [...] a man who praises himself in the right way, and does not cause envy or annoyance in doing so, is well within the bounds of discretion; and he deserves the praise of others as well as what he

> allows himself, because he is achieving something very difficult. [... He must also say] things in such a way that they do not seem to be spoken with that end in view, but are so very much to the purpose that one cannot refrain from saying them; and also on giving the impression of avoiding self-praise, while indulging in it [...]. (59)

By successfully manipulating the elements of Castiglione's theory of courtly performance, Timon achieved the goal of solidifying his position within the social hierarchy while deriding the failed performances of his host and his friends, the "wits."

Artemisia, like Timon, finds herself performing for two audiences whose expectations are at odds with one another: her country friend Chloe and her courtly peers. During the opening section of the poem, Artemisia attempts to mollify both of her audiences in one performance which begins in the first lines of the verse epistle:

> Chloe,
>
> *In verse by your command I write.*
>
> Shortly you'll bid me ride astride and fight:
>
> These talents better with our sex agree

Than lofty flights of dangerous poetry. (lines 1-4)[13]

Artemisia begins her two-sided performance by emphasizing that she is constrained to write poetry by *Chloe's wishes*. As Chloe's link to the higher social circles in town, Artemisia holds the position of power in their relationship and will continue to do so as long as she provides the information Chloe craves. However, by asking Artemisia to write to her in verse Chloe threatens the balance of their relationship by forcing Artemisia to perform. In order to maintain her position of power within her relationship with Chloe, Artemisia must to first safeguard her reputation in town.

Even though pleasing both audiences would be almost impossible, Artemisia seems to attempt this feat in the opening section of the verse epistle. To comply with Chloe's wishes, Artemisia must write in verse, but by doing so, she risks losing some of her social status because her peers would not suffer being linked with a poetess. To guard against this reaction, Artemisia must plainly state in verse that she only violates this social convention to appease her country friend. Artemisia attempts to reconcile these mutually exclusive goals by ending the first section of the poem with some advice to "herself," a performative act meticulously prepared and shaped to appeal to both of her audiences. She begins her lesson: "When I reflect on [the problems poetry brings

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[13] My emphasis.

many men], I straight grow wise, / And my own self thus gravely I advise: / Dear Artemisia, poetry's a snare" (14-16). Although she claims to be warning herself of the troubles attendant with writing verse as a woman, Artemisia's true aims in these last twenty lines of the opening are only concerned with maintaining her social position. Artemisia must convince her peers that she respects the set of values they share in the hope that, if they see her verse, they will forgive her faux pas. In order to maintain her position of authority, Artemisia must also put Chloe in her place. She achieves this by giving her condescending instructions about city life, delivered in graceful verse to make Chloe feel guilty for requesting a letter in verse in the first place.

In the remaining two hundred and thirty-three lines of the poem, Artemisia causes the failure of her earlier, carefully constructed performance. She purposefully withheld *dissimulazione* from her performance because she would not dissemble her poetic ability. By delivering a thoughtful and critical view, in relatively graceful verse, of the events and individuals in town, she not only forfeits her earlier performance, she risks alienating her peers with her critical appraisal of their actions in town. However, by continuing her letter in verse, Artemisia creates an opportunity to regain her authority over Chloe. Her early failure enables her to fashion a repressive performance as she spends two hundred thirty-three lines reasserting her superior courtly worth.

Artemisia delivers her repressive performance while she calls Chloe's attention to the failed performances she encounters in town. Before she begins her social critique, however, she sets the tone of the rest of the letter by mocking Chloe's shallow interest in the latest town gossip:

> Y'expect at least to hear what loves have passed
> In this lewd town, since you and I met last;
> What change has happened of intrigues, and whether
> The old ones last, and who and who's together. (32-35)

Rather than launch into the latest gossip, which would be something below her, Artemisia instead begins with a more abstract lament over the declining state of women in the city. The first social critique that Artemisia provides involves the young women in town that all conform to the whims of an elite clique of their more powerful peers who dictates the opinions of the entire demographic. Her disdain for these followers also implicates Chloe, who depends on Artemisia's news to shape her own opinions and actions. Just like the majority of the young women in town fail in their performances, Chloe's attempts to be a satellite member of the London scene fail. Artemisia explains to Chloe that:

> Their private wish obeys the public voice;
> 'Twixt good and bad, whimsy decides, not choice.
> Fashions grow up for taste; at forms they strike;

Bovey's a beauty, if some few agree

To call him so; the rest to that degree

Affected are, that with their ears they see. (lines 66-73)

Her emphasis on "affected" illustrates, Artemisia's complaint about these followers centers on their blatantly artificial *manner*. In other words, they lack the *sprezzatura* that would make their affectation less obvious and enable them to join the trend setters (73). By linking Chloe to them, Artemisia criticizes her as well.

After she discusses the young women in town, Artemisia indicts the "fine lady" and the transparency of her performance (74). According to Artemisia, the fine lade exaggerates every action, phrase, and gesture to the degree that the calculations and affectation in her performance make it farcical. As Artemisia describes her, the fine lady does such a good job of illustrating her own performance that Artemisia merely has to relate her actions to complete her critique of the fine lady's behavior. However, Artemisia's role as creator of the performance in the letter for Chloe enables her to depict individuals in any manner she chooses. Artemisia had an interest in making the fine lady look ridiculous, whether she does so simply to reinforce the importance of the court by making the fine lady look even worse than she actually did, or to depict each of the characteristics that she wanted to critique in Chloe,.

The fine lady is embarrassed by the country appearance of her "humble knight"; to separate herself from his country *manner*, the fine lady makes a very loud show of disparaging him and proving her power in their relationship (73-91). Artemisia explains:

> She flies upstairs, and all the haste does show
> That fifty antic postures will allow,
> And then bursts out:
> Dear madam, am not I
> The altered'st creature breathing? Let me die,
> I find myself ridiculously grown,
> *Embarrassée* with *being out of town*,
> *Rude* and *untaught* like any Indian queen:
> My *country* nakedness is strangely seen. (93-100)[14]

Her continual posturing, loud voice, and use of unnecessary French complement her clearly contrived simile for herself. She gets a lot of mileage out of this Janus-faced image; by comparing herself to the Indian queen, she believes she excuses any faux pas that she may commit by evoking the image of the noble savage and believes she makes her "acceptable" actions and up to date knowledge of the latest town gossip seem even more impressive. A little later in

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[14] My emphasis.

her encounter with Artemisia, the fine lady, upon being "forced to cease / Through want of breath, not will to hold her peace," sees a monkey in the window and dotes upon it, clearly because she believes she is acting fashionably (135-136):

> With forty smiles, as many antic bows,
> As if 't been the lady of the house,
> The dirty, chattering monster she embraced,
> And made it this fine, tender speech at last:
> "Kiss me, thou curious miniature of man!
> How odd thou art! how pretty! how japan!
> Oh, I could live and die with thee!" Then on
> For half an hour in compliment she run. (139-146)

Artemisia sums up her view of the fine lady by explaining that the fine lady was "a woman so distinguished from the rest, / Except discretion only, she possessed" (168).

The fine lady's performance is perhaps the most blatantly failing example described in Rochester's verse. She is so intent upon giving the kind of impression she mistakenly believes the London set wants to see that she comes across as an empty shell of a once discerning and vibrant woman whose practiced conformity and continual dissembling erased most (if not all) that she

used to be. All that is left of her is her desire to be accepted in town. She yearns for this so much that she cannot dissemble it, and it tragically ruins her performance by preventing her from using *sprezzatura* to hide her eagerness.

Artemisia sets up the fine lady as a representative of the country in town, which relates her to the kind of actions Chloe might take if removed from the country. By implying through this comparison that Chloe's city performances might bear a close resemblance to the fine lady's, Artemisia insinuates that Chloe would also share the fine lady's her potential for performative success. By implicitly equating Chloe to the fine lady, Artemisia can critique every aspect of Chloe she finds fault with through her analysis of the fine lady's behavior without risking Chloe's censure. Artemisia also describes the fine lady's country backwardness and failed courtly performance to highlight own courtliness and, by extension, the *manner* of the rest of the courtly ladies.

The roles that Artemisia and Timon play as speakers in "A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country" and "Timon" are multifaceted. On the one hand, they serve as upper class critics of the failed performances of the individuals they meet. On the other hand, they also illustrate another incarnation of the success-through-failure performance that Castiglione described in the opening quote of this chapter. Artemisia's refusal to maintain her anti-poetic performance for her peers in town and Timon's decision not to

dissemble his poetic ability, emphasize the ease with which upper-class individuals, whose social positions illustrate that they have mastered the courtly *manner*, can allow their performances to fail. Like Rochester's failed performance in "A Very Heroical Epistle," Timon's and Artemisia's failures represent poetic versions of the performances Castiglione explained *must* fail in order to succeed. These failed performances, instead of damaging the social position of the performers, solidify their positions and reinforce the influence of the court by drawing attention to the superiority of the upper class performer over the abilities of the non-noble spectator. Artemisia does this by confronting Chloe with her inherent *grazia*, illustrated in her ability to craft elegant verse even though doing so forces her to sacrifice her earlier performance for her town peers. She also uses her verse to create implicit critiques of Chloe's country *manner*. Artemisia regains her position of superiority in the power struggle between she and Chloe as a result of this " failed" performance. Timon did so by revealing his own poetic ability to his peer instead of hiding it with *dissimulazione* and *sprezzatura*. The benefit of this "failed" performance is the social acknowledgement of and possible respect for Timon's poetic talent. These successful failures align with the repressive performance described by Castiglione above. Both Castiglione's typical courtly performance and the repressive success-through-failure performance solidify the performer's

positions of authority. They both also reinforce the established social hierarchy by calling attention to the difference between the speakers and their lower-class spectators.

a conservative rochester's social critiques

Rochester's own voice is the final level of critique inherent in each of these poems. While making simple assumptions about the relationship between the speakers and the poet is risky, some of the speakers' views or motivations in the above poems could be analogous to Rochester's own goals as he created his poetic performances. For instance, as a member of the court, he could share with his successful and masterly failing courtly speakers, like Timon and Artemisia, the desire to support an upper class threatened by an influx of non-noble individuals. Using his verse as the vehicle of his critique allowed Rochester the opportunity to play the part of the pundit speaker like the speaker in "My Lord All-Pride" – the speaker who stands on the sidelines, reporting events as they occur, and who provides commentary along the way. By creating the poetic equivalent of the repressive courtly masking that Castiglione describes above, Rochester had the opportunity to critique those individuals who perform very poorly and thus taint the upper class, as well as those individuals who might

succeed in their attempts to take advantage of the social mobility inherent in Castiglione's behavioral theory.

Rochester also demonstrates his incorporation of Castiglione by taking on the role of the failing nobility speaker or the failed courtier, like he did in "A Very Heroical Epistle," "Timon," "A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country," and "My Lord All-Pride." By doing so, Rochester could complete a performance that required his failure, the transparency of his pose that let his readers see beyond the speakers to Rochester himself – or at least the performance of "Rochester" he chose to enact. Actions like these buttressed the established social hierarchy. By taking on the role of the failing courtier, Rochester sets himself personally above the kind of individuals he described, and reestablishes the superiority of the court.

Reading Rochester's verse as a repressive performance reasserts the parallels between his poetic performances and Castiglione's performance theory, demonstrating that his repressive performances did not preclude him from performing the more typical type of performance described in *The Book of the Courtier*. While Rochester critiqued various failing performances, he also reiterated his own mastery of *grazia*, *sprezzatura*, and *dissimulazione* as he demonstrated his courtliness through the technical and aesthetic decisions he made as he drafted his verse performances.

Ultimately these verse performances allowed Rochester to widen the gap between himself and the court he represents and individuals whose performances fail, because the repressive performance *in verse* is better equipped to critique the failed performer - and the lower class in general - than the "true" performances that it mimics. In other words, the extra layers of performance in Rochester's repressive verse[15] give the poet the ability to tailor *his* poetic performance to evoke certain feelings of disdain or intimidation in his audience to a greater degree than an individual enacting physical impersonations of his "low" spectator. In verse Rochester had complete control over the language, polish, and ease with which the courtly representative acted as well as the coarseness and ridicule with which he described the non-courtly performer. Consequently, Rochester's success-through-failure verse performances have an even greater conservative stabilizing effect through their ability to exaggerate the "facts" of the failed performance than the physical masking Castiglione described in the quote at the beginning of this chapter and on which Turner focuses in *Libertines and Radicals*.

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[15] The performer enacts the performances in the dramatic situation of the poem, the speaker then describes that dramatic situation and the performances it entails, and the poet creates both the speaker and the dramatic situation of the poem, which ultimately reflect on him as his own courtly performance.

Rochester's manipulation of Castiglione's repressive model of performance indicates the degree to which Castiglione's behavioral theory continued to be appropriated by different sectors of society to achieve very different goals. Regardless of the poets', courtiers', or potential courtiers' motivations for embracing the *manner* of Castiglione's courtly performances, Castiglione's impact on British society continued beyond the late Renaissance as a chance for social mobility, and throughout the Restoration as a safeguard that could alleviate the courtiers' anxiety about their tenuous position in the evolving British social hierarchy.

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vita

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