

IMAGES OF THE COURTIER IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

by

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This thesis evaluates cultural constructs of the courtier in Elizabethan England. It focuses particularly on Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*. The *Courtier* is generally recognised as one of the most influential texts in Renaissance Europe. It was originally published in Venice in 1528; the first English translation was produced by Thomas Hoby in 1561. This thesis aims to provide an integrated analysis of Castiglione's contribution to English political culture throughout the second half of the sixteenth century. It considers the circumstances in which Hoby translated the *Courtier*, and his motives for doing so. It identifies two distinct models of courtliness delineated by the Urbino interlocutors, and assesses the extent to which these models influenced the self-presentation of leading Elizabethan politicians.

The thesis also engages with negative characterisations of the courtier. In particular, it examines the adaptation of traditional anti-courtier discourse to voice new concerns about the nature and legitimacy of court politics towards the end of Elizabeth's reign.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr Samuel Gerald McComb, who always supported my academic ambitions.

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INTRODUCTION

‘[I]n the court I exist and of the court I speak, and what the court is, God knows, I do not’.¹ This wry observation from a twelfth century courtier is popular with court historians, many of whom can doubtless empathise with its disarming admission of bafflement. The status, significance and function of courts and their inhabitants are notoriously awkward to define. Rulers have traditionally been surrounded by men and women who attend to their physical needs, assist them with their political duties, entertain them during their leisure hours, and reinforce their self-presentation at home and abroad. Yet such men and women tend to defy posthumous profiling and pigeon-holing. Attempts to delineate them collectively, as a generic type, invite more questions than they answer. Who, exactly, counted as a courtier? Was the holding of court office a prerequisite, or was sporadic attendance on the monarch sufficient qualification? What hierarchies, official and unofficial, operated within the royal entourage? How readily was service - often menial in nature - reconciled with self-aggrandizement and the brokerage of power? What was a courtier’s primary duty, and what could he or she hope to achieve?

In 1504, a relatively young but experienced courtier, soldier and diplomat entered the service of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, duke of Urbino.² He briefly joined the duke on campaign, before accompanying him back to Urbino at the end of August.³ He took up

¹ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium: courtiers’ trifles*, ed. and trans. by M. R. James, rev. by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983; repr. 2002), p. 3.

² See James Dennistoun, *Memoirs of the dukes of Urbino, illustrating the arms, arts and literature of Italy, from 1440 to 1630*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1851), II, 15-31.

³ Julia Cartwright Ady, *Baldassare Castiglione, the perfect courtier: his life and letters 1478-1529*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1908), I, 38-50; Dennistoun, *Dukes of Urbino*, II, 46-7.

residence in the magnificent palace built by Guidobaldo's father, Federico da Montefeltro.⁴ Under Federico, the Urbinese court had been renowned as a centre of arts and letters.⁵ Guidobaldo assiduously cultivated this reputation. He recovered his father's extensive library, which Cesare Borgia had recently looted.⁶ He also invited cultural luminaries from all over Europe to Urbino.⁷ Castiglione subsequently recalled with affection 'the great delite I tooke in those yeeres in the louing companie of so excellent Personages as then were in the Court of Urbin'.⁸ After the death of Guidobaldo, his duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga, and many of the 'excellent Personages' who graced their brilliant court, Castiglione decided to commemorate his friends. He composed a dialogue, which (he explained) was intended to serve 'as a purtraict in peinctinge of the Court of Urbin: Not of the handiwoorke of Raphael, or Michael Angelo, but of an unknowen peincter, and that can do no more but draw the principall lines, without setting furth the truth with bewtifull coulours, or makinge it appeere by

⁴ Castiglione described the palace as 'the fayrest that was to be founde in all Italy'. Federico, he claimed, had

so furnished it with euerye necessary implement belonging therto, that it appeared not a palaice, but a Citye in fourme of a palaice, and that not onelye with ordinarie matters, as Siluer plate, hanginges for chambers of veye riche cloth of golde, of silke and other like, but also for sightlynesse: and to decke it out withall, placed there a wonderous number of auncyent ymages of marble and mettall, veye excellent peinctinges and instrumentes of musycke of all sortes, and nothing would he haue there but what was moste rare and excellent.

Balthazar Castiglione, *The covrtyer of count Baldessar Castilio*, trans. by Thomas Hoby (London: William Seres, 1561), sig. Aii^v. The reader should note that the prefatory material published with Hoby's translation is paginated separately. To avoid confusion, I have italicized the signature references for the preface.

⁵ See Jacob Burckhardt, *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898; repr. Phaidon Press, 1960), pp. 29-30.

⁶ Federico had 'gathered together a great number of most excellent and rare bookes, in Greke, Latin and Hebrue, the which all he garnished wyth golde and syluer, esteaming this to be the chieffest ornament of his great palaice'. Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Aii^v.

⁷ Dennistoun, *Dukes of Urbino*, II, 39-46; 50-65.

⁸ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Bii^v.

the art of Prospectiue that it is not'.⁹ He claimed to have transcribed four after-dinner discussions, which took place on four consecutive evenings. The discussions were inspired by a challenge that Federico Fregoso devised for the company: 'to shape in woordes a good Courtyer, specifying all suche condicions and particuler qualities, as of necessitie must be in hym that deserueth this name'.¹⁰ Castiglione circulated the dialogue among friends, one of whom (to his intense irritation) distributed portions of it without his permission. Protesting that his hand had been forced by this betrayal, he arranged for the text to be published in Venice.¹¹ It appeared in 1528, under the title *Il libro del cortegiano* – the *Book of the Courtier*.

The concept of a good courtier was usually treated as a joke. As we shall see, the reputation of court acolytes in western Europe was consistently low throughout the classical and medieval periods. Castiglione's dialogue was novel, because his interlocutors sought to demonstrate that courtiers could make a serious, positive contribution to public affairs. The importance of the role that they envisaged for their paragon could scarcely be exaggerated. He would use his wit and accomplishments to win the favour and friendship of his prince. He would subsequently capitalise upon the loving trust his master reposed in him by encouraging the latter to rule justly, wisely and virtuously. 'Wherfore', as Ottaviano observed in Book IV of the dialogue, 'perhappes a man may say that to beecome the Instructor of a Prince were the ende of a Courtier'. Aristotle and Plato had not considered such a task beneath their dignity. Courtiership should be recognised as a legitimate occupation, with enormous

⁹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Biv^r.

¹⁰ Ibid., sig. Ci^r.

¹¹ Ibid., sig. Yy ii^v – Yy iii^v.

potential.¹² On this premise, Castiglione provided a comprehensive analysis of the courtier's role and responsibilities. Unusually, in contrast to the flippancy of Walter Map and the cynicism of many other commentators, he made a serious attempt to elucidate the problem of 'what in Court a Courtier ought be'.¹³

The claims made by the Urbino interlocutors on behalf of the courtly profession were lofty indeed. Arguably, they reflected the growing political, social, economic and cultural significance of princes' households in many parts of Europe. The Renaissance court was a very different entity from its peripatetic medieval predecessor. Norbert Elias attributed the enhancement of its status 'to the advancing centralisation of state power, to the growing monopolization of the two decisive sources of the power of any central ruler, the revenue derived from society as a whole which we call 'taxes', and military and police power'. He argued that the process of state formation encompassed a phase whereby authority and influence were vested predominantly in a sovereign individual. Members of the sovereign's immediate circle were empowered by their association with, and access to, the man or woman who embodied the state, and personally supervised its governance. Hence, 'the monarch's court and court society formed a powerful and prestigious elite'.¹⁴ Other sociologically minded historians of the mid twentieth century identified 'the advancing centralisation of state power' as a catalyst for the aggrandizement of early modern courts. According to Lawrence Stone,

¹² Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ss ii^v – Siii^r.

¹³ The quotation comes from a commendatory sonnet by Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst; see Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Aii^v. Sidney Anglo suggests that, by treating the courtier's art as a valid and worthwhile discipline, Castiglione 'create[d] a profession where, hitherto, none had existed'. Sidney Anglo, 'The courtier: the Renaissance and changing ideals', in *The courts of Europe: politics, patronage and royalty 1400-1700*, ed. by A. G. Dickens (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), pp. 33-53 (p. 36).

¹⁴ Norbert Elias, *The court society*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 2.

The most striking feature of the great nation states of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the enormous expansion of the Court and the central administration. This development was characterized by the acquisition by the Crown of greatly expanded financial and military resources, the extension of royal control over outlying areas, the development of a self-supporting bureaucracy with a vested interest in the perpetuation and extension of royal authority, a concentration of business and pleasure on the capital city, and the efflorescence of a brilliant and expensive court life.

Stone regarded this trend as a crucial component of the ‘crisis’ that he famously imputed to the early modern aristocracy: ‘Everywhere the nobility was sucked into this vortex ... they were drawn to the centre and became increasingly dependent on the Crown for their support. Once-formidable local potentates were transformed into fawning courtiers’. Like Elias, he suggested that the expansion of the court was a pan-European phenomenon.¹⁵

The court was thus identified as the beating heart of many early modern regimes. However, Stone’s reference to ‘fawning courtiers’ is noteworthy. The stereotype of the emasculated courtier, politically impotent and personally degenerate, proved surprisingly durable. Of course, the notion that courtiers tended towards effete servility was a staple trope of anti-courtier discourse from the classical era onwards. So was the jibe that, lacking ‘proper’ employment, they became obsessed with frivolous ceremonies and trivial amusements.¹⁶ Such rhetoric possibly encouraged historians to underestimate the significance of courtliness, whilst acknowledging that the court itself was a nerve-centre of politics and government. One of the twentieth century’s most

¹⁵ ‘With important local differences, this model is true of France or Brandenburg, Spain or England, Milan or the Netherlands’. Lawrence Stone, *The crisis of the aristocracy: 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965; repr. 1966), p. 385.

¹⁶ These ideas are discussed in chapter four.

distinguished Tudor historians, Geoffrey Elton, half-jokingly suggested that court culture was an irritating distraction from the serious business that was transacted in the royal entourage. As we shall see in chapter three, Elton attempted to differentiate ‘mere’ courtiers, whose expertise was largely confined to entertainment and adornment, from statesmen whose spheres of activity encompassed the court.¹⁷

Other factors contributed to the marginalization of the courtier in British historiography. Before the onset of revisionism, the upheavals of the mid seventeenth century were deemed symptomatic of modernizing processes that unfolded over decades, if not centuries. Whiggish scholars traced the evolution of parliamentary democracy from its Anglo-Saxon cradle to its Victorian coming-of-age. Their preoccupation with the ‘steadily growing’ strength of Parliament, and its victory over Charles I, left the courtier looking like a doomed anachronism.¹⁸ The march along the high road to civil war left him trailing in its wake. Mid twentieth century Marxist historians rejected the long-term constitutional emphasis of whiggish history, but offered instead their own grand narrative of modernization. They attributed the civil wars and interregnum to the inexorable rise of a politically active ‘bourgeois’ class.¹⁹ This interpretative framework could not easily accommodate the courtier in any capacity, other than that of an obstruction to be flattened by the locomotive of history.

¹⁷ G. R. Elton, ‘Tudor government: the points of contact. III. The court’, *THRS*, 5th ser., vol. 26 (1976), 211-28. See chapter three.

¹⁸ The reference to the ‘steadily growing’ strength of Parliament comes from Winston S. Churchill, *A history of the English speaking peoples*, 4 vols (London: Cassell & Company, 1956-58), II (1956), 113.

¹⁹ R. H. Tawney, ‘The rise of the gentry, 1558-1640’, *Economic History Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1941), 1-38; Lawrence Stone, ‘The anatomy of the English aristocracy’, *Economic History Review*, vol. 18, nos 1 & 2 (1948), 1-53 (esp. 1-2). See also Lawrence Stone, *The causes of the English revolution: 1529-1642* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972; repr. 1973), pp. 26-30.

Revisionism, with its emphasis on short-term causality and personal interaction, facilitated a reappraisal of the courtier's reputation.²⁰ Personal interaction was the *métier* of the character created by the Urbino interlocutors. Words, expressions, gestures and accomplishments were his professional tools. These devices seem trivial when placed in the context of grand historical schemata. Yet revisionist historians suggested that they could, in fact, affect the formulation of policy and the outcome of events. Such scholars were interested in the intimate brand of politics practised by Castiglione's courtier. Over the past three decades, interdisciplinary studies have confirmed that their interest was justified. Investigations into the physical structure of princely households have proved particularly fruitful, and have demonstrated the true political consequence of these nominally domestic institutions.²¹ David Starkey has highlighted the segregation of royal living quarters from the remainder of the establishment, which occurred (and was enforced with increasing rigidity) during the late medieval and early Tudor period.²² 'The frontier', observes Starkey,

lay at the door of the Privy Chamber. Behind lay the world of the Privy Lodgings. These got steadily larger with Henry VIII's relentless multiplication of galleries, closets and chambers, and they provided for more and more of his needs: he walked in the Privy Gallery or the Privy Garden; read in his Library, and slept in his Bedchamber. Yet the whole area was out of bounds to all but a handful of his servants.²³

²⁰ See, for example, Conrad Russell, *The causes of the English civil war* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 1-25.

²¹ As Neville Williams remarked, 'In an age of personal monarchy, the royal court of England was both the hub of the kingdom's affairs and the setting in which the sovereign lived out his public and private lives'. Neville Williams, 'The Tudors: three contrasts in personality', in *Courts of Europe*, ed. by Dickens, pp. 147-67 (p. 147).

²² David Starkey, 'Court history in perspective', in *The English court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, ed. by Starkey et al (Harlow: Longman, 1987), pp. 1-24 (pp. 3-4).

²³ Starkey, 'Court history', p. 4.

Access to these restricted zones was an invaluable political commodity; it afforded those who enjoyed it the opportunity to cultivate the favour, and perhaps even to influence the thinking, of the monarch. The privilege of attending the latter during what were essentially his rest and recreation hours depended to a significant extent on one's capacity to make oneself congenial to him. This was precisely what the Urbino courtier was designed to do. Clearly, he had the potential to be a dominant player on the political stage.

It is also worth noting that social and cultural historians have recently begun to engage with Renaissance conduct literature. As Anna Bryson observes, manners used to be treated as 'a peripheral or trivial area of individual behaviour', scarcely worthy of serious study.²⁴ The predictable result of this attitude was failure to appreciate the significance of 'civil conversation', demeanour and dress within early modern society. Scholars such as Bryson, Adam Fox and Markku Peltonen have helped to fill the lacuna. The studies they have published in the past fifteen years illuminate the potency of Castiglionean courtliness as a strategy for negotiating politics and managing a wide range of social scenarios.²⁵

Despite these very promising historiographical developments, Castiglione's contribution to English political culture has been under-evaluated. In 1995, Peter Burke

²⁴ Anna Bryson, *From courtesy to civility: changing codes of conduct in early modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 1-3.

²⁵ Bryson has demonstrated that sixteenth and seventeenth century society was 'characterized ... by a striking preoccupation with manners', based on the belief that 'manners maketh man'. Bryson, *Courtesy to civility*, pp. 1-3. Fox noted that manners, speech and fashions 'placed' a person, geographically and socially, and could also affect his or her success in business. Adam Fox, *Oral and literate culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 108-10. Peltonen discussed significance of 'civility' within the early modern political sphere. Markku Peltonen, *Classical humanism and republicanism in English political thought: 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 18-36.

published a useful survey of the reception of *Il libro del Cortegiano* throughout Europe over four centuries.²⁶ The chronological and geographical scope of Burke's slim monograph was truly impressive, but understandably, it precluded in-depth regional or national analysis. Literary scholars such as Daniel Javitch and Jennifer Richards have discussed the influence of Castiglione within early modern political discourse.²⁷ Yet much work remains to be done on the impact of *Il Cortegiano* in England. Nobody doubts that it was an important text. That it was widely read and well respected is taken as given.²⁸ Sir Philip Sidney's resemblance to its eponymous hero is frequently noted.²⁹ Nonetheless, English responses to the dialogue have been subjected to surprisingly little close analysis.

This thesis considers the extent to which Castiglione changed the image of the courtier, and shaped definitions of courtly conduct, during the second half of the sixteenth century. It focuses primarily upon the first English translation of *Il Cortegiano*, which was produced by Thomas Hoby and printed by William Seres in 1561. The circumstances under which Hoby translated the dialogue, and arranged for its publication, are slightly curious. The timing of the project, his motivation for undertaking and completing it, and the involvement of other protagonists, have never adequately been explained. These problems are addressed in chapter one of the thesis.

²⁶ Peter Burke, *The fortunes of the Courtier: the European reception of Castiglione's Cortegiano* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

²⁷ Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978); Jennifer Richards, *Rhetoric and courtliness in early modern literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 43-64.

²⁸ Jennifer Richards, for example, describes the Courtier as 'one of the most influential texts in Renaissance European culture'. Such statements are by no means uncommon. Richards, *Rhetoric and courtliness*, p. 43.

²⁹ Katherine Duncan-Jones observes that 'purely in terms of his talent and versatility, there is no doubt that Sidney did come nearer than most to fulfilling the Castiglionian ideal'. Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: courtier poet* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), p. 156.

Chapter two evaluates the reception of Hoby's *Covrtyer*, and other editions of *Il Cortegiano*, in Elizabethan England. It aims to provide a detailed picture of how English readers absorbed and appropriated the dialogue. It also suggests that the publication of Hoby's English translation in 1561, and Bartholomew Clerke's Latin translation in 1571/2, inaugurated a relatively novel vogue for literature that celebrated the role of the courtier within the commonwealth. Chapter three assesses the contribution of Castiglione's ideas to the self-fashioning of Elizabethan courtiers. It notes that *Il Cortegiano* delineates both 'martial' and 'civil', or 'humane', ideals of courtliness. It argues that, whilst the Castiglionean credentials of 'martial' courtiers (such as Sidney) are widely acknowledged, those of 'civil' courtiers (such as Burghley) have been overlooked.

The second half of the thesis is concerned with the deterioration of the courtier's reputation towards the end of Elizabeth's reign. Chapter four provides a survey of the anti-courtier literary tradition, from the classical era until the early sixteenth century. It highlights the survival of derogatory tropes and stereotypes, even at the height of England's love affair with Castiglione. It also considers the extent to which Elizabethan criticism of courtiers was framed in response to the political culture of Renaissance Italy. It documents a backlash against 'Italianate' manners and morals, and an increasingly prevalent tendency to associate courtiership with Machiavellian conduct. Chapter five explores the conflation of old prejudices about the court and its inhabitants with new concerns about Italian political culture. It examines the manifestation of this phenomenon within three literary genres: the history play; the beast fable; and verse satire. Chapter six assesses the status and reputation of courtiers between 1590 and

1603. It engages with the concept of the ‘nasty nineties’, which suggests that disillusionment with Elizabeth’s court was precipitated, suddenly and sharply, by the structural, administrative and economic crises of her ‘last decade’.³⁰ It seeks to identify the immediate issues that inflamed anti-courtier sentiment, without ignoring the literary antecedents of fin-de-siècle invective. It argues that Castiglione’s composite model of courtliness, which accommodated civil and martial codes of conduct, was seriously undermined during the 1590s by rhetoric emanating from the circle of Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex.

Most of the sources for the thesis are literary. Chapter one, which relies upon circumstantial evidence, draws on a more traditional range of sources (state papers, diplomatic and personal correspondence, journals, chronicles and registers). Such material is also consulted in chapter six, which interrogates the politics of the 1590s. Chapters two, three, four and five refer extensively to poems, fables, plays and satires. Courtiers feature prominently in Elizabethan literature, and by examining their various incarnations, we can monitor the fluctuation of their reputation. Biographies and letters also shed interesting light upon the representation of men and women who identified themselves as courtiers, and constructed their public personae accordingly. Portraiture is briefly discussed in chapters two and three, as visual self-fashioning is clearly relevant to this strand of the investigation. Chapters two and four also use library lists and inventories to assess the extent to which specific texts were circulating.

The body of literature addressing the status and function of Renaissance courtiers is

³⁰ John Guy, ‘The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth I?’, in *The reign of Elizabeth I: court and culture in the last decade*, ed. by Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; repr. 1999), pp. 1-19.

remarkably rich. It allows us to explore, in depth, the development and dissemination of courtly images, ideals and caricatures. It is perhaps less informative about the extent to which these cultural constructs were reflected in practice, on a day-to-day basis. The personal papers of many leading Elizabethan courtiers, such as Leicester and Raleigh, are frustratingly sparse. A number of letter collections and diaries, most notably those of Philip Gawdy, Sir John Harington, Rowland Whyte, Dudley Carleton and John Chamberlain provide fascinating details of life in the royal entourage at the end of the sixteenth century. Unfortunately for the student of Tudor court politics, such material is far more abundant for the Jacobean era. This is not a serious impediment to a thesis concerned primarily with literary stock-types and tropes; but it is certainly regrettable!

Dedicating *Il Cortegiano* to Michel de Sylva, bishop of Viseo, Castiglione observed that ‘if the booke shall generally please, I wil count him good, and think that he ought to liue: But if he shall displease, I will count him naught, and beleaue that the memorye of him shall soone perish’.³¹ There was, and is, no danger that the latter eventuality would come to pass. The Urbino courtier is one of the iconic literary figures of the Renaissance. Yet his reception and influence in Elizabethan England still merits further investigation.

³¹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ciii^v.

CHAPTER ONE

'HEE IS BECOME AN ENGLISHMAN'¹

In 1561, Thomas Hoby announced that the Courtier 'is become an Englishman'.² This development was long overdue. As we noted in the introduction, *Il libro del cortegiano* was originally published in Venice in 1528. The first Spanish translation appeared in print in 1534. A French translation followed three years later.³ There is no doubt that contemporary English readers were interested in, and familiar with, Castiglione's text.⁴ Yet they had to wait almost thirty years longer than their continental counterparts for a native vernacular edition. Hoby had actually begun translating the dialogue in 1552, but it was not ready for publication until 1556 at the earliest.⁵ A further five years elapsed before it finally came off the press. The printer, William Seres, intimated that Hoby would have been willing to publish much sooner, had circumstances permitted.⁶ The delay is undoubtedly puzzling, given that the work was internationally renowned and would presumably have been guaranteed an appreciative readership. The literature relating to the *Covrtyer* has never seriously attempted to explain this curiosity. Yet the story of how, when and why the English edition was produced throws considerable light upon the politics of publication in the mid-Tudor period.

To address the problem, we need to begin by reviewing Hoby's background and

¹ A version of this chapter was published as 'Thomas Hoby's English translation of Castiglione's Book of the Courtier', *Historical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 4 (December 2007), 769-86.

² Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Aiii^r.

³ Burke, *Fortunes of the Courtier*, pp. 62-4.

⁴ See, for example, David Starkey, 'The court: Castiglione's ideal and Tudor reality; being a discussion of Sir Thomas Wyatt's satire addressed to Sir Francis Bryan', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 45 (1982), 232-9.

⁵ Hoby's dedication was dated 1556. Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Bi^r.

⁶ *Ibid.*, sig. Aii^r.

career. Born in 1530, he matriculated at St John's College, Cambridge, in 1545. He left Cambridge in 1547, and thereafter led a rather peripatetic existence. He travelled extensively on the continent, and became renowned for his linguistic scholarship. His first major literary project was a translation of Martin Bucer's *Gratulation vnto the Churche of Englande*, which was a riposte to Stephen Gardiner's polemical defence of clerical celibacy.⁷ Hoby's evangelical sympathies (illustrated by his willingness to act as Bucer's mouthpiece) ensured that his political career stalled under Mary. In 1566, however, Elizabeth I appointed him ambassador to France, and he died in Paris later that year.⁸

Hoby was extremely well connected. His half-brother, Philip, was a highly regarded diplomat. During Edward's reign, the Hoby brothers worked closely and amicably with other rising stars in the political firmament, such as William Cecil, John Mason, John Cheke, Thomas Smith, William Parr and Walter Mildmay.⁹ The brothers were affiliated to the coterie that Winthrop Hudson has labelled 'the Cambridge Connection'.¹⁰ This was a group of individuals who attended Cambridge University during the 1530s and 1540s, and allied themselves with tutors John Cheke and Thomas Smith. They were particularly associated with a campaign to popularise an historically authentic method of Greek pronunciation, and were thus sometimes known as the Athenians.¹¹ They were

⁷ Martin Bucer, *The gratulation of the mooste famous clerke M. Martin Bucer ... vnto the Churche of Englande* (London: Richard Jugge, 1549).

⁸ L. G. Kelly, 'Hoby, Sir Thomas (1530-1566)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), xxvii, 442-3.

⁹ Thomas Hoby, *The travels and life of Sir Thomas Hoby, K^t of Bisham Abbey, written by himself: 1547-1564*, ed. by Edgar Powell, Camden, Third Series, vol. IV, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1902), pp. 66-7. See also Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Cecil and Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1955), pp. 34; 70-1.

¹⁰ Winthrop S. Hudson, *The Cambridge connection and the Elizabethan settlement of 1559* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), pp. 46-60.

¹¹ Stephen Alford, *The early Elizabethan polity: William Cecil and the British succession crisis, 1558-*

also interested in promoting vernacular English as a literary language.¹² Their devotion to Cicero, and his ideal of public service, was legendary.¹³ They were generally regarded as sympathetic to religious reform, although by no means all of them were Protestants.

The translation of *Il Cortegiano* – with its Ciceronian ethos and analysis of the usage and development of language – was an eminently suitable project for an ‘Athenian’ to undertake. In fact, it has seemed so entirely appropriate that Hoby should have wished to anglicize the work that few commentators, if any, have paused to consider his actual motivation for doing so. It is easy enough to understand why the project would have appealed to him when he first embarked upon it in 1552. Italian literature was popular among cosmopolitan Edwardian reformists, and its early sixteenth century disciples included Anne Boleyn’s brother Lord Rochford, the earl of Surrey, Thomas Wyatt and William Thomas.¹⁴ Edward Courtenay claimed to have taught himself the language whilst imprisoned in the Tower of London between 1538 and 1553. Princess Elizabeth and Sir Anthony Cooke’s daughter, Anne, both translated Italian sermons by the radical Protestant preacher Bernardino Ochino.¹⁵

The disproportionate representation of religio-political reformists among the vanguard of enthusiasts can partly be explained by the fact that several Italians who rose to

1569 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 16.

¹² Cathy Shrank, *Writing the nation in Reformation England, 1530-1580* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 143-54.

¹³ Henry Peacham, *The compleat gentleman* (London: [John Legat] for Francis Constable, 1622), p. 45.

¹⁴ Lewis Einstein, *The Italian Renaissance in England* (New York & London: Columbia University Press & Macmillan, 1902), pp. 97-8.

¹⁵ M. A. Overell, ‘Edwardian humanism and *Il Beneficio di Cristo*, 1547-1553’, in *Reassessing Tudor humanism*, ed. by Jonathan Woolfson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 151-73 (pp. 151-60).

prominence in England were Protestant refugees.¹⁶ Under Edward, an Italian Church was established in London for such individuals, which, according to the historian and antiquarian John Strype, developed into a kind of language school ‘for the use of such English gentlemen as had travelled abroad in Italy. That by their resorting thither, they might both serve God, and keep their knowledge of the Italian language’.¹⁷ Needless to say, those who chose to worship at the Italian church, whilst simultaneously improving their linguistic skills, were almost invariably Protestant.

Italian probably excited many reformists quite simply because Italy was deemed to be the cradle of advanced thought and culture. David Starkey has argued that, during the Edwardian era, ‘Power politicians such as Seymour, Somerset and John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, and intellectuals such as Thomas Smith, William Cecil and John Cheke, were progressives and thought of themselves as such. Their progressivism embraced every sphere of activity’.¹⁸ The Italian peninsula was undeniably glamorous to such individuals, as it was the birthplace of new learning and the rediscovery of classical civilization. As the poet Samuel Daniel would later observe, ‘The *Hebrewes* [were deemed to have] hatched knowledge, *Greece* did nourish it, *Italie* clothed and beautified it’.¹⁹

Hoby’s translation of *Il Cortegiano* was not simply inspired by his enthusiasm for

¹⁶ R. C. Simonini, *Italian scholarship in Renaissance England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1952), p. 7; John L. Lievsay, *The Elizabethan image of Italy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1964), pp. 7-8.

¹⁷ John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and establishment of religion, and other various occurrences in the Church of England, during Queen Elizabeth’s happy reign*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1814-24), vol. II part I, 41.

¹⁸ David Starkey, *Elizabeth: apprenticeship* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), p. 87.

¹⁹ Paolo Giovio, *The worthy tract of Paulus Iouius, contayning a discourse of rare inuentions, both militarie and amorous called impress: whereunto is added a preface contayning the arte of composing them*, trans. Samuel Daniel (London: [G. Robinson] for Simon Waterson, 1585), sig. *iiii^r-v.

Italian culture. His journal records that, having arrived in Paris in late July or early August 1552, 'the first thing I did was to translate into Englishe the third booke of the 'Cowrtisan', which my Ladie Marquesse had often willed me to do, and for lacke of time ever differed it'.²⁰ The 1561 publication states that Book III was 'Englised at the request of the Layde Marquesse of Northampton in anno 1551'.²¹ The marchioness of Northampton was Elizabeth Parr, wife of the influential courtier and politician, William Parr.

As the brother of the Protestant queen Katherine Parr, the marquis of Northampton was closely affiliated to the religious reformists of Hoby's acquaintance. At the age of thirteen, he had been married to Lady Anne Bouchier, who had deserted him in 1541. The couple's separation was legally recognised in 1542. The following year, Parr became involved with Elizabeth Brooke, who was the daughter of the MP and privy councillor, Lord Cobham.²² For the next eight years, Parr attempted to secure the dissolution of his marriage. His affair with Elizabeth Brooke was common knowledge, and the pair made no secret of their ambition to become man and wife.²³ A commission to consider his case for divorce was established, but, anticipating its conclusion, Parr arranged for a marriage service to be performed privately and this action was validated, rather belatedly, by Parliament in 1551.²⁴

For the first time, then, Elizabeth Brooke was officially recognised as the 'Ladye Marquesse of Northampton'. She was evidently determined to enjoy her newfound

²⁰ Hoby, *Life*, p. 78.

²¹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Aaiiii^v.

²² Susan E. James, 'Parr, William, marquess of Northampton', *DNB*, XLII, 856-8.

²³ *CSP dom. Ed.*, p. 22.

²⁴ James, 'Parr, William', *DNB*.

status, and participated extensively in London's social calendar.²⁵ Whilst her activities can be interpreted as a public celebration of her position, it seems plausible that she took other steps to assert her new-found respectability. Susan E. James has observed that 'Elisabeth's education had been neglected, and she never pretended to be an intellectual'.²⁶ In 1551, however, she assumed the role of literary patroness, requesting that a portion of one of the most celebrated books of her age be translated into English. If this was, indeed, atypical behaviour on her part, we can only suppose that the text possessed some special significance at this juncture in her career. In Book III of the *Courtier*, the protagonists stress the importance of virtue and reputation for a gentlewoman of the court: 'She ought also to be more circumspect [than a male courtier] and to take better heed that she giue no occasion to be yll reported of, and so to beehaue her selfe, that she be not onlye not spotted wyth anye fault, but not so much as with suspicion'.²⁷ By commissioning the translation of this book, Elizabeth may have sought to emphasize to contemporaries that her honour was now beyond reproach.

Elizabeth would certainly have been aware that her husband's late sister, Katherine Parr, had cultivated a formidable reputation as a patroness of the arts. Queen Katherine had given encouragement and financial support to musicians, artists, printers and authors.²⁸ She was particularly renowned for her sponsorship of Protestant devotional texts.²⁹ Margaret P. Hannay has noted that early modern women who produced or

²⁵ Susan E. James, *Kateryn Parr: the making of a queen* (Aldershot, Brookfield, Singapore & Sydney: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 360-1.

²⁶ James, *Kateryn Parr*, p. 99.

²⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Bbiii^r.

²⁸ James, *Kateryn Parr*, p. 2.

²⁹ John N. King, 'Patronage and piety: the influence of Catherine Parr', in *Silent but for the word: Tudor women as patrons, translators, and writers of religious works*, ed. by Margaret Patterson Hannay (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985), pp. 43-60.

promoted works of literature were often encouraged to concentrate exclusively upon religious material: 'women were permitted to break the rule of silence only to demonstrate their religious devotion by using their wealth to encourage religious education and publication by men, by translating the religious works of other (usually male) writers, and, more rarely, by writing their own devotional meditations'.³⁰ If Elizabeth's sole objective was to bolster her respectability, we might reasonably wonder why she chose to commission the translation of a secular work. It seems likely, however, that she also wished to advertise her status as a luminary of civil society. After all, Castiglione's interlocutors had argued that a female courtier should be more than 'a good huswief'. Virtue and modesty were no excuse for dull conversation, unsophisticated manners or an unprepossessing appearance:

for her that liveth in Court, me thinke there beelongeth unto her above all other thinges, a certein sweetnesse in language that may delite, wherby she may gentlie entertein all kinde of men ... accompanying with sober and quiet maners and with the honestye that must alwayes be a stay to all her deedes, a readie liveliness of wit, wherby she declare herself far wide from all dulnesse: but with such a kind of goodnes, that she may be esteemed no less chaste, wise and courteise, then pleasant, feat conceited and sobre: and therefore must she kepe a certein meane very hard, and (in a maner) dirived of contrarie matters, and come just to certein limites, but not passe them.³¹

Elizabeth could presumably appreciate the delicacy of this balancing act. Whatever she hoped to achieve through the translation, the Northamptons would have had ample opportunity to suggest the project to Hoby. In May 1551, Parr was sent to France at the head of an embassy with instructions to confer the Order of the Garter upon the French king, Henri II, and to arrange a betrothal between King Edward and Henri's daughter

³⁰ Margaret P. Hannay, 'Introduction', in *Silent but for the word*, ed. by Hannay, pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

³¹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Bbiii^v.

Elizabeth.³² Thomas Hoby accompanied the delegation, and his brother Philip was a commissioned negotiator.³³

Elizabeth Brooke's 'Englised' dialogue was never published independently. However, given the timing of the scheme, this is hardly surprising. In July 1553, a year after Hoby settled down to his assignment, Mary Tudor became queen of England. The implications for the Parrs were catastrophic, particularly since William had supported Lady Jane Grey's claim to the throne. The new queen stripped Parr of his title and withdrew the divorce that Thomas Cranmer had granted him. It was reported that Parr's pardon had been granted 'on condition that he shall take back his first wife and put away the daughter of Lord Cobham'.³⁴ It would thus have been impossible for Hoby, or anyone, to publish a work dedicated to the 'Lady Marquesse of Northampton' whilst Parr was known as the 'late marquess' and the queen was pointedly referring to Elizabeth by her maiden name.³⁵

The circumstantial details outlined above suggest that Hoby did not, at least initially, intend to translate all four books of the *Covrtyer*. We know that he was working on the third book in 1552, but we should not thereby infer that he had already anglicized the first two, or had immediate plans to engage with the fourth. Indeed, his dedication of 1556 explicitly asserts that when he finished Book III, he regarded his task as complete:

a great while I forbare [from a complete translation] and lingered the time to see if anye of a more perfect vnderstanding in the tunge, and better practised in the matter of the booke ... woulde take the matter in hande, to do his countrey so great benefite: and this imagination preuailed in me a long space after my

³² Jennifer Loach, *Edward VI* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 107-8.

³³ Hoby, *Life*, pp. 66-70.

³⁴ *Cal. Eng. Spain*, XI, 186.

³⁵ *CSP dom. Mary*, pp. 280, 319-20.

duetie done in translating the thirde booke (that entreateth of a Gentlewoman of the Courte) perswaded therto, in that I was enfourmed, *it was as then in some forwardness by an other, whose wit and stile was greatly to be allowed, but sins preuented by death he could not finish it* [my italics].³⁶

Whilst the identity of the alternative translator cannot be established conclusively, it is possible to suggest a highly plausible candidate. The first point to note is that he is identified by Hoby as an expert practitioner of Italian. In the early 1550s, the number of scholars known primarily for their proficiency in this particular area was still somewhat limited. Italian was a newly fashionable language, only recently elevated to the status of an essential accomplishment for members of the political and cultural elite. The publication of the first Anglo-Italian dictionary in 1550 testifies both to the growing enthusiasm for the tongue and to the need for basic aids to its acquisition.³⁷ Italian translation was a specialist skill; according to George B. Parks, ‘we do not find any translations direct from Italian published in England until Thomas Wyatt’s *Certain Penitential Psalms* (1549)’.³⁸ The translator of the *Covrtyer* would thus have belonged to a fairly select group of linguistically accomplished Italophiles.

Hoby’s apparent reluctance to name the individual is also striking and suggestive. In early modern dedications, acknowledgment of a predecessor’s work was often accompanied by a fulsome description of his or her learning and character. Thomas Wilson, for example, self-confessedly translated the *Orations of Demosthenes* in the intellectual shadow of Sir John Cheke. He recalled Cheke’s exposition of the orations, and expressed profound regret that the great man had not ‘Englished’ them himself:

³⁶ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Bⁱ^v.

³⁷ Simonini, *Italian scholarship*, p. 43.

³⁸ William Thomas, *The history of Italy*, ed. by George B. Parks (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Universty Press, for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1963), xii.

‘But seeing maister Cheeke is gone from vs to God, after whom we must all seeke to follow, and that this thing is not done by him, which I woulde with all my hart had bene done, for that he was best able: it can not be counted now, I trust, any fault in me, if I endeauour to doe that, the which I neuer sawe done before me’.³⁹ This warmly personal tribute to a deceased colleague contrasts markedly with the unspecific allusions in the preface to the *Covrtyer*.

Hoby may well have had good reason for his reticence. It seems probable that the translator to whom he so fleetingly refers was an evangelical Italophile who had antagonized the Marian authorities. John Ponet, Richard Morison and Edward Courtenay were all competent linguists with reputations for religious unorthodoxy. Moreover, their deaths fell within the parameters established by Hoby in that the scholar in question was alive for ‘a long space after’ Hoby completed his translation of Book III, begun in summer 1552, but was evidently dead when he composed the dedication in 1556. The likeliest candidate, however, is William Thomas.⁴⁰ Relatively little is known about Thomas. He was almost certainly born in Wales in the early sixteenth century, and by the 1540s, he had entered the service of the prominent Henrician courtier, Anthony Browne. Facing substantial gambling debts, he fled abroad in 1545 with money he had stolen from Browne, and was apprehended in Venice. His captor, Edmund Harvell, convinced the Council of his contrition, and Thomas was

³⁹ Demosthenes, *The three orations of Demosthenes chiefe orator among the Grecians, in fauour of the Olynthians, a people in Thracia, now called Romania: with those his fower orations titled expressly & by name against King Philip of Macedonie*, trans. by Thomas Wilson (London: Henry Denham, 1570), sig. [*i]^v.

⁴⁰ To the best of my knowledge, the only other person to identify Thomas as a candidate was P. J. Laven. Laven made the suggestion in his M.A. thesis of 1954, but asserted that ‘There is only a thin thread to hang this conjecture upon’. P. J. Laven, ‘Life and Writings of William Thomas (d. 1554)’ (unpublished master’s dissertation, University of London, 1954), pp. 366-8.

released to spend the next four years in Italy.⁴¹

In 1549, by which time Browne had died, Thomas was back in London. Edward VI's *Chronicle* records his appointment as clerk of the Privy Council in April 1550.⁴² He became involved with the young king's political education, supplying him with eighty-five Machiavellian 'Common places of state', and several treatises on subjects such as the reform of the coinage, the organization of armies and the forging of alliances with foreign princes.⁴³ Thomas remained in England after the accession of Mary in July 1553, despite counselling his Protestant friend Thomas Hancocke to flee the kingdom.⁴⁴ However, he was clearly profoundly unhappy with the Marian regime. He was implicated in the Wyatt conspiracy, and executed at Tyburn on 18 May 1554.⁴⁵

Thomas's political career and criminal escapades explain why Hoby would have been reluctant to identify him in 1556. Yet Thomas was arguably the most renowned Italian scholar of his day. In 1547, he composed a defence of Henry VIII's ecclesiastical

⁴¹ E. R. Adair, 'William Thomas', in *Tudor studies: presented by the board of studies in history in the University of London to Albert Frederick Pollard*, ed. by R. Seton-Watson (London: Longmans and Green, 1924), pp. 133-60 (pp. 133-7).

⁴² *The chronicle and political papers of King Edward VI*, ed. by W. K. Jordan (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 25.

⁴³ BL Cotton MS Vesp. D. XVIII, fols 1^r – 45^v.

⁴⁴ Thomas Hancocke, 'Autobiographical narrative of Thomas Hancocke, minister of Poole', in *Narratives of the days of reformation, chiefly from the manuscripts of John Foxe the martyrologist; with two contemporary biographies of Archbishop Cranmer*, ed. by John Gough Nichols, Camden First Series, vol. 77 (London: Camden Society, 1859), pp. 71-84 (p. 84).

⁴⁵ Anon, *The chronicle of Queen Jane, and of two years of Queen Mary, and especially of the rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. by John Gough Nichols, Camden, Old Series, vol. 48 (London: Camden Society, 1850), pp. 63-76. It is significant that Thomas died in 1554, whereas Morison, Ponet and Courtenay all died in 1556, the year in which Hoby composed his dedication, having finished his work upon Books I, II and IV. If he had not even considered making these translations until March, August or September 1556, he must have finished them within a remarkably short space of time. It seems more plausible, instead, that he heard of Thomas's death in the summer of 1554, and subsequently began work on the project that Thomas had been unable to complete. The first modern editor of the 'Englished' *Covrtyer*, Walter Raleigh, highlighted an entry in Hoby's journal for 1554-55: 'The writing begun the xviiiith of November I ended the ixth of Februarie'. According to Raleigh, 'That this writing was the translation of the Book of the Courtier seems hardly open to question'. Walter Raleigh, 'Introduction', in Balthazar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by Thomas Hoby, ed. by Raleigh (London: David Nutt, 1900), xxxvi.

policy in both English and Italian.⁴⁶ The *Peregrine*, like *Il Cortegiano*, was framed as a typically Italian dialogue, with a realistic setting and multiple protagonists.⁴⁷ In 1548, Thomas compiled an Italian grammar and dictionary which was published in England in 1550, and a *Historie of Italie* which was published in 1549.⁴⁸ After his return to the English court, he presented King Edward with a ‘poore new yeres gifte’ – a translation of *The narration Josaphat Barbaro, citezein of Venice, in twoo voyages, made th’one into Tana and th’other into Persia* – ‘being the worke of myne owne handes’.⁴⁹

Evidently, Thomas had the linguistic ability to ‘English’ the *Covrtyer*. We know that he read it; in his *History*, he commented that the Duke of Urbino’s palace ‘is a very fair house, but not so excellent as the Conte Baldessare in his *Courtesan* doth commend it’.⁵⁰ Moreover, Thomas was an enthusiastic disseminator of Italian culture in England. The dedication of his *Principal rvles of the Italien grammer* to John Tamworth reads like a manifesto for the promotion of Italian studies. ‘[E]xperience sheweth, howe much ... [Latin and Greek] haue flourished, remainyng yet (as they dooe) in great estimacion’, he wrote,

so seemeth ... [Italian] nowe to growe as a thirde towards them. For besides the auctours of this tyme (whereof there be manie woorthie) you shall almoste finde no part of the sciences, no part of any woorthie historie, no parte of

⁴⁶ For a contemporary copy of the dialogue in English, see BL Cotton MS Vesp. D. XVIII, fols 47^r – 81^r. Adair stated that the Italian version was the original; Laven disputed this assumption, but suggested that Thomas probably translated the English text into Italian himself. Adair, ‘Thomas’, in *Tudor studies*, ed. Seton-Watson, p. 149; Laven, ‘Life and writings of Thomas’, pp. 75-87.

⁴⁷ Virginia Cox, *The Renaissance dialogue: literary dialogue in its social and political contexts, Castiglione to Galileo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 9-10. One of the reviewers of my *HJ* article pointed out that English dialogues often featured only two protagonists. See, for example, Roger Ascham’s *Toxophilus* (London: Edward Whitchurch, 1545) – a self-consciously English work that celebrated the traditional English skill of archery.

⁴⁸ Laven, ‘Life and writings of Thomas’, pp. 30-6.

⁴⁹ *Literary remains of King Edward the sixth*, ed. by John Gough Nichols, 2 vols, (London: J. B. Nichols, 1857), I, 335.

⁵⁰ Thomas, *History of Italy*, p. 127.

eloquence, nor any parte of fine poesie, that ye haue not in the Italian tongue. So that if the Italians folowe other tenne yeres the diligence, that in these tenne yeres assed they haue vsed: surelie their tongue will be as plentifull as anie of the other.⁵¹

Thomas was also someone with whom Hoby was well acquainted, since the two men met on numerous occasions. Hoby's journal records, for example, an encounter at Strasbourg in January 1548, whilst they were at court together for the Christmas festivities of 1550.⁵² More significantly, both accompanied William Parr on his embassy to France in 1551.⁵³ If Hoby was indeed requested to translate Book III shortly before, or during, the mission, it is quite plausible that he mentioned the project to Thomas, and he would thus have been alerted to any plan of the latter's to translate all four dialogues. Moreover, in 1553, Hoby joined his brother on an embassy led by the Bishop of Norwich to the Imperial court, which Thomas also attended.⁵⁴

As well as knowing each other, Hoby and Thomas had a considerable number of allies and acquaintances in common, the most significant of whom was Walter Mildmay. We know that Mildmay was on intimate terms with the Hoby brothers; when Philip Hoby urged William Cecil to spend the Christmas of 1557 at Bisham, he instructed him to 'Exhort our friend Mildmay and his wife likewise to be there, that the company may be complete'.⁵⁵ In the early 1550s, William Thomas also married Mildmay's sister Thomasine. Moreover, Mildmay took a keen and active interest in his brother-in-law's literary projects. The publication of Thomas's *Principal rvles of Italian grammer*, for

⁵¹ William Thomas, *Principal rvles of the Italian grammer, with a dictionarie for the better vnderstandyng of Boccace, Petracha, and Dante: gathered into this tongue by William Thomas* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1550; facsimile reproduction Menston; Scolar Press, 1968), [i-iii].

⁵² Hoby, *Life*, ed. Powell, p. 4; Laven, 'Life and writings of Thomas', p. 66.

⁵³ Hoby, *Life*, ed. Powell, p. 66.

⁵⁴ Laven, 'Life and writings of Thomas', p. 367.

⁵⁵ *CSP dom. Mary*, p. 299.

example, was his initiative.⁵⁶ A translation of *Il Cortegiano* would certainly have had his warm support. Thomas can also be linked to the Parr family. His wife, Thomasine, was the widow of Anthony Bouchier, who served as Catherine Parr's auditor. Moreover, Thomas dedicated his tract on *The vanitee of this world* (1549) to 'the right woorshipfull and my singuler good Ladie, the Ladie Anne Herbert of Wilton', Anne Herbert being the sister of William and Katherine Parr.⁵⁷ The identification of a Parr connection is suggestive, given that it was William's wife, Elizabeth, who commissioned the original Hoby translation.

Despite their earlier acquaintance, Hoby would scarcely have wished to associate himself with Thomas in 1556. By this stage he was back in England, and consequently had good reason to avoid antagonizing the Marian government.⁵⁸ The Hoby brothers already had too many dubious – if not dangerous – connections. They were close to Edward Courtenay, whom some of the Wyatt conspirators had sought to place on Mary's throne as the husband of Princess Elizabeth. Letters written by Courtenay from Cologne are filled with friendly 'commendations' to Philip Hoby.⁵⁹ Philip was strongly suspected of complicity in the conspiracy that had cost Thomas his life. The Imperial ambassador Simon Renard described him as 'a heretic, a plotter, ill-disposed, an enemy of the Chancellor and deeply devoted to the Lady Elizabeth'. Moreover, Renard dismissed Philip's ostensible reason for leaving England in 1554 (to visit continental spa-towns for the sake of his health) as a 'pretext', insisting that he and his friends 'have prepared some new revolt, and are now getting out of the way until they see what

⁵⁶ Thomas, *Principal Rvles*, [i].

⁵⁷ William Thomas, *The vanitee of this world* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1549), sig. Aii^r.

⁵⁸ Hoby, *Life*, ed. Powell, p. 126.

⁵⁹ *CSP dom. Mary*, pp. 140-1.

happens'. In May 1554, Renard accused Philip of 'having formed some seditious plan' with Paget and Cobham, the latter being the father of Elizabeth Parr. In June he informed Charles V that 'it has been discovered that Hoby gave his approval to the recent rebellion'.⁶⁰ Renard was not the only influential figure to regard Philip as 'one of the stubbornest heretics and worst subjects of the Queen'.⁶¹ Stephen Gardiner, the bishop of Winchester, was equally mistrustful, and his hostility extended to Thomas Hoby. When translating Bucer's *Gratulation*, Thomas Hoby had rather tactlessly sneered at Gardiner's arguments against clerical marriage, and suggested that their 'railing' tone was 'farre unsemely for a sober Bishoppe'.⁶² In 1555, Philip's servant, Richard Scudamore, informed him that his 'kepyng of companye' with Marian malcontents on the Continent was 'much myslyked here at home'.⁶³ When Thomas returned to live 'at home', his position was understandably somewhat delicate. His reference to an anonymous translator would have allowed him to acknowledge William Thomas obliquely to members of their mutual circle, who would recognise and appreciate the allusion.

The Marian regime's suspicion of the Hoby brothers also helps to explain Hoby's strategy of dedicating his completed translation to Henry Hastings in 1556. Hastings was the son and heir of Francis Hastings, the second earl of Huntingdon. The latter had been a Protestant stalwart of Northumberland's government, and had participated in the abortive attempt to enthrone Lady Jane Grey in 1553. He had been condemned to

⁶⁰ *Cal. Eng. Spain*, XII, 259, 214, 239, 270.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁶² Hoby, *Life*, p. 5; Bucer, *Gratulation ... vnto the Churche of Englande*, sig. Aiii^r.

⁶³ 'The letters of Richard Scudamore to Sir Philip Hoby, September 1549 - March 1555', ed. by Susan Brigden, *Camden Miscellany XXX*, Camden Fourth Series, vol. 39 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1990), pp. 67-148 (p. 147).

death, but pardoned. In November 1553, Renard reported that Huntingdon and the duke of Suffolk (who had also been pardoned) 'are professing undying loyalty [to Mary] and saying that she may marry whom she pleases, for they will maintain, honour and obey her choice'.⁶⁴ Suffolk, however, revised his intentions and attempted to orchestrate rebellion in Leicestershire in January 1554. Doubtless eager to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the government, Huntingdon 'implored the Queen to be allowed to go forth against him and put a stop to his proceedings'.⁶⁵ The expedition was authorized, and when it culminated in the capture of Suffolk, 'that same day was Te Deum songe in the qwenes chapelle for joye of it'.⁶⁶

Hastings was a young man who shared Hoby's intellectual background and religious inclinations. He was educated by Cheke, Cooke and Ascham as a schoolroom companion of Edward VI, and attended Cambridge University. He was later renowned for his puritan sympathies. We should, however, be wary of attributing the dedication to a sense of spiritual solidarity. Like his father, Hastings conformed to the Catholic regime after being pardoned for his role in the Jane Grey debacle. Evidence of the family's resolute orthodoxy can be found in a dispensation granted to the earl and countess of Huntingdon in 1555, allowing them to eat meat during Lent 'because of nobility and zeal for the holy see'.⁶⁷ Hastings's reputation as a hot Protestant was

⁶⁴ *Cal. Eng. Spain*, xi, 366.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55. David Loades suggests that Huntingdon may also have wished to eliminate a local rival. See D. M. Loades, *Two Tudor conspiracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 31-3.

⁶⁶ *Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London*, ed. by John Gough Nichols, Camden, Old Series, vol. 53 (London: Camden Society, 1852), p. 87.

⁶⁷ *The correspondence of Reginald Pole*, ed. by Thomas F. Mayer, 3 vols (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002-4), III, 72.

established only after the Elizabethan accession.⁶⁸

Hoby probably chose Hastings as his dedicatee primarily because the latter was generally recognised as a youth of considerable promise. What could be more natural than to bracket Hastings's name with a treatise on the acquisition of accomplishments and the pursuit of a successful court career? Hoby was also likely to have been aware of his young friend's Italophilia; in 1556, Hastings described Italy as 'the country which I most desire to see'.⁶⁹ Indeed, Hastings may have asked for the translation, since Hoby subsequently described 'the continuall requestes and often perswasions of many yong gentlemen' as the encouragement that prompted him to produce the work.⁷⁰ We know from Hoby's journal that he encountered Hastings in Brussels in the autumn of 1555, at which point the latter could have petitioned Hoby to undertake the enterprise, or expressed interest in a work that was already underway.⁷¹

Another explanation for Hoby's dedication to Hastings can be proposed. Hoby returned to England late in 1555, after over a year of semi-official exile. The fact that he chose to do so suggests a willingness to make his peace with the Marian regime. After all, Hoby could hardly have predicted that the regime would collapse within three years. The death of Gardiner – which coincided with Hoby's return – may also have encouraged him to contemplate reconciliation. With an old adversary out of the way, Hoby may have identified an opportunity to rehabilitate himself in England. Consequently, he finished translating *Il Cortegiano*, prepared it for publication as a self-

⁶⁸ Claire Cross, *The Puritan earl: the life of Henry Hastings third earl of Huntingdon 1536-1595* (London, Melbourne, Toronto & New York: Ashgate & St. Martin's Press, 1966), pp. 3-21.

⁶⁹ Cross, *Puritan earl*, p. 19.

⁷⁰ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. B1^r.

⁷¹ Hoby, *Life*, ed. Powell, p. 126. Hoby's dedication also referred to 'The honour and entertainment that your noble Auncestors shewed Castilio the maker whan he was in this realme'. Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Aiii^v.

promotional bid, and dedicated it to a young man who, as well as being a sympathetic friend, was also the nephew and protégé of Cardinal Pole. Pole was a close friend and kinsman of the queen, Archbishop Cranmer's successor to the see of Canterbury, and the architect of England's restoration to the Catholic fold.⁷²

There were many reasons for Hoby to suppose that a translation of the *Covrtyer* would recommend him to Pole. Pole was an Italophile who had studied in Padua in the 1520s. Whilst at Padua, he had formed friendships with many of Castiglione's close acquaintances, including Vittoria Colonna, who featured in the preface to *Il Cortegiano*, and Pietro Bembo, who was allocated crucial speeches within the dialogues themselves.⁷³ Hoby may also have felt that his unorthodox religious background would be less distasteful to Pole than to many other Marian politicians. Pole was not a great persecutor of heretics, as John Foxe acknowledged: 'he was none of the bloody & cruell sort of papistes, as may appeare not only by staying the rage of [Bonner]: but also by the solicitous writing, and long letters written to Cranmer, also by *the* complaintes of certayne papistes, accusing him to the Pope, to bee a bearer with heretickes'. Foxe depicted the Cardinal as a fundamentally tolerant and intelligent man, 'notwithstanding the pomp and glory of the world afterward carried him away to play the papist as he did'.⁷⁴ A treatise begun by Walter Haddon and completed by Foxe similarly commended Pole as one 'whom although Rome had maruailously disguised', still

⁷² Thomas F. Mayer, *Reginald Pole: prince and prophet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 235, 252-301.

⁷³ Mayer, *Prince and prophet*, pp. 48-9, 105, 50-2.

⁷⁴ John Foxe, *Actes and monuments ... newly reuised and recognised, partly also augmented, and now the fourth time agayne published*, 2 vols (London: John Daye, 1583), II, 1973. All subsequent references to this edition.

retained his discernment and humanity.⁷⁵

Foxe also hinted that Pole's own spiritual affinities were by no means as Catholic as many supposed. '[I]t is thought of him', he wrote, 'that toward his latter end, a little before his coming from Rome to England, he began somewhat to savour the doctrine of Luther, and was no lesse suspected at Rome: Yea, & furthermore, did there at Rome conuert a certain learned Spanyarde from papisme to Luthers side'.⁷⁶ Hoby was well aware of these allegations. He had been in Rome for the papal election of 1550, at which point he noted that Pole's chances of securing the papacy were sabotaged by a smear campaign that branded him 'a verie Lutheran'.⁷⁷ Accusations of unorthodoxy dogged Pole throughout the latter years of his career. As a young man in Italy, he had formed part of an evangelical circle that included the radical theologians Peter Martyr and Bernardino Ochino.⁷⁸ In the early 1540s, Pole had been involved in the production of the *Beneficio di Cristo*; indeed, Thomas Mayer asserts that he 'deserves more credit for the work than he has usually received'.⁷⁹ This text stressed the necessity of justification by faith, and was translated from Italian into English by Edward Courtenay in the 1540s.⁸⁰ In 1555, it was reissued on the continent in a volume containing several explicitly Protestant tracts, which led to Pole being portrayed by his enemies as a closet nonconformist.⁸¹ Hoby, who was presumably looking for a patron for the *Covrtyer* at precisely the same time as the controversy arose, may well have observed these

⁷⁵ Walter Haddon and John Foxe, *Against Ierome Osorius byshopp of Siluane in Portingall and against his slaunders inuectiues an aunswere apologeticall: for the necessary defence of the euangelicall doctrine and veritie* (London: John Daye, 1581), sig. 77^v.

⁷⁶ Foxe, *Actes and monuments*, II, p. 1973.

⁷⁷ Hoby, *Life*, ed. Powell, p. 26.

⁷⁸ Mayer, *Pole*, p. 116.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁸⁰ See Overell, 'Edwardian humanism and *Il Beneficio di Cristo*'.

⁸¹ Mayer, *Pole*, p. 116.

developments with interest.

Hoby was not the only Athenian Protestant to make overtures to Pole at this juncture. William Cecil formed part of the delegation that accompanied the Cardinal on his journey back to England from the Imperial court in November 1554. As Pauline Croft has noted, 'Pole was ... the personal embodiment of Mary's project to return England to Roman obedience, so Cecil's journey to Brussels carried an unmistakable religious freight'. Furthermore, Cecil solicited and procured employment as Pole's secretary on a diplomatic mission in the spring of 1555. He formed what Croft has described as 'a successful working relationship' with Pole – to the extent that when the latter died, he bequeathed a silver inkstand to Cecil.⁸² Other Athenians identified the Cardinal as a potential source of patronage. In 1555, Roger Ascham sent him a presentation copy of *De nobilitate civili libri II. Eiusdem de nobilitate Christiana libri III*, by the Portuguese scholar Jeronimo Osorio. Pole evidently passed Ascham's gift on to the Hastings family, as Francis Hastings inscribed his name on the title page and annotated the text.⁸³ It would seem that Pole subsequently asked Henry Hastings to translate the work into English; on 3 July 1555, he wrote to Hastings's mother, Katherine, that he 'Woulde be glad to see your son's translation of the 'booke written of nobilitie' that I showed him'.⁸⁴

As this request indicates, Pole's interest in Hastings was keen and benevolent. On returning to England, he was anxious to re-establish cordial relations with his family.

⁸² Pauline Croft, 'The new English church in one family: William, Mildred and Robert Cecil', in *Anglicanism and the western Christian tradition: continuity, change and the search for communion*, ed. by Stephen Platten (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), pp. 65-89 (pp. 68-9).

⁸³ The text, along with Ascham's handwritten letter of dedication, is in St. John's College Library in Cambridge. I would like to thank the College for allowing me to view it.

⁸⁴ Mayer, *Correspondence of Pole*, III, 121.

In 1554, he had written wistfully to the countess of Huntingdon that a letter she had recently sent him ‘was the first from any member of my family for many years’.⁸⁵ Henry Hastings was among the vanguard of well-wishers who greeted Pole at Dover in November 1554.⁸⁶ Uncle and nephew subsequently exchanged letters, visits and even, on one occasion, venison pasties.⁸⁷ Hastings was therefore both a neo-Athenian and the cherished kinsman of Queen Mary’s close friend and advisor. He provided a link between men such as Hoby and the government under which they lived, and was thus ideally situated to effect their rehabilitation.

If we accept that the *Covrtyer* was a product designed for Marian consumption, one curiosity about the text can perhaps be explained. Hoby’s translation contains several explicitly Catholic references, which might have been expected to grate upon the sensibilities of an Athenian Protestant. In Book III, for example, one speaker observes ‘how much in dignitie all creatures of mankinde be inferiour to the virgin our Lady’. Queen Isabella of Spain is also commended for her religion.⁸⁸ These remarks are not refuted or qualified by any marginal commentary; indeed, the piety of Queen Isabella is highlighted by the annotation ‘Isabel Queene of Spaine. Praise of her’.⁸⁹ A tribute to the religious zeal of Mary’s grandmother could only have facilitated Hoby’s negotiation of a truce with the establishment. Moreover, a translation of *Il Cortegiano* would have been a cultural asset to any court, regardless of its religious complexion. The text was celebrated throughout Europe as a delightfully sophisticated analysis of elite manners and morals, which offered an excitingly expansive vision of what a Renaissance

⁸⁵ Mayer, *Correspondence of Pole*, II, 306.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 379.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, III, p. 287.

⁸⁸ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Dd. Ii^v; Dd. Iii^f; Ff. ii^v.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. Ff. ii^v.

courtier could, and should, be.⁹⁰ It was the perfect vehicle for an ambitious translator to advertise his cultural credentials and political *savoir faire*.

By 1556, Hoby was clearly preparing for publication. Before sending his manuscript to the press, it would appear that he circulated it among his friends to ascertain their opinions. The paratext to the 1561 edition included a letter from Cheke (who had since died) ‘To his loving frind Mayster Thomas Hoby’, in which he wrote that he had ‘taken sum pain at your chieflie in your preface, not in the reading of it for that was pleasaunt unto me ... but in changing certein wordes which might verie well be let aloan, but that I am verie curious in mi freendes matters, not to determijn, but to debaat what is best’.⁹¹ Since the letter is signed ‘From my house in Woodstreete the 16 of July, 1557’, we can deduce that Hoby spent the first half of 1557 informally soliciting comments from his friends, before proceeding to the printers.⁹²

The printer in question was William Seres, a Protestant who had been involved in the publication of works by John Bale, William Tyndale and John Cheke. After the regime change of July 1553, Seres’s patent for the production of primers and psalters was withdrawn, and he was briefly imprisoned.⁹³ He was apparently allowed to resume his trade – on probation, as it were – in 1556. This can be inferred from the fact that his name does not appear on a register of stationers taken in 1555.⁹⁴ However, on 21 May 1556, he presented an apprentice to the Company.⁹⁵ He was mentioned in the Stationers’ Charter of 1557 as one of Mary’s ‘beloved and faithful lieges’. This does

⁹⁰ Burke, *Fortunes of the Courtier*, pp. 47-56.

⁹¹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Aaai^r.

⁹² *Ibid.*, sig. Aaai^v.

⁹³ Elizabeth Evenden, ‘Seres, William (d. 1578 x 80)’, *DNB*, XLIX, 773-4.

⁹⁴ *Transcript of the registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554-1640*, ed. by Edward Arber, 5 vols. (London: Stationers’ Company, 1875), I, xxxii-xxxiii.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 3^v.

not, of course, denote that the authorities had overcome their mistrust of him; John Foxe was also listed as a 'beloved and faithful liege'.⁹⁶ Seres would have needed to tread carefully to protect his recently restored professional status and freedom.

As well as being a printer, Seres was a household servant of William Cecil.⁹⁷ It is unclear if the latter was in any way responsible for his servant's commission to publish the *Covrtyer*. Cecil visited Hoby at Bisham in the summer of 1557. We know that Hoby was circulating the manuscript among friends at this juncture, and it seems probable that he showed it to his guest. Moreover, Hoby spent the following summer at Burghley House in Northamptonshire.⁹⁸ On either occasion, Cecil may have agreed to facilitate the *Covrtyer*'s publication if possible, offering Hoby the services of his attendant printer. It is worth noting that the *Covrtyer* was, generically, quite different from the type of text that Seres usually handled. Devotional works always had been, and continued to be, his staple fare. This lends credence to the theory that his production of Hoby's book owed more to some personal connection with the author, than to his professional reputation.

The text issued in 1561 was prefaced by a letter from Seres, explaining that it would have been released earlier 'but that there were certain places in it whiche of late years being misliked of some, that had the perusing of it (with what reason judge thou) the Author thought it much better to keepe it in darknes for a while, then to put it in light unperfect and in peecemeale to serve the time.'⁹⁹ The phrase 'of late years' is probably

⁹⁶ Arber, *Registers of the Company of Stationers*, I, xxviii.

⁹⁷ Peter Blayney, 'William Cecil and the stationers', in *The Stationers' Company and the book of trade 1550-1990*, ed. by Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1997), pp. 11-34 (p. 26).

⁹⁸ Hoby, *Life*, pp. 126-7.

⁹⁹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Aii^r.

a pointed reference to the Marian era; this is implied by the suggestion that Hoby was put under pressure ‘to serve the time’. Seres did not specify which passages were deemed offensive. *Il Cortegiano* was, however, treated as a risqué text by many Catholic authorities in Europe. Anti-clerical jokes, allusions to Fate and Castiglione’s secular approach to political analysis all seem to have caused consternation, and the text was placed on the Vatican’s Index of Prohibited Books in 1590.¹⁰⁰

Neither Seres nor Hoby was in any position to promote a contentious work in 1557-8. The chartering of the Stationers’ Company in 1557 facilitated greater regulation of the book trade; the Charter permitted the Master and Wardens of the Company to search for, seize and destroy unlicensed works, and to imprison their printers.¹⁰¹ In March 1557, the Privy Council arrested six individuals for involvement in the production of unauthorized books. Six months later, the printer, John Cawood, had his premises searched after the Council suspected him of handling dubious texts.¹⁰² Other printers were subjected to similar treatment in 1558.¹⁰³ Five months before Mary’s death, the government prescribed draconian penalties for ownership of ‘bokes filled bothe with heresy, sedityon and treason’.¹⁰⁴ Although *Il Cortegiano* was never explicitly

¹⁰⁰ Burke, *Fortunes of the Courtier*, p. 104. See pp. 99-116 for a discussion of the censorship to which Castiglione’s work was subjected.

¹⁰¹ The Stationers’ Charter did not represent a premeditated attempt by the government to boost its policing powers. The Stationers sought and procured incorporation to enhance their authority and protect their professional interests. See D. F. MacKenzie, ‘Printing and Publishing 1557-1700: Constraints on the London Book Trade’, in *The Cambridge history of the book in Britain*, ed. by Lotte Hellinga, J. B. Trapp, John Barnard, D. F. MacKenzie and Maureen Bell, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999-), iv, 553-67 (554). However, David Loades has observed that ‘the government depended heavily on the cooperation of the company in controlling subversive publication’. David Loades, *Politics, censorship and the Reformation* (London, 1991), p. 104.

¹⁰² Alec Ryrie, ‘Cawood, John (1513/14-1572)’, *DNB*, x, 685-6.

¹⁰³ Loades, *Politics, censorship and the Reformation*, p. 117.

¹⁰⁴ Mary I, *By the Kynge and the Quene whereas dyuers bokes filled bothe with heresy, sedityon and treason, haue of late, and be dayly, brought into this realme ... and some also couertly printed within this realme* (London: John Cawood, 1558).

mentioned in royal proclamations that listed prohibited works, some authoritative figure 'mislyked' its contents, which was sufficient reason for Hoby and Seres to refrain from publishing it.¹⁰⁵

The Stationers' Company accounts reveal that at some point between 7 July 1560 and 8 July 1561, Seres paid twelve pence 'for his lycense for pryntinge of a boke Called Curtyssye', which can only be a reference to Hoby's *Covrtyer*.¹⁰⁶ *Il Cortegiano* finally became an Englishman. His apotheosis was a complex and protracted process. Thomas Hoby began translating a portion of Castiglione's text in 1551, when Italian culture was deemed radical and progressive. He undertook this commission to celebrate the status and success of the Protestant Parrs under King Edward VI, but 'forbare' from a complete translation out of deference to another Italian scholar, who can be identified with reasonable confidence as William Thomas. After Thomas's death in 1554, Hoby resumed work on the dialogues. This time, the text was apparently intended to effect a rapprochement between Hoby and the Catholic government under which he now lived. Despite Hoby's efforts, his translation was not actually published until his credibility, as well as that of his friends, was restored by the Elizabethan accession.

¹⁰⁵ Mary I, *By the Kyng and the Quene where as by the statute made in the seconde yeare of Kynge Henry the fourth, concernyng the repression of heresies* (London: John Cawood, 1555).

¹⁰⁶ Arber, *Registers of the Company of Stationers*, 1, 62.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RECEPTION OF THE COURTIER¹

Today, according to J. R. Woodhouse, the *Courtier* is the ‘most widely-known least-read book of the Renaissance’.² It is rare to find a study of political culture that does not pause, however briefly, to pay obeisance to the shrine of Castiglione’s reputation. The *Courtier* is eminently quotable, and the Urbino interlocutors found something interesting to say about an impressively wide range of issues. References to, and quotations from, the dialogues are consequently ubiquitous. Yet the extent to which scholars have actually engaged with the text as a whole can be difficult to determine. In sixteenth century England, *Il Cortegiano* was both widely-known and well-read. Nonetheless, the task of assessing responses to the work is surprisingly problematic. As with modern academics and students, it is not always easy to gauge who read what, or why, or how, or what they made of it.

Our particular interest in Hoby’s translation adds a further complication. By 1561, many educated Englishmen and women were already familiar with *Il libro del Cortegiano* in the original Italian. In 1530, Edmund Bonner wrote to Thomas Cromwell, reminding the latter of a promise ‘to make me a good Ytalion’, and requesting the loan of ‘the boke called Cortigiano in Ytalion’.³ In 1538, Sir Thomas

¹ In this chapter, I discuss several different editions of the *Courtier*. When I am not citing any specific edition, I refer to ‘the *Courtier*’. Castiglione’s original Italian text is referred to as ‘*Il Cortegiano*’, Hoby’s translation as ‘*The Covrtyer*’, Bartholomew Clerke’s Latin translation as ‘*De Curiali*’, and the two major French translations as *Le Courtisan*.

² J. R. Woodhouse, *Baldesar Castiglione: a reassessment of the Courtier* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1978), ix.

³ Henry Ellis, *Original letters illustrative of English history*, 11 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1846; repr. Dawson’s of Pall Mall, 1969), 3rd series, II, 178. I am greatly indebted to Peter Burke’s list of

Wyatt produced what David Starkey has argued was a clever critique of Castiglione in his *Satire addressed to Sir Francis Bryan*. If Starkey's reading of Wyatt's satire is correct, Wyatt was confident that Bryan would be sufficiently conversant with Castiglione's precepts to appreciate his juxtaposition of 'the never-never land of an idealized Urbino with the reality of the Tudor court'.⁴ Several pre-Elizabethan works intended for public consumption also assumed an awareness of *Il Cortegiano's* reputation and contents. During Edward VI's reign, for example, a published account of Somerset's expedition to Scotland described Sir John Luttrell as 'both a good Captain at warfare in feld, and a wurthy courtyar in peace at home'. A marginal note explained laconically: 'I mean suche a one as Counte Balthazar the Italian in his boke of Courtyar doth frame'.⁵

The *Courtier* 'in Ytalion' was highly collectable, and the growing volume of traffic to Italy ensured that it was relatively easy to procure. Sir William More of Loseley, in Surrey, had an inventory taken 'of all suche GOODS as I WILLIAM MORE, Esquiere, had the 20th day of August, Anno Domini 1556'. The books in his chamber included 'the Curtesan, in Italian', which was valued at a very reasonable 12d.⁶ A list of volumes collected by Sir Thomas Smith, dated 1 August 1566, mentions 'Il Cortegiano'.⁷ Henry Howard, the future earl of Northampton, owned and annotated a 1541 edition of the

individuals and families throughout Europe who owned, referred to, or manifestly borrowed from, the *Courtier* before 1700. The list is extensive and detailed (I have only detected a few omissions). See Burke, *Fortunes of the Courtier*, pp. 163-78.

⁴ David Starkey, 'The court: Castiglione's ideal and Tudor reality: being a discussion of Sir Thomas Wyatt's satire addressed to Sir Francis Bryan', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 45 (1982), 232-9 (238).

⁵ William Patten, *The expedition into Scotlande of the most woorthely fortunate prince Edward, duke of Soomerset* ([London: Richard Grafton, 1548]), sig. H7^r.

⁶ John Evans, 'Extracts from the private account book of Sir William More, of Loseley, in Surrey, in the time of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth', *Archaeologia: miscellaneous tracts relating to antiquity*, vol. 36 (1855), 284-310 (291).

⁷ John Strype, *The life of the learned Sir Thomas Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1698), p. 144.

work.⁸ So did Gabriel Harvey.⁹ Sir Thomas Knyvett's library included a 1550 edition of the 'Cortegiano de Conte Baldesar Castiglione'.¹⁰ Sir Thomas Tresham had a Venetian edition from 1564.¹¹

English readers at home and abroad also had access to French translations of *Il Cortegiano*. The earliest of these was Jacques Colin's *Le Courtisan*, published in 1537. The Colin text, later modified by Melin de Saint-Gelais, retained its popularity until it was superseded by Gabriel Chappuys' *Le Parfait Courtisan en deux langues* in 1580. Sir William More owned 'the curtesan, in french' (it was worth 8d more than his Italian *Courtier*). The library of Sir Edward Coke, catalogued in 1634, boasted a 1569 Parisian edition of 'Le Curtisan de Baltasar de Castillion'. Coke married the widow of the model Elizabethan courtier, Sir Christopher Hatton, and W. O. Hassall believed that Coke's *Courtisan* was almost certainly inherited from Hatton's collection of Italian literature.¹²

Hoby's *Covrtyer* was not the only translation of *Il Cortegiano* to be produced in England. Bartholomew Clerke published a popular Latin translation in 1571/2. *Balthasaris Castilionis Comitis De Curiali siue Aulico* was reissued five times within the next fifty years (in 1577, 1585, 1593, 1603 and 1612), during which time only three more editions of the *Covrtyer* were produced (1577, 1588 and 1603). This has

⁸ It was originally believed that this copy belonged to Howard's father, the earl of Surrey. See Bent Juel-Jensen, 'The poet earl of Surrey's library' *The Book Collector*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Summer 1956), 172.

⁹ G. C. Moore Smith, *Gabriel Harvey's marginalia* (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1913), p. 81.

¹⁰ CUL, MS Ff. 2. 30, fol. 38^v.

¹¹ BL Add. MS 39, 830 (Tresham papers III), fol. 187^v.

¹² W. O. Hassall, *A catalogue of the library of Sir Edward Coke* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 87; xiii.

prompted several scholars to suggest that *De Curiali* was the more influential text.¹³ Daniel Javitch has noted that references to *The Courtier* became more prolific in the 1570s, which might be attributable to the impact of Clerke's work.¹⁴ It is true that some Elizabethan authors explicitly cited the Latin translation. Yet it is important to consider the context of such citations before we draw conclusions about the relative currency of *De Curiali* and the *Covrtyer*. Two well-known allusions to the former work occur in passages defending the art of translation. In his preface, Clerke confronted those who disparaged translators; if they thought the job was easy, he argued, they should pick up a copy of *Il Cortegiano*, attempt to translate a few pages, and then compare their efforts with his.¹⁵ 'N. W.' was writing to similar effect when he inquired whether Castiglione 'shal be more reuerenced for his Courtier, then *D. Clarke* admired for inuesting him with so courtlie robes?'.¹⁶ John Harington also referred to *De Curiali* whilst endorsing Clerke's 'prettie challenge' to 'those that count it such a contemptible and trifling matter to translate'.¹⁷ Given their apologetic agenda, it was natural for 'N. W.' and Harington to cite the sympathetic Clerke text. We should not assume that *De Curiali* was simply the edition that sprang automatically to mind.

It is probably not particularly helpful to spend too much time trying to work out precisely which version of the *Courtier* exerted the most influence on various authors

¹³ See, for example, Julius A. Molinaro, 'Castiglione and his English translators', *Italica*, vol. 36, no. 4 (December 1959), 262-78 (262-3).

¹⁴ Javitch, *Poetry and courtliness*, p. 4.

¹⁵ Balthasar Castiglione, *Balthasaris Castilionis Comitis De Curiali siue Aulico*, trans. by Bartholomew Clerke (London: John Daye, 1571/2), sig. Bj^v.

¹⁶ Paolo Giovio, *The worthy tract of Paulus Iouius, contayning a discourse of rare inuentions, both militarie and amorous called impress. Whereunto is added a Preface contayning the arte of composing them, with many other notable deuises*, trans. by Samuel Daniel (London: [G. Robinson] for Simon Waterson, 1585), sig. *iiii^r.

¹⁷ John Harington, 'An Apologie of poetry', in Lodovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, trans. by Harington (London: Richard Field, 1591), sig. ¶viii^r.

and readers. For many individuals, there was no definitive text. Ownership of multiple copies was reasonably common. We have already seen that Sir William More possessed the *Courtier* in French and Italian. Gabriel Harvey and Sir Thomas Knyvett acquired Hoby and Clerke translations respectively, in addition to their Italian copies.¹⁸ Mark H. Curtis' investigation of the wills and inventories that were processed by Oxford University's Chancellor's Court revealed that Edward Higgins, a scholar who died in 1588, 'had three copies of the *Courtier*, one in English, another in French, and a third in Latin'. John Glover, who died in 1578, 'also had two copies of this work, one in the original Italian and the other in French'.¹⁹ The 1588 edition of the *Covrtyer* was, in fact, trilingual; the Hoby translation was juxtaposed with Castiglione's original text and Chappuys' *Le Courtisan*.

Allowing for the fact that the cultural footprints of any particular *Courtier* will be difficult to trace, we can make some observations about the reception of the dialogue, and Hoby's rendition of it, in Elizabethan England. Among historians and literary scholars, there is widespread consensus that the *Courtier* was assimilated eagerly and, in most cases, uncritically. It is worth investigating whether this consensus can be challenged, or at least qualified. A. L. Rowse asserts that Castiglione completely defined 'the ideal of a courtier', adding that it is 'remarkable how closely the profession

¹⁸ Moore-Smith, *Harvey's marginalia*, pp. 81-2.

¹⁹ Mark H. Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge in transition 1558-1642: an essay on changing relations between the English universities and English society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 135-6. John Tatham, Richard Ferne, Thomas Bolt and John Hornsley, whose inventories were processed by the Chancellor's court in 1576-8, owned the *Courtier* in English only. *Private libraries in Renaissance England: a collection and catalogue of Tudor and early Stuart book-lists*, 6 vols (New York & Marlborough: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies & Adam Matthew Publications, 1992-2004), ed. by Robert J. Fehrenbach and Elizabeth S. Leedham-Green, IV, 216; V, 83, 207 and 262. The inventories of John Simpson, Thomas Pope and Thomas Tatham (1577, 1578 and 1586) mention 'Aulecus Clarkii', 'Aulicus latine' and 'clark de aulico' only. *Private libraries in Renaissance England*, V, 160 and 276; VI, 88.

of courtier, even in England, adhered to his specification'.²⁰ Paul Siegel concurs: 'Castiglione's *Courtier*, in Hoby's translation, was the most influential source of [the] ideal of the courtier'.²¹ Daniel Javitch's analysis of Elizabethan courtliness was deliberately based upon *Il Cortegiano*:

My dependence on the Italian book is not arbitrary. The *Courtier* was one of the most influential conduct books in England ... In fact, by relying on the Italian code to define model norms of late Tudor courtliness, I actually imitate Elizabethan writers who, instead of formulating anew the requisites of the English courtier, simply deferred to Castiglione's prescriptions.²²

Walter Schrunner commented 'wie weit Castigliones Werk in seiner ganzen Tufe und Totalität in das Kulturbewußtsein Englands eingegangen ist'.²³ Rather than simply accepting such statements, we should analyse the ways in which the *Courtier* was assimilated; this will allow us to develop a more nuanced understanding of its influence in England.

Scholars who believe that the Castiglionean version of the courtier materialized on the Elizabethan scene fully developed, like Venus from the sea, often cite two contemporary references to Hoby's translation. Roger Ascham famously commended the work in his *Scholemaster*, composed between 1564 and 1568, and published posthumously in 1570.²⁴ Ascham endorsed Castiglione unreservedly, asserting that his teachings should be 'diligentlie folowed' by young gentlemen. 'I meruell', he added,

²⁰ A. L. Rowse, *The Elizabethan Renaissance: the life of society* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 55-6.

²¹ Paul N. Siegel, 'English humanism and the new Tudor aristocracy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 13, no. 4 (October 1952), 450-68 (467).

²² Javitch, *Poetry and courtliness*, pp. 4-5.

²³ Roughly translated, 'how far Castiglione's work in its entirety penetrated the cultural consciousness of England'. Walter Schrunner, *Castiglione und die englische Renaissance* (Berlin: Junfermann, 1939), p. 88.

²⁴ For the dating of the *Scholemaster*, see Lawrence V. Ryan, *Roger Ascham* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1963), pp. 252-54.

‘this booke, is no more read in the Court, than it is, seying it is so well translated into English by a worthie Ientleman Syr Th. Hobbie’.²⁵ The anonymous author of a dialogue *Of Cyuile and Vncyuile Life*, published in 1586, was still more evangelical. During the course of the dialogue, the sophisticated city-dweller Valentine declines to describe a good courtier to his rustic friend, Vincent: ‘For to take vpon mee to frame a Courtier were presumption, I leaue that to the Earle Baldazar, whose Booke translated by Sir Thomas Hobby, I thinke you haue, or ought to haue reade’. When Vincent quizzes Valentine about the age at which a courtier ought to refrain from certain activities (such as dancing and the wooing of women), the latter responds impatiently: ‘I pray you presse mee no more with these demaunds, for I referred you to a booke *that* can better enforme you’. Valentine subsequently restates his position: ‘I will speake no more of Court, but as I haue oft tolde, wish you to peruse the booke of the Courtier’. In the closing exchanges, Vincent summarises everything he has learned from Valentine. He recounts a few points ‘Touching the Court and Cittie’; ‘Concerning the rest, you referre mee to the Booke of the Courtier’.²⁶ Castiglione’s work is thus presented as the definitive guide to courtly conduct. As far as Valentine and Vincent are concerned, the image of the courtier in England is (or should be) identical to that of the Urbino prototype.

Such unqualified willingness to embrace an Italian model of courtliness might prompt us to ask whether *Il Cortegiano* did, in fact, ‘become an Englishman’, as Hoby claimed.

As a translator, Hoby’s stated intention was to ‘folow the very meaning & woordes of

²⁵ Roger Ascham, *The scholemaster* (London: John Daye, 1570), sig. 20^v.

²⁶ Anon, ‘The English courtier, and the cuntry–gentleman: a pleasaunt and learned disputation, betweene them both’, in *Inedited tracts: illustrating the manners, opinions, and occupations of Englishmen during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, ed. by W. C. Hazlitt (London: Roxburghe Library, 1868; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, [1964?]), pp. 1-93 (pp. 68; 75; 77; 93).

the Author' as closely as possible.²⁷ This attitude can be contrasted with that of Castiglione's Polish translator, Lukasz Górnicki. Górnicki reinvented the Urbino interlocutors as Polish notables, gathered in the villa of Bishop Samuel Maciejowski in the summer of 1549. The title of his translation – *Dworzanin poliski*, or *The Polish Courtier* – reflects his determination to give *Il Cortegiano* a new context and identity.²⁸ Hoby had no such ambitions; his *Covrtyer* remained an authentically Italian creature. The protagonists discuss specifically Italian concerns. In Book I they consider the relative merits of various regional dialects ('ye have not a notable Citye in Italy that hath not a divers maner of speache from all the rest'). They seek to identify the most civilized strains of dialect, and 'the most gorgeous and fine woordes out of every parte of Italye', so that their Courtier can write and converse in a suitably refined form of Italian.²⁹ Of course, the cultivation of vernacular languages was a pan-European phenomenon in the sixteenth century.³⁰ To the Urbino interlocutors, however, the preservation and promotion of Italian was a matter of peculiar urgency. They were keenly aware 'that Italy hath bene, not onely vexed and spoyled, but also inhabited a long time with barbarous people', and that 'by the great resort of those nations, the latin

²⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, preface, sig. Bii^r.

²⁸ David J. Welsh, 'Il Cortigiano Polacca (1566)', *Italica*, vol. 40, no. 1 (March 1963), 22-7.

²⁹ Several of the protagonists believed that 'the Tuskane tunge is fairer than al the rest', whereas the Bergamask tongue was deemed particularly barbarous. Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Fi^v.

³⁰ See, for example, Joachim du Bellay, *La deffence et illustration de la langue françoise (1549)*, ed. by Jean-Charles Monferran (Geneva: Droz, 2001), pp. 73-180, and Richard Mulcaster, *The first part of the elementarie which entreateth chiefe of the right writing of our English tung* (London: Thomas Vautroullier, 1582), esp. ch. 13 (pp. 77-83) and ch. 14 (pp. 83-100). Sir Humphrey Gilbert argued that vernacular languages should be treated as appropriate vehicles for eloquence and oratory, because 'in what language soeuer learning is attayned, the apliance to vse is principally in the vulgare speech, as in preaching, in parliament, in Cownsell, in Commyssion, and other offices of Common Weale'. Humphrey Gilbert, 'Queene Elizabethes achademy', in *Queene Elizabethes achademy, a booke of precedence, &c., with essays on Italian and German books of courtesy*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society, Extra Series no. VIII (London: N. Trübner for the Early English Text Society, 1869), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

tunge was corrupted and destroyed'.³¹ They had also witnessed firsthand the depredation of the Italian peninsula by modern-day 'barbarians'. The fear of cultural, political and military subjugation underpinned their discussion on language – and pervaded all four of the dialogues. This fear was explicitly addressed in Book IV, when Ottaviano considered the bleak possibility that Italy would become little more than a battleground for the great powers of Europe.³² *Il Cortegiano* thus contemplated, and commented on, the particular plight of the Italian states. Castiglione's proto-nationalist agenda was difficult to disguise without extensive reworking of the dialogues.

Moreover, the setting of *Il Cortegiano* was explicitly Italian. Castiglione placed Urbino on the map for English readers.³³ He introduced the dialogue by pinpointing the precise geographical location of duke Guidobaldo's palace, and describing the surrounding countryside. Hoby translated the description faithfully:

the lytle Citye of Urbin is sytuated upon the side of the Appenine (in maner) in the middes of Italy towards the Golf of Venice. The which for all it is placed emonge hylles, and those not so pleasaunt as perhappes some other that we behould in many places, yet in this point the element hathe been favourable unto it, that all aboute, the cuntrye is very plentyfull and full of fruites ...³⁴

The milieu provided by the ducal court of Urbino was also politically, socially and culturally characteristic of Renaissance Italy. Denis Hay has described intimate, regional courts that attracted luminaries from across Europe as 'peculiar to the Italian

³¹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Fii^v.

³² *Ibid.*, sig. Qqiii^v.

³³ When the city of Urbino was mentioned in English texts, it was almost invariably in conjunction with the *Courtier*. This is particularly evident in travel narratives. See, for example, *The autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, ed. by James M. Osborn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 68: 'from hens [Ferrara] to the town of Vrbyn, I after took my way, / of which the book namd the Courtier, doth many praizes say'.

³⁴ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Aii^r.

scene'.³⁵ The Courtier was designed for just such an environment; his formidable talents, complemented by disarming *sprezzatura* and delightful manners, were ideally suited to the close conviviality of a small yet illustrious entourage. Indeed, Castiglione presented him as an asset to which rulers who did not command enormous households, extensive lands or fabulous wealth could nonetheless aspire. He wrote that any prince who was served by, and worthy of, such a courtier, 'although hys state be but small, maye notwithstandinge be called a myghtye Lorde'.³⁶ This idea was particularly relevant and reassuring to Italian potentates, who manifestly lacked the resources of a Valois king or Habsburg emperor. It is indicative of Castiglione's concern to enhance the political and cultural credibility of small-state Italy.

The Italian origins of *Il Cortegiano* were obvious to English readers.³⁷ Nonetheless, Raymond B. Waddington has argued that English men and women felt a special affinity for Castiglione, who had travelled to England in 1506 to be invested with the Order of the Garter on behalf of duke Guidobaldo. According to Waddington, 'members of the Tudor courts would have seen *The Courtier* as a book written by an honorary

³⁵ Burckhardt wrote that the Courtier's persona encompassed 'much that could only exist at courts highly organized and based on personal emulation, such as were not to be found out of Italy'. Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance*, p. 236. One feature of the Urbino court that Górnicki deemed particularly Italian was the high profile of the women there. He cut the female characters out of *Dworzanin poliski*, arguing that Polish ladies were less educated than their Italian counterparts, and could not plausibly feature in such intellectually stimulating dialogues! Welsh, 'Il cortigiano polacca', *Italica*, vol. 40, no. 1 (March 1963), 22-7.

³⁶ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ai^v.

³⁷ In 1580, Gabriel Harvey included the *Courtier* in a list of ultra-fashionable Italian texts. He asserted that, in Cambridge, 'Matchiauell [was] a great man: Castilio of no small reputation: Petra[r]ch, and Boccace in euery mans mouth: Galateo and Guazzo neuer so happy'. Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser, *Three proper, and wittie, familiar letters* (London: H. Bynneman, 1580), p. 28. In 1591, John Florio suggested that 'Castilions Courtier' was frequently consulted by readers who wished to learn 'a little Italian'. John Florio, *Florios second frutes* (London: [T. Orwin] for Thomas Woodcock, 1591), sig. A4^r.

Englishman who had participated in the highest ceremony of knighthood'.³⁸ They were consequently willing to overlook the foreignness of the book and its author. It is true that Castiglione was often treated as an honourable exception when Italian manners and morals were criticised. Ascham, for example, juxtaposed praise for the *Courtier* with shuddering censure of Italy and its inhabitants.³⁹ Yet, at least during the first half of Elizabeth's reign, Castiglione's nationality was not generally regarded as problematic. 'Progressive' Edwardian optimism about Italy was undoubtedly ebbing, and the peninsula was frequently depicted as a hotbed of vice and irreligion: 'suffer not thy Sonnes to pass the Alpes. For they shall learne nothing there, but Pride, Blasphemy, & Atheism'.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Italian courtliness possessed, and retained, a certain cachet in England. In 1578, Gabriel Harvey could proudly report that Queen Elizabeth had told him he looked just like an Italian when he entertained her with an oration at Audley End.⁴¹ Harvey was ridiculed for this piece of boasting.⁴² Yet the glamour of Italian

³⁸ Raymond B. Waddington, 'Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Spring 1993), 97-113 (104-6).

³⁹ Ascham, *Scholemaster*, fols 20^v; 23^r – 24^v.

⁴⁰ William Cecil gave this much-quoted piece of advice to his son Robert. See Francis Peck, *Desiderata Curiosa* (London: [n. pub.], 1732), I, 65.

⁴¹ Gabriel Harvey, *Gabrielis Harueij Gratulationum Valdinensium* (London: Henry Binneman, 1578), I, 20. The subsequent eulogy to the Italian people was so breathlessly rhapsodic that it seems clear Harvey was writing with his tongue in his cheek (I, 20-1). Nonetheless, there is no reason to doubt that Harvey was genuinely pleased at being likened to an Italian, which he took as a gracious compliment.

⁴² Thomas Nashe, with whom Harvey became embroiled in an acrimonious pamphlet war, brought up the episode 'De vultu Itali' ('of the Italian look') twice. In his *Strange newes*, he recounted 'a merry iest':

The time was when this Timothie Tiptoes made a Latine Oration to her Maiestie. Her Highnes as shee is vnto all her subiectes most gracious: so to schollers she is more louing and affabloe than any Prince vnder heauen. In which respect, of her owne vertue and not his desert, it pleased hir so to humble the height of hir iudgement, as to grace him a little whiles he was pronouncing, by these or such like termes. *Tis a good pretie fellow, a lookes like an Italian*, and after hee had concluded, to call him to kisse her royall hand. Herevpon he goes home to his studie all intraunced, and writes a whole volume of Verses; first *De vultu Itali*, of the countenance of the Italian; and then *De osculo manus*, of his kissing the Queenes hande. Which two Latin poems he publisht in a booke of his cald *Aedes Valdinenses*, proclaiming thereby (as it were to England, Fraunce, Italie and Spaine, what fauour hee was in with her Maiestie.

court culture can be gauged by examining the paratext to Simon Robson's *Court of ciuill courtesie* (first published in 1577). The printer, Richard Jones, asserted that the text had been translated 'Out of the Italian', 'as hee that brought it vnto me made reporte ... by a Gentleman, a freeinde of his, desyringe mee that it might bee printed'.⁴³ In fact, it seems probable that Robson was the sole and original author of his entirely English treatise.⁴⁴ He clearly regarded Italian conduct manuals as the pinnacle of marketable sophistication.

Because of the prestige associated with Italian courtliness in general, and Castiglione in particular, individual Englishmen were sometimes identified with, or as, *Il Cortegiano*. Pietro Bizzari, an expatriate Italian Protestant, scholar and intelligence agent, composed a poem in honour of John Astley.⁴⁵ Astley was the husband of Elizabeth's trusted lady-in-waiting, Katherine Astley. He was a gentleman of the queen's privy chamber, the master of her jewel house and the treasurer of her jewels and plate. He was also an accomplished horseman, and the author of a treatise on *The*

Thomas Nashe, *Strange newes, of the intercepting certaine letters, and a conuoy of verses, as they were going priuillie to victuall the Low Countries* (London: John Danter, 1592), sig. D2^r. Nashe referred to the incident again in *Haue with you to Saffron-walden: or, Gabriell Harueys hunt is vp* (London: John Danter, 1596), sig. M2^{r-v}, writing that, after Harvey had orated before the queen at Audley End,

he was brought to kisse the Queenes hand, and it pleased her Highnes to say (as in my former Booke I have cyted) that he lookt something like an Italian. No other incitement he needed to rouze his plumes, pricke vp his eares, and run away with the bridle betwixt his teeth, and take it vpon him; (of his owne originall ingrafted disposition theretoo he wanting no aptnes) but now he was an insulting Monarch aboute *Monarcha* the Italian, that ware crownes on his shooes; and quite renounst his naturall English accents & gestures, & wrested himselfe wholly to the Italian puntlios, speaking our homely Iland tongue strangely, as if he were but a raw practitioner in it ...

⁴³ [Simon Robson], *The covrte of ciuill courtesie: fitly furnished with a pleasant porte of stately phrases and pithie precepts* (London: Richard Jhones, 1577), sig. Aii^{r-v}.

⁴⁴ Bryson, *Courtesy to civility*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ See Massimo Firpo, *Pietro Bizzari: esule italiano del Cinquecento* (Torino: G. Giappichelli, 1971), pp. 38-9.

art of riding.⁴⁶ When praising Astley, Bizzarri initially represented the Urbino Courtier as a superhuman paragon:

Non qualis fuerit publica Res, Plato
Sed qualis potius debeat haec fore,
Scripsit, nec Xenophon qualis erat Cyrus,
Sed qualis potius bonus
Princeps debeat esse ... ita est (vt puto) nobilis,
Liber Castilij quie docet Aulicam
Vitam, quoue modo acquirere gloriam
Possit optimus Aulicus.⁴⁷

However, he continued, if anyone could claim to embody *Il Cortegiano*, it was the dedicatee of his verses:

Verum ipse (vt fatear quae mea opinio
De te, quidque alij iudicio bono
Dicant) solus es ille Aulicus, Anglia
Sola talem habet Aulicum,
Qualem Castilio praecipit. Hanc tibi
Si huc posset remeare ipsemet integram
Laudem ascriberet, ac praecipuum locum &
Palmam inter reliquos daret.⁴⁸

Gabriel Harvey endorsed this verdict, describing Astley as ‘a rare gentleman ... whom I dare entitle our English Xenophon; and marvel not that Pietro Bizzaro, a learned Italian, proposeth him for a perfect pattern of Castilio’s courtier’.⁴⁹ When writing in praise of

⁴⁶ Charlotte Merton, ‘Astley, John (c. 1507-1596)’, *DNB*, II, 775.

⁴⁷ Harold S. Wilson translates these lines as follows: ‘Plato wrote not about an actual state but rather about what an ideal state would be like; nor did Xenophon describe the historical Cyrus, but rather the ideal of the good prince ... So it is, as I conceive, with the noble work of Castiglione, which teaches courtly life and how the best courtier may win renown’. Harold S. Wilson, ‘John Astley, “Our English Xenophon”’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 2 (February 1959), 107-118 (112).

⁴⁸ ‘In my opinion, and in the opinion of others competent to judge, you alone are that perfect courtier; England alone has such a courtier as Castiglione described. And if Castiglione could return hither, he would confer that honor upon you; he would award you the palm in preference to all others; he would give you the highest place.’ Wilson, ‘Astley’, *HLQ*, 112.

⁴⁹ Gabriel Harvey, *Pierces supererogation or a new prayse of the old asse* (London: John Wolfe, 1593),

Sir Philip Sidney, Thomas Nashe employed a formula very similar to that used by Bizzarri in *Ad Ioannem Ashleum*. He described a discussion that he initiated ‘with manie extraordinary Gentlemen ... touching the seuerall qualities required in Castalions Courtier’. Nashe’s companions agreed that *Il Cortegiano* personified an impossible ideal. However, ‘the vpsnot’ of the conversation was consensus ‘that England afforded many mediocrities, but neuer saw any thing more singuler then worthy Sir Phillip Sidney’.⁵⁰ Nashe and Bizzarri both equated *Il Cortegiano* with unobtainable perfection – and then gave him an English face by nominating an Elizabethan courtier as his closest mortal approximation.

Specific features of the *Courtier*, or portions of the dialogue, were sometimes deemed especially applicable to certain men and women. Schrinner highlights a flattering reference to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, in Claudius Corte’s *Il Cavallerizzo* (1573).⁵¹ Corte commended Leicester’s courtly grace - ‘ein Lob, das ganz dem Castiglionischen sprezzatura-Begriffe entspringt’.⁵² Raphaëlle Costa de Beaugard claims that Castiglione’s signature concept of *sprezzatura* informed the work of Nicholas Hilliard, whose treatise on the *Arte of limninge* suggests familiarity with Hoby’s *Covrtyer*.⁵³ Beaugard argues that the portrait of a melancholy young man among eglantines, generally believed to be the earl of Essex, was technically designed

p. 51.

⁵⁰ *The works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. by Ronald B. McKerrow (London: A. H. Bullen, 1904), p. 7.

⁵¹ Excerpts from *Il Cavallerizzo* were published in translation in 1584. See Claudio Corte, *The art of riding*, trans. by Thomas Bedingfield (London: H. Denham, 1584).

⁵² Roughly translated, ‘a compliment that derives directly from the Castiglionean concept of *sprezzatura*’. Schrinner, *Castiglione und die englische Renaissance*, p. 82.

⁵³ Erna Auerbach, *Nicholas Hilliard* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 198-200. John Pope-Hennessy identified a passage in the *Arte of limning* which appears to derive from the *Covrtyer*. John Pope-Hennessy, ‘Nicholas Hilliard and mannerist art theory’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol 6 (1943), 89-100 (91).

to evince nonchalant grace, thereby casting its subject ‘dans le rôle du courtisan-chevalier décrit par Castiglione’.⁵⁴ This indicates that Castiglione quite literally shaped the image of the courtier in Elizabethan England.

Elizabethan reading practices may well have encouraged a tendency to atomise the Courtier by ascribing his constituent parts to a variety of individuals. Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine have demonstrated how and why Gabriel Harvey dissected Livy’s *Romanae historiae principis*.⁵⁵ We also know a lot about how Harvey read his Castiglione; his *Cortegiano* has been lost, but his *Covrtyer* survives (and is preserved in Chicago). Typically for an early-modern reader, Harvey highlighted significant portions of the text, and supplemented them with marginal cross-references and commentary. Such annotations included the nomination of characters to whom he considered the passages in question particularly relevant. In response to the statement that a courtly gentlewoman should be ‘seene in the most necessary languages’, Harvey cited the example of ‘The Queen’. He invoked Sir Thomas More beside a tribute to the Courtier’s easy manners and social versatility: ‘Likewise in company with menne and women of all degrees, in sportinge in laughyng, and in iestyng he hath in hym a certayne sweetnesse, and so comely demeanours, that whoso speaketh with hym or yet beholdeth him, muste nedes beare him an affection for ever’.⁵⁶ In Book I of the

⁵⁴ Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard, *Nicholas Hilliard et l’imaginaire Elisabethian* (Toulouse: CNRS, 1991), pp. 261-81, esp. p. 269.

⁵⁵ Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, “‘Studied for action’”: how Gabriel Harvey read his Livy’, *Past and Present*, no. 129 (November 1990), 30-78.

⁵⁶ Caroline Ruutz-Rees, ‘Some notes of Gabriel Harvey’s in Hoby’s translation of Castiglione’s *Courtier* (1561)’, *PMLA*, vol. 25 (1910), 608-39 (616-17). William Roper certainly depicted his father-in-law as a flexible, charming and amusing conversationalist. Roper reported that More was so ‘merry & pleasant’ that ‘it pleased the King and Queene very often to send for him, at tyme of dinner and supper, as also many other times to come & recreate with them’ - to the extent that More began to worry he would never be allowed to spend an evening with his own family! William Roper, *The mirrour of vertue in worldly greatnes: or the life of Syr Thomas More* (Saint-Omer: The English

Courtier, the assembled company discusses the hallmarks of good writing. Count Lewis argues that a writer should express himself as naturally as possible, as if he were speaking directly to the reader, whilst Sir Frederick proffers the opinion that writing can be beautified and dignified through the use of archaic words and subtle phrases.⁵⁷ In his *Gratulationum Valdinensium*, Harvey suggested that the literary works of Edward de Vere, seventeenth earl of Oxford, evinced both fluency and gravitas. In this respect, gushed Harvey, Oxford was ‘ipso mage Castilione Aulica, compta magis’.⁵⁸

Comparisons with the *Courtier* were not invariably flattering. The dialogues were occasionally used as a yardstick against which contemporaries were measured and found wanting. As Oxford observed in a prefatory letter for *De Curiali*, Castiglione counterbalanced prescriptions for good and graceful conduct with examples of ridiculous characters and oafish, uncivilised mores.⁵⁹ Harvey annotated the Urbino protagonists’ descriptions of the pitfalls that a courtier should avoid with the names of contemporaries of whom he disapproved. Bibbiena’s assertion that ‘it is not meete for a Gentlemanne to make weepinge and laughing faces, to make sounes and voices, and to wrastle with himselfe alone’ reminded Harvey of the celebrated court entertainer Robert Tarleton.⁶⁰ A satirical warning against false liberality - ‘Gessee you what liberalitye is in him, that doeth not only geue awaye hys owne good but other mens also’ - inspired

College Press, 1626), pp. 14-5.

⁵⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Eiiii^v – Fi^v.

⁵⁸ Harvey, *Gratulationum Valdinensium*, IV, sig. 3^r. Thomas Jameson translated Harvey’s tribute to Oxford in “‘The Gratulationes Valdinenses’ of Gabriel Harvey’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale, 1938). The translation is reproduced in Alan H. Nelson, *Monstrous adversary: the life of Edward de Vere, 17th earl of Oxford* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), p. 181.

⁵⁹ ‘Non scribum, quanta cum concinnitate & praestantiae, in summis personis virtutum ornamenta depinxerit: nec referum, in ijs, qui Aulici esse non possunt, quemadmodum aut vitium aliquod insigne, aut ridiculum ingenium, aut mores agrestes & inurbanos, aut speciem deformem delinearit’. ‘Edouardus Verus, Comes Oxoniae, Dominus magnus Angliae Camerarius, Vicecomes Bulbeck, & Dominus de Scales, & Badilsmere Lectori. S. D.’, in Clerke, *De Curiali*, sig. (i)^v.

⁶⁰ Ruutz-Rees, ‘Harvey’s Notes on Castiglione’s Courtier’, *PMLA* (1910), 618.

the marginal inscription: ‘Dr Howland, Bishop of Peterborough’.⁶¹ In *Pierces supererogation*, Harvey cattily suggested that his enemy Nashe was pathetically eager – but, alas! unable – to internalise Urbinese manners and morals: ‘Castilios Courtier after a pleasurable sort, graceth him with a deepe insight in the highest Types, and Ideas of humane perfections, whereunto he most curiously, and insatiably aspired’.⁶²

Before the 1590s, few Elizabethan authors contested the notion that Castiglione’s creature represented an ‘Idee of humane perfection’, to which contemporaries ought to aspire. The *Book of the Courtier* was often cited as a touchstone for correct and sophisticated conduct. The author of the *Booke of honor and armes*, for example, appealed to its authority to justify the controversial practice of duelling:

And albeit I am not ignorant that publique Combats are in this age either rarely of neuer graunted; yet for that ... no prouidence can preuent the questions and quarrels that daylie happen among Gentlemen and others professing Armes, it shall not be amisse, but rather behouefull that all men should be fully informed what iniurie is, and how to repulse it, when to fight, when to rest satisfied, what is Honor and good reputation, how it is gained, and by what means the same is kept & preserued; which was the respect that the Earle *Balthazer Castilio* in his booke of the Courtier, doth among other qualities require in a gentleman, specially aduise that he should be skilfull in the knowing of Honor, and causes of quarrel.⁶³

In his *Autobiography*, the composer and music tutor Thomas Wythorne raises the question of whether a leisured gentleman should strive to become a skilled musician, or whether virtuosity was better left to wage-dependent professionals. This issue was not

⁶¹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Xi^r; Ruutz-Rees, ‘Harvey’s Notes on Castiglione’s Courtier’, *PMLA* (1910), 619.

⁶² Harvey, *Pierces supererogation*, p. 177. ‘Curiosity’ was an anathema to the Urbino protagonists; Count Lewis warns that the courtier must ‘eschew [it] as much as a man may, & as a sharp and daungerous rock’. Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Eii^r.

⁶³ Richard Jones, attrib., *The booke of honor and armes* (London: [Thomas Orwin for] Richard Jones, 1590), sig. A3^r.

nearly as contentious as duelling; musical proficiency was almost universally accepted as a suitable accomplishment for cultivated members of the social elite. Nonetheless, dissenting voices were audible. In Book I of the *Courtier*, Pallavicino asserts that music ‘is mete for women, and paradventure for some also that have the lykenes of men, but not for them that be men in dede’. He is comprehensively answered by Canossa, who draws upon philosophy, natural history, religion and the example of men such as Achilles and Alexander the Great (whose virility can hardly be doubted) to champion the necessity of ‘skill ... on sundrye instruments’ for the Courtier.⁶⁴ Whythorne cites this endorsement, in conjunction with a similar passage from Humfrey Braham’s *Institucion of a gentleman*.⁶⁵

Doz that do learn it [music] az afforsaid, for the loov thei hay to the siens and not <to> l<yv> by az the otherz do, thez I say ar to be akownted among the number of th<qz> who the book named *De institucion of A gentilman* doth allow to learn miuzik. And also which the book named *De Coortier*, doth will to learne miuzik, for thei wold hay the great gentilmen, and the koortier<z> to learn miuzik in that sort, and to that end.⁶⁶

Both the *Booke of honor and armes* and Whythorne’s *Autobiography* illustrate the way in which Castiglione’s approval was played like a trump card by apologists for various cultural trends.

It would be a mistake to assume that the *Book of the Courtier* was invariably treated with deferential reverence. The dialogues attracted their fair share of flippant and

⁶⁴ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Iii^r – Iiii^r.

⁶⁵ Braham wrote that, in a true gentleman, ‘sum knowledge in Musicke, or to knowe the vse of musicall Instrumentes is muche commendable’. He pointed out that Socrates had taken up music late in life, considering his formidable repertoire of talents incomplete without it. Humfrey Braham, *The institucion of a gentleman* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1555), sig. B7^v.

⁶⁶ Whythorne, *Autobiography*, p. 246.

subversive annotation. One such piece of commentary rather ruins the mood at the end of Pietro Bembo's beautiful oration on Platonic love in a 1588 *Covrtyer*. Beside the affirmation that a man who has learned to love truly and purely and perfectly 'shall euermore carrie his precious treasure about with him shutte fast within his hart', a certain E. H. saw fit to add: '& codpeece'.⁶⁷ At the start of the same volume, a verse inscribed by another hand appears to undermine the fundamental premise, and indeed the very point, of Castiglione's work:

sweet are those thoughts that savour of content
a quiet mind is ric[h]er then a crowne
sweet are those nights in quiet slumber spent
sweete are those dayes that feele not fortun sorro
And sweet contente such mind such dayes such b[l]isse
meane men enjoy when greate estates doe miss⁶⁸

Despite this warning, one imagines that the writer engaged enthusiastically with the text. Other copies of the *Courtier* sport quirky illustrations indicative of doodling, rather than serious textual analysis. The title page of a 1561 edition (held in Trinity College Library, Cambridge) is decorated with a careful little sketch of a small, spiky creature, executed immediately under the advertisement for William Seres' business premises 'at the sign of the Hedghogge'.⁶⁹ Of course, irreverent and idle marginalia do not denote any fundamental lack of respect for the *Courtier*. It merely reminds us that the work was not invariably handled with the breathless, humourless awe that seems to characterize some of the more effusive tributes to it.

⁶⁷ BL, Rare Books, 6 DE 53, sig. Oo7^r.

⁶⁸ Ibid., sig. '4^v.

⁶⁹ Trinity College Library, Rare Books, VI. I. 63. I am very grateful to the college for allowing me to view this work.

Like other early modern texts, the *Courtier* was viewed as a repository of wisdom, from which case studies, phrases and facts could be mined and recycled.⁷⁰ In his manuscript *Direccions for speech and style*, John Hoskyns recommended ‘the Courtier & the .2^d. Booke of Cicero de Oratore’ as excellent sources of ‘pithy sayings, symillitudes, conceits, Allusions to some knowne history, or other common place’.⁷¹ This advice was repeated almost verbatim in Ben Jonson’s *Timber: Or, Discoveries* (a posthumous publication distilled from Jonson’s commonplace book). Jonson noted that, in writing, ‘There followeth *Life*, and *Quicknesse*, which is the strength and sinnewes (as it were) of your penning by pretty Sayings, Similitudes, and Conceits, Allusions <to> some knowne History, or other common place, such as are in the *Courtier*, and the second booke of *Cicero de oratore*.’⁷² Elizabethan authors did indeed extract a wealth of material from the dialogues. In Book I, for example, Cesare Gonzaga tells his friends that

it is sayde to be in *Pulia* of them that are bitten with a *Tarrantula*, about whom men occupye manye instrumentes of musicke, and with sundrye sounes goe searchynge out, vntyll the humor that maketh this dysease by a certayn concordance it hath wyth some of those sounes, feling it, doth sodeinly moue, and so stirreth the pacient, that by that styrrynge he recouereth hys health agayne.⁷³

⁷⁰ For an analysis of this attitude, see Robert Miola, *Shakespeare’s reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1-17.

⁷¹ Louise Brown Osborn, *The life, letters, and writings of John Hoskyns 1566-1638* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), p. 121. Osborn calculated that the *Direccions* must have been composed some time between 1598 and 1603 (p. 103).

⁷² Ben Jonson, ‘Timber: or, discoveries; made vpon men and matter: as they have flow’d out of his daily Readings’, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. by C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-63), VIII (1947), 632-3. The juxtaposition of the *Courtier* and the *Orator* is not coincidental. As Mary Augusta Scott observed, the section of the *Courtier* from which many stories and aphorisms were borrowed (sig. Kiiii^v – Aaii^f) ‘is modelled closely on the second book of Cicero’s *De Oratore*. Some of the stories are even Cicero’s’. Mary Augusta Scott, ‘The Book of the Courtyer: a possible source of Benedick and Beatrice’, *PMLA*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1901), 475-502 (485).

⁷³ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Bii^f.

The word ‘tarantula’ was new in the English lexicon; no recorded use of it predates Hoby’s translation of 1561.⁷⁴ Both the name and the myth of the musical cure were quickly popularized. Robert Greene’s imagination was captured; he made numerous references to the spiders in his work. *Alcida: Greenes metamorphosis* (1588) rehearses the theory that ‘such as are stung with the Tarantula, must haue musicke at their eare before the poison come at their heart’.⁷⁵ Francesco, the prodigal hero of the Palmer’s Tale in *Greenes neuer too late* (1590), diagnoses himself as ‘ineunymed [sic] with the Tarantula of heart sicke torments’ to the courtesan Infida: ‘I thinke no medicine fitter for my maladie, than to be cured by the musicall harmonie of thy friendly counsaile’.⁷⁶ The 1587 edition of Holinshed’s *Chronicle* incorporated a chapter on the venomous beasts of England (or providential scarcity thereof). The chronicler notes the absence of tarantulas, ‘whose poison bringeth death, except music be at hand’.⁷⁷ In 1586, the anonymous *The praise of musicke* recounted how ‘in Apulia when anie man is bitten of the Tarrantula, which is a certain kinde of flie, verie venomous and full of daunger, they finde out the nature and sympathie of the sicknesse or humour, with playing on instruments’. A marginal note referred the reader to ‘Bathas. Castilio. Aul<...> lib. I.’⁷⁸

⁷⁴ OED [accessed 25 February 2008]

⁷⁵ Robert Greene, *Alcida: Greenes metamorphosis* (London: George Purslowe, 1617), sig. D3^r.

⁷⁶ Robert Greene, *Greenes neuer too late* (London: Thomas Orwin for N[icholas] L[ing] and John Busbie, 1590), p. 58.

⁷⁷ Raphael Holinshed, *The first and second volumes of the chronicles ... newly augmented and continued (with manifold matters of singular note and worthie memorie) to the yeare 1586* (London: Henry Denham, 1587), p. 28.

⁷⁸ Anon, *The praise of musicke* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1586; facsimile repr. Hildesheim; New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1980), p. 65.

Trivia, anecdotes and jokes from the *Courtier* can also be detected in better known works of literature. The plays of Shakespeare have (inevitably) been dusted repeatedly for Castiglione's fingerprints. There is no conclusive proof that Shakespeare read the *Courtier*. Regrettably, the inscription in a 1603 edition - 'Thys lyttle Booke I haue reade withe muche pleasure as I do fynde therein manye thinges thate bee righte profitable ... W^m Shakespeare' - is a forgery.⁷⁹ It seems very likely that the playwright was familiar with the work, but whether this mere probability can support some of the theories that have taken it as their foundation is another issue. Mary Augusta Scott's attempt to demonstrate that the 'merry war' between Benedick and Beatrice in *Much ado about nothing* was a reproduction of the sparring between Pallavicino and Emilia Pia at Urbino is not entirely convincing.⁸⁰ Several scholars have suggested that Polonius's long-winded speech of advice to Laertes in *Hamlet* may well have been modelled on the *Courtier*.⁸¹ The idea has possibilities, but we should remember that by 1600-1, there were other, more up-to-date targets for Shakespeare's gentle satire (most notably the precepts of Lord Burghley). Robert C. Reynolds has argued that, in *Julius Caesar*, Cassius' famous description of the dictator - 'Why, man, he doth bestride the

⁷⁹ BL, Rare Books, 8403 d. 20.

⁸⁰ Apart from the rhetorical question 'Is it possible that the greatest of the Elizabethans, living through the time when translations from the Italian were "solde in every shop in London," was ignorant of one of the oldest and best and most popular of them?', Scott summarises her evidence as follows:

I would submit, First, that Benedick and Beatrice are plainly of Italian origin; in Italian literature the Lady Emilia is first seen in the Lady Pampinea of the Decamerone. Second, that they do not belong to Hero's story in *Bandello*, and fit into it loosely in Shakespeare, precisely because they do not belong to any story. Thirdly, that in *Much Ado* they are both detached persons, they have "just growed," precisely as the Lord Gaspare and the Lady Emilia appear in the *Courtyer*. Fifth, that the very vividness of the representation is due to the fact that Benedick and Beatrice were originally real persons, the Lord Gaspare Pallavicino and the Lady Emilia Pia, of *Il Cortigiano*.

Scott, 'Possible source of Benedick and Beatrice', *PMLA* (1901), 501-2.

⁸¹ See, for example, Eric Reginald Vincent, 'Il Cortegiano in Inghilterra', in *Rinascimento Europeo e Rinascimento Veneziano*, ed. by Vittore Branca (Venice: Sansoni, 1968), pp. 97-107 (100-1), and Walter Raleigh, 'Introduction', in Balthasar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by Thomas Hoby (London, 1900), vii – lxxxviii (lxxix).

narrow world / Like a colossus' (I. 2. 134)⁸² - is based upon a very specific meaning of the word 'colossus', which derives from the *Courtier*. Reynolds highlights Ottaviano's indictment of tyrants: 'they are (in my judgement) like the Colosses that were made in Roome the last yeere upon the feast day of the place of Agone, whiche outwardlye declared a likeness of great men and horses of triumph, and inwardly were full of towe and ragges'.⁸³ Hence, according to Reynolds, "'Colossus" accords perfectly ... with Cassius' indisputable intention of damning Caesar with ironic praise'.⁸⁴ In *Macbeth*, as Raleigh pointed out, the Porter's reference to 'a farmer, that / hang'd himself on the expectation of plenty' (II. 3. 4)⁸⁵ recalls an Urbino vignette: 'M. Augustin Beuazzano toulde, that a couetous manne which woulde not sell his corne while it was at a highe price, when he sawe afterwarde it had a great falle, for desperacion he hanged himself'.⁸⁶ Once again, however, it has proved impossible to establish a direct connection between Shakespeare's play and Castiglione's dialogues.

Other poets and playwrights have been identified as borrowers of 'pithy sayings, symillitudes, conceipts' and 'Allusions to some knowne history' from *The Courtier*. The influence of the text has been discerned in the most famous lines from Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*:

It lies not in our power to love or hate,

⁸² William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. by David Daniell, The Arden Shakespeare (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

⁸³ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Nn ii^r.

⁸⁴ Reynolds also draws attention to 'certain points of similarity, such as subject and phrase, between the particular passage in *The Courtier* and Cassius' statements'. For example, Ottaviano asserts that tyrants 'thinke ... to be counted (almost) Goddes', whilst Cassius declares 'this man / Is now become a god'. Robert C. Reynolds, 'Ironic Epithet in Julius Caesar', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 3 (Summer 1973), 329-33 (331-2).

⁸⁵ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1951; repr. Routledge, 1994).

⁸⁶ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Xi^r; Raleigh, 'Introduction', lxxix.

For will in us is overruled by fate.
 When two are stripped, long ere the course begin
 We wish that one should lose, the other win;
 And one especially we do affect
 Of two gold ingots like in each respect.
 The reason no man knows: let it suffice,
 What we behold is censured by our eyes.
 Where both deliberate, the love is slight;
 Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight? (l. 167-76)⁸⁷

The passage with which these lines are frequently juxtaposed occurs in Book I of the *Courtier*:

And forsomuch as our mindes are very apte to loue and to hate: as in the sightes / of combates and games and in all other kinde of contencion one with an other, it is seene that the lookers on many times bear affection without any manifest cause why, vnto one of the two parties, with a gredy desire to haue him get the victorie, and the other haue the ouerthrow. Also as touching the opinion of mens qualities, the good or yll reporte at the first brunt moueth oure mynde to one of these two passions: therefore it commeth to passe, that for the moste part we iudge with loue or els with hatred. You see then of what importance this first imprinting is, and howe he ought to endeouore himself to get it good in princes, if he entende to be set by, and to purchase him the name of a good Courtyer.⁸⁸

Similarly, literary critics have cited Bembo's celebrated discourse on the transcendental power of love and beauty as the prosaic template for Spenser's *Fowre hymnes (In honour of love; In honour of beautie; Of heavenly love; Of heavenly beautie)*.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, in *Christopher Marlowe: the complete poems and translations*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

⁸⁸ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ciiii^f-v. For comparisons between these passage, see Raleigh, 'Introduction', lxxx-lxxxi; Vincent, 'Il Cortegiano in Inghilterra', in *Rinascimento Europeo*, ed. by Branca, p. 103; and Carmela Nocera Avila, *Tradurre Il Cortegiano: The Courtyer di Sir Thomas Hoby* (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1992), p. 23.

⁸⁹ Edmund Spenser, *Fowre Hymnes*, in *The Yale edition of the shorter poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by William A. Oram (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989); Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Uv iiii^f – Xx iiii^v. In 1898, George Wyndham argued that 'Spenser in his Hymne in Honour of Beautie does but versify the argument of Hoby's admirable Fourth Book'. Wyndham owed the insight 'that Spenser and Shakespeare must have been familiar with Hoby's translation' to Hoby's indefatigable publicist, Walter Raleigh. See *The poems of Shakespeare*, ed. by George Wyndham (London:

Ben Jonson almost certainly appropriated entertaining tales from the *Courtier*, transforming them into comic set-pieces.⁹⁰ In Act V Scene 2 of *Every man out of his humour*, Saviolina is told by the gallants that she will presently encounter a prodigiously accomplished and courtly gentleman, who can imitate ‘a rusticke, or a clowne’ so convincingly ‘that it is not possible for the sharpest-sighted wit (in the world) to discern any sparkes of the gentleman in him’ (v. 2. 43).⁹¹ Sogliardo, an authentic clown, approaches, and Saviolina insists ‘they were verie bleare-witted, yfaith, that could not discern the gentleman in him’ (v. 2. 73). This episode reads like a dramatic adaptation of M. Bernarde’s tale about a Bergamask cowherd, who arrived at court to join the retinue of a great man. Some high-spirited gentlemen told a couple of ladies ‘that there was arriued a Spaniarde, seruant to Cardinall Borgia whose name was Castilio, a verie wittie man, a musitien, a daunser and the best Courtier in all Spaine’.

The ladies

longed verie much to speake with him, and sent incontinently for him, and after they had receyued him honorablye, they caused him to sitt downe, and beegan to entertein him with a verie great respect ... But the Gentilmen that diuised this Prancke, had first toulde those Ladyes that emonge other thinges he was a great dissembler and spake all tungen excellentlye well, and especially the Countrie speache of Lombardye so that they thought he feigned; and manie tymes they beehelde the one the other with certein maruellinges, and saide: What a wonderfull matter is this, howe he counterfeyteth this tunge?⁹²

The tale of the miser reduced to despair by an abundance of corn also crops up in *Every man out of his humour*. The details of Sordido’s attempted suicide correspond closely

Methuen, 1898), cxix. See also Avila, *Tradurre Il Cortegiano*, pp. 22-3.

⁹⁰ See Herford, Simpson and Simpson, *Jonson*, IX (1950), 472-3; W. David Kay, ‘Jonson’s urbane gallants: humanistic contexts for “Epicoeue”’, *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 3 (May 1976), 251-66 (253; 261).

⁹¹ Ben Jonson, *Every man out of his humour*, in Herford, Simpson and Simpson, *Jonson*, III (1927).

⁹² Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Qi^r.v.

to Bibbiena's story. In both cases, the parsimonious protagonist is saved by a humble passer-by who cuts the rope from which he dangles. In both cases, having got his breath back, he berates his rescuer for ruining a perfectly good piece of rope ('You thred-bare horse-bread-eating rascals, if you would needes haue beene meddling, could you not haue vntied it, but you must cut it? and in the midst too! Aye me.').⁹³ Another device that W. David Kay believes was 'almost certainly derived from an anecdote in Book II of *The Courtier*' can be found in Act IV of *Epicoene*.⁹⁴ Truewit kindles an inordinate affection (or appetite) for Dauphine in the hearts of the Collegiate ladies by persuading Epicoene to talk incessantly, and adoringly, about Dauphine's good qualities.⁹⁵ The plot succeeds, and the ladies spend lines 1-74 of Act IV Scene 6 sighing over Dauphine. In the *Courtier*, to illustrate the crucial significance of first impressions, Federico Fregoso refers to a gentleman of his acquaintance, 'who albeit he was of sufficient manerly beehaviour and modest conditions and well seene in armes, yet was he not in any of these qualities so excellent, but there were manie as good and better'. Despite his mediocrity, 'it beefell that a gentlewoman entred most feruently in loue with him'. He responded promisingly to her attentions. His inamorata confided in a female friend, whom she hoped would act as a go-between on her behalf. Unfortunately, she praised the gentleman so ardently that her friend became besotted, and 'practised what she coulede to come by him, not for her friend, but for her owne selfe'.⁹⁶

⁹³ Jonson, *Every man out of his humour*, in Herford, Simpson and Simpson, *Jonson*, III. 3. 22-5.

⁹⁴ Kay, 'Jonson's urbane gallants', *HLQ* (May 1976), 261.

⁹⁵ '[C]ontinue this discourse ... praise him exceedingly. Magnifie him with all the height of affection thou canst. (I haue some purpose in't)'. Ben Jonson, *Epicoene*, in Herford, Simpson and Simpson, *Jonson*, V (1937), IV. 4. 175.

⁹⁶ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Qi^r.v.

The *Courtier*, like Cicero's *De Oratore*, was recognised and read as a compendium of (re)usable material by early modern authors. Borrowings were often unacknowledged, and, in many cases, their literary pedigree cannot be verified beyond reasonable doubt.⁹⁷ Some rather speculative links between the *Courtier* and other texts have been postulated, most notably in the fertile field of Shakespeare studies. What can be stated with certainty, however, is that Urbinese narratives and tidbits resurface in an eclectic assortment of subsequent works. This indicates widespread familiarity with the dialogues, and suggests that their contents were thoroughly assimilated into the literary culture of Renaissance England.

The *Courtier* had other uses besides that of a literary source-book. It is, after all, widely regarded as the definitive Renaissance conduct manual. As such, we would expect it to provide practical guidance on the modification of behaviour – tips that would enable the reader to thrive in a sophisticated social milieu. There is, and was, a certain tension between representations of the *Courtier* as an impossible ideal (like More's *Utopia* and Plato's *Republic*) and the notion that his traits and tricks could actually be emulated. In *Greenes farewell to folly*, Lady Katherin observes that her mother 'séekes not with Tullie to frame an Orator in concept, with Plato to build a commonwealth upon supposes, not with Baldeslar to figure out a courtier in impossibilities'.⁹⁸ Oxford's preface to *De Curiali* is slightly ambiguous:

Quid enim difficilium quisquam, quid praeclarius, quid magnificentius in se

⁹⁷ Castiglione, of course, borrowed stories from other authors. John Harington noted an example in his translation of *Orlando furioso*: 'Concerning the tale of Drusilla, it is taken out of Plutarke, and thought a true Story: it is both in the *Courtier* of Castaglion and in Apuleius; but somewhat amplified by mine author'. Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, trans. by Harington, p. 315.

⁹⁸ Robert Greene, *Greenes farewell to folly* (London: Thomas Scarlet for T. Gubbin and T. Newman, 1591), sig. B3^v.

suscepit, quam artifex ille Castilio, qui eam aulici formam effigiemque expressit, cui nihil addi possit, in quo nihil redundet, quem summum hominem & perfectissimum iudicemus? Itaque cum natura ipsa nihil omni ex parte perfectum expoluerit: hominum autem mores, eam, quam tribuit natura, dignitatem peruertant: & seipsum vicit, qui reliquos vincit: & naturam superauit, quae a nemine vnquam superata est.⁹⁹

Oxford suggests the *Courtier* represents a perfect – and hence purely conceptual – prototype. However, he asserts that men’s manners should improve upon nature, and that Castiglione has demonstrated how this can be done. He therefore offers up the ‘effigy’ as a realistic role-model for imperfect, unpolished men and women. Peter Burke has argued that the process of publication changed the *Courtier* from a complex philosophical text into a straightforward ‘how-to’ guide to court culture. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the book ‘acquired an increasingly elaborate ‘paratext’’. Indexes, notes, tables of contents, even bullet-point summaries of the dialogues, were added.¹⁰⁰ These tools facilitated consultation and cross-referencing, but also, according to Burke ‘flattened and decontextualized’ the work; ‘the paratext helped transform the *Courtier* from an open dialogue, probably designed to be read aloud, into a closed treatise, an instruction manual, or one might even say a ‘recipe-book’’.¹⁰¹

The *Courtier* was frequently cited in conjunction with other courtesy manuals. In the late 1570s, Gabriel Harvey complained that Cambridge students were devoting too much of their time to the perusal of such works:

And nowe of late forsoothe to help countenance owte the matter they have

⁹⁹ Oxford describes the *Courtier* as a perfect effigy, to which nothing can be added and in which nothing is redundant. ‘Edouardus Verus’, in Clerke, *De Curiali*, sig. (i)^f.

¹⁰⁰ Hoby’s *Covrtyer* supplemented Castiglione’s text with a ‘breef rehersall’ of necessary qualifications for a courtier, and a synopsis of the ‘chief conditions’ of a ‘waytyng gentlylwoman’. Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Yyiii^f – Zziiii^v.

¹⁰¹ Burke, *Fortunes of the Courtier*, pp. 43-4.

gotten Philbertes Philosopher of the Courte, the Italian Archebysshoppics brave Galatro, Castiglioes fine Cortegiano, Bengalassoes Civil Instructions to his Nephewe Seignor Princisca Ganzar: Guatzoes new discourses of curteous behaviour, Jouios and Rassellis Emblems in Italian, Paradines in Frenche, Plutarche in Frenche, Frontines Stratagemes, Polyenes Stratagemes, Polonica, Academica, Guigiandine, Philipp de Comines, and I knowe not howe many owtlandishe braveryes besides of the same stampe.¹⁰²

Mark Curtis' research suggests that Elizabethan scholars at Oxford who owned copies of the *Courtier* often collected other conduct manuals. Edward Higgins, whose book list included *The Covrtyer*, *De Curiali* and *Le Courtisan*, acquired Stefano Guazzo's *Civile conversation* and Roger Ascham's *Scholemaster*. John Glover had copies of *Il Cortegiano*, *Le Courtisan* and *The scholemaster*.¹⁰³ The young James VI was given courtesy books to assist with his education. His library boasted 'The dial of Princes', the 'Institution of a Christian Prince', 'the scholemaistre of Mr. Askame', 'Eliotis Gouvernour' and two copies of *The Courtier*. One of them, an Italian edition, was donated by 'My lord of Glamis'. 'The Courtiour in english', which he probably inherited from his mother's library, was originally a gift from the English ambassador to Scotland, Sir Henry Killigrew.¹⁰⁴

James VI could reasonably expect to spend the rest of his life in a courtly environment. For Edward Higgins, John Glover and the young men at Cambridge who devoured 'owtlandishe' conduct books, the chances of doing so were uncertain. Elizabethan editions of the *Courtier* tended to emphasize the fact that it was written by a virtuoso courtier, for fellow initiates. Lord Buckhurst's prefatory verse 'in commendation' of

¹⁰² *The letter book of Gabriel Harvey*, ed. by Edward John Long Scott, Camden new ser., vol. 33 (London: Camden Society, 1884), pp. 78-9.

¹⁰³ Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge in transition*, p. 136.

¹⁰⁴ George F. Warner, *The library of James VI: 1573-1583* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the Scottish History Society, 1893), lii – lxvi.

the Hoby translation affirmed that *Il Cortegiano* had demonstrated ‘what in Court a Courtier ought to be’.¹⁰⁵ Oxford invited the reader of *De Curiali* to admire Castiglione’s vivid depiction of court life.¹⁰⁶ Such comments stressed the courtly context of the dialogues, implying a certain exclusivity in their application. They intimated that Castiglione’s work was relevant primarily to those who inhabited the royal entourage. In reality, the *Book of Courtier* commanded a far wider readership. As a courtesy book – an early modern guide to winning friends and influencing people - its appeal was almost universal.¹⁰⁷

Throughout the sixteenth century, demand for texts that codified and clarified ‘civil’ behaviour became increasingly vociferous. Anna Bryson has explored this phenomenon in her superb monograph on the transition *From courtesy to civility* (subtitled *Changing codes of conduct in early modern England*). Crucially, Bryson addresses the elements of ambiguity in the relationship between ‘specialized literature on prudent and correct behaviour at court’ and books directed, more generally, at those who aspired to gentility or social *savoir faire*.¹⁰⁸ The convergence of these genres is usually treated as a perfectly natural development – so natural that it has barely excited any comment. It should excite comment. Traditionally, as we shall see in chapter four, the value systems and behavioural norms of the court were assumed to be significantly different to those of the broader political community. Yet in Elizabethan England, non-courtiers identified with, and laid claim to, explicitly courtly codes of conduct.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, preface, sig. Aii^v.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Edouardus Verus’, in Clerke, *De Curiali*, sig. (i)^f.

¹⁰⁷ See Avila, *Tradurre Il Cortegiano*, pp. 35-6.

¹⁰⁸ Bryson, *Courtesy to civility*, p. 36.

¹⁰⁹ The court was undeniably glamorous, and its political prominence increased significantly throughout the Tudor period, but these factors alone do not account adequately for the phenomenon.

The awkwardness of the alliance between courtly and gentlemanly models of behaviour was highlighted by Ruth Kelso in 1929. Kelso noted that the ‘doctrine of the English gentleman in the sixteenth century’ was informed by continental definitions of courtliness to such an extent that ‘through translations and adaptations the expression of the English ideal took on a character opposed in many respects to actual English conditions and ideas’.¹¹⁰ Bryson agrees that ‘English conditions’ in the early Tudor period were very different to those of the Italian city states in which the ideology that underpinned popular courtesy manuals evolved.¹¹¹ The significant distinction was that ‘England, like France, was a country dominated by a rural aristocracy’. In a local, aristocratic community, social relations were defined by a rigid hierarchy, which extended from the greatest to the lowliest. Italian courtesy literature presupposed an urban(e) environment, in which ‘friends of equivalent status and culture’ were concentrated.¹¹² The congregation of educated, cultivated equals was characteristic of the city and the court. Hence, the codes of conduct associated with the two locations were often invoked interchangeably.¹¹³

The court was hierarchical, in the sense that it existed to serve a preeminent sovereign. Interestingly, though, courtesy authors who analysed the manners and values of particular courts tended to neutralize disparity of status among their protagonists by

¹¹⁰ Ruth Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century*, University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, vol. XIV, nos 1-2 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1929), p. 13. Kelso adds that ‘Castiglione’s *Courtier* presented in Hoby’s English dress becomes to all appearance and intention an English book, and the recommended bible of the gentleman; and yet in many respects the ideal of the Italian courtier never seems to have become the ideal of the English gentleman’.

¹¹¹ Bryson, *Courtesy to civility*, p. 61.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 116. Bryson does not suggest that urban communities were egalitarian, or unstratified. She simply points out that they facilitated the convergence of ‘gentle’ men and women.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-7.

removing the prince from the picture. In the *Courtier*, duke Guidobaldo is conspicuously absent from the dialogues. Cruelly afflicted by gout, he ‘used continuallye, by reason of his infirmitye, soone after supper to go to his rest’.¹¹⁴ The soirées are presided over by his duchess, Elizabeth Gonzaga, whose femininity helps to blur the boundary between her rank and that of her companions. A similar scenario is postulated in Annibale Romei’s *Courtiers academie*, first published in Venice and Ferrara in 1585. The *Courtiers academie* duplicates the format of the *Courtier*. Beginning with a glowing description of the Ferrarese court under the auspices of Duke Alfonso II, it purports to transcribe a series of discussions which were staged on consecutive days for the diversion of the courtiers. The programme of ‘gratious conuersation’ is conceived when Alfonso, ‘desirous to go down to the sea side’, decrees ‘that euery one might lawfully betake himselfe to that contentment, which was to him most acceptable’:

Whereupon one part of the Gentlemen, the Lady D. Marsisa and Bradamante, aud [sic] other Gentlewomen of the Court, accompanied his Highnesse, and the Duchesse to the sea side: but the greater part, especially of women, vnto whom the sea winde in the end of Autumne was not pleasing, went to the Pallace, to the end that with some delightsome entertainment, they might passe the time till the returne of his Highnesse.¹¹⁵

The subsequent discourse ‘Of beautie’ concludes when the appearance of the duchess’ dwarf heralds the imminent return of the court grandees.¹¹⁶ The second and third conversations (‘Of humane loue’ and ‘Of honour’) are conducted whilst the duke and

¹¹⁴ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, Aiii^v.

¹¹⁵ Annibale Romei, *The courtiers academie*, trans. by I. K. (London: Valentine Sims, 1598; facsimile reproduction Amsterdam; New York: Da Capro Press, 1969), p. 4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

his immediate associates are out hunting.¹¹⁷ On the fourth day, which is wet and stormy, Alfonso leaves his courtiers to their own devices; the discussion group retires to consider the issue of 'Combate'.¹¹⁸ The duke and duchess' departure for the beach on the fifth day sets the scene for a critique 'Of Nobilitie'.¹¹⁹ The sixth and seventh discourses ('Of beautie' and on 'The precedence of armes and letters') take place during a boating trip, with the interlocutors ensconced in their own separate barge.¹²⁰ Clearly, Romei believed that the recipe for 'gracious conuersation' was to take a group of civilized and sympathetic friends, to detach them from 'vertical' social structures, and to leave them in a pleasant, convivial setting.

Such emphasis on 'horizontal' interaction was a relatively novel component of court culture in Elizabethan England.¹²¹ In medieval chronicles, the chief protagonists at English courts were often cast as barons or favourites.¹²² The former were essentially free agents; their castles, lands and military resources allowed them act independently of each other, and often of the king.¹²³ The latter, by contrast, were locked in an exclusively bilateral relationship with the monarch. They were often accused of manipulating or dominating their royal masters. However, they had no other friends or

¹¹⁷ Romei, *Courtiers academie*, pp. 31; 76.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 240; 264.

¹²¹ Markku Peltonen discusses 'vertical' and 'horizontal' social relations (those conducted with superiors or inferiors and those conducted with equals respectively) when analyzing concepts of honour in early modern England. He notes that 'it was above all the horizontal notion of honour or reputation which was inherent in the theory of civil courtesy and conversation'. Markku Peltonen, *The duel in early modern England: civility, politeness and honour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 35-9. See also Mervyn James, *Family, lineage and civil society: a study of society, politics and mentality in the Durham region, 1500-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 177-98.

¹²² In reality, of course, court society was more complex.

¹²³ See, for example, William Baldwin's biography of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, 'That plaaste and baaste his soveraynes so oft / By enterchaunge'. William Baldwin, *A myrroure for magistrates* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1559), fols lxix^r – lxxxi^v (lxx^v). In this edition of the *Myrroure*, fol. lxx features twice, and is followed by fol. lxxxii.

protectors. They barely interacted with anyone else. Once alienated from the king, whether physically, politically or emotionally, they were helpless.¹²⁴ There is no precedent in this umbilical relationship for the social virtuosity of the Castiglionean courtier. The Courtier works hard to win the favour of his prince, but never ceases to contextualize himself in civil conversation with his peers.¹²⁵

Italian courtesy literature helped to redefine English expectations about how people would and should behave at court. As Bryson observes, it identified the values of the court with those of civil society. This society included city-dwellers, and the burgeoning number of wealthy or well-born men and women who were periodically exposed to metropolitan life.¹²⁶ However, as the concept of civility was closely intertwined with that of citizenship,¹²⁷ it also encompassed the provincial gentlemen who devoted themselves to public service for the good of the commonwealth.¹²⁸ The Ciceronian ethos of the *Courtier* will be discussed more fully in chapter three. For the present, we will simply take note of Ottaviano's eloquent exposition of the Courtier's ultimate objective:

For doubtlesse if the Courtier with his noblenesse of birth, comlie beehaviour,

¹²⁴ The most notorious favourite in English history was probably Piers Gaveston. When Gaveston left the side of Edward II, he was captured by the barons and ignominiously slaughtered. See *Vita Edwardi Secundi: the life of Edward the Second*, trans. by N. Denholm-Young (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1957), p. 28, discussed in chapter five.

¹²⁵ D. A. L. Morgan has pointed out that the concept of a professional courtier – neither a baron nor a favourite – only really achieved currency in late fifteenth century England: 'It is as we come to the end of the final, fraught generations of Plantagenet kingship that we find the word developing a particular connotation as a term of peculiar art, both in its ordinary usage and in literary typology'. D. A. L. Morgan, 'The house of policy: the political role of the late Plantagenet household, 1422-1485', in *English court*, ed. by Starkey, pp. 25-70 (p. 69).

¹²⁶ Stone, *Crisis of the aristocracy*, pp. 385-94.

¹²⁷ In his Anglo-Italian dictionary, John Florio translated the verb 'Inurbare' as 'to become or make a citizen or a ciuill man'. John Florio, *A worlde of wordes, or most copious, and exact dictionarie in Italian and English* (London: Arnold Hatfield for Edward Blount, 1598), p. 191.

¹²⁸ See Peltonen, *Classical humanism*, pp. 18-36.

pleasantnesse and practise in so many exercises, should bringe furth no other frute, but to be suche a one for himself, I woulde not thinke to come by this perfect trade of Courtiership, that a man shoulde of reason beestowe so much studye and peynes about it, as who so will compase it must do ... The ende therfore of a perfect Courtier (wherof hitherto nothinge hath bine spoken), I beleave is to purchase him, by the meane of the qualities which these Lordes have given him, in such wise the good will and favour of the Prince he is in service withall, that he may breake his minde to him, and alwaies enfourme him francklye of the trueth of everie matter meete for him to understande, without fear or perill to displease him. And whan he knoweth his minde is bent to commit any thinge vnseemlie for him, to be boulde to stande with him in it, and to take courage after an honest sort at *the* fauour which he hath gotten him throughe his good qualities, to disswade him from euerie ill pourpose, and the set him in *the* waye of vertue.¹²⁹

David Starkey has described this passage as ‘the axis of the *Courtier*’, which justifies the work and ‘link[s] the educational programme of the first three Books with the broader political and moral speculations of Book IV itself’.¹³⁰ It also holds the key to understanding why this particular text was so influential in England – why it appealed to such a wide range of readers, and why it was able to counteract deeply embedded assumptions about the distinctiveness and depravity of court culture. Through Ottaviano’s speech, Castiglione explicitly linked civil sociability (to which almost everyone aspired) with Ciceronian morality (to which almost everyone subscribed). By grafting both the manners and the morals onto the image of the courtier, he rescued that image from a literary tradition that had alienated royal acolytes from the rest of the commonwealth.

The combined popularity of the *Covrtyer* and *De Curiali* encouraged other authors, translators and publishers to disseminate material that treated court acolytes benignly.

Sir David Lindsay’s *Dialog betuixt experience and ane courteour off the miserabill*

¹²⁹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Mm iiiiv - Nn i^r.

¹³⁰ Starkey, ‘Castiglione’s ideal and Tudor reality’, 233.

estait of the warld, was first published in Edinburgh or St Andrews in 1554. In 1566 it was reissued in London as *A dialogue betweene experience and a courtier, of the miserable estate of the worlde first compiled in the Schottishe tongue, by Syr Daud Lyndsey; now newly corrected, and made perfit Englishe*. The publishers of the ‘perfit Englishe’ edition, Thomas Purfoote and William Pickering, apparently felt that Lindsay’s poem presented an unnecessarily bleak view of the court and its inhabitants. They consequently attached an *Epistle* to the text, explaining that the author had not really meant to disparage court life at all: ‘But what inditeth he? the seemely sightes? the pleasure or delightes? the blisse and brauery of the Court? nothing less, but the misery, the chaunge, and instabilitie of the World. Why (I pray you) is that to be learned in the Court? In no place soner, for the higher a tree groweth, the more it is subiect to the blast and tempest’.¹³¹ Robert Greene’s translation of Orazio Rinaldi’s *Royall exchange* defined the courtier’s role in purely positive terms. It asserted that ‘Foure things doo appertaine to a Courtier’: ‘To heare with sapience’; ‘To answer with prudence’; ‘To be offensiuie to no man’; ‘And to profit the Cittizen’. It referred the reader to Castiglione’s dialogue: ‘Baldessar in his Courtier hath the like principles’.¹³²

It is worth noting how seriously most of the new, optimistic courtesy literature was treated. Previously, court culture had been criticised for its mindless frivolity. However, in 1581, we find the author George Pettie explaining that he has translated an

¹³¹ David Lindsay, *A dialogue betweene experience and a courtier, of the miserable estate of the worlde first compiled in the schottishe tongue, by Syr Daud Lyndsey; now newly corrected, and made perfit Englishe* (London: Thomas Purfoote and William Pickering, 1566), sig. *ii^v. Such rhetoric could, of course, be used to cloak offensive anti-courtier satire. However, we have no reason to suppose that Purfoote and Pickering feared the consequences of publishing Lindsay’s work. It seems likelier that they genuinely wished to present the *Dialog* as an attack upon the world, and not the court.

¹³² Orazio Rinaldi, *The royall exchange*, trans. by Robert Greene (London: J. Charlewood for William Wright, 1590), sig. Ci^v.

Italian conduct manual because he wishes to be taken seriously as a writer. Pettie had previously published a compendium of stories entitled *A petite pallace of Pettie his pleasure*. Whilst popular, this work had been disparaged by some as whimsical triviality. Pettie subsequently sought to disarm his critics and bolster his intellectual credibility:

Hauing (gentle Readers) by reason of a trifling woorke of mine (which, by reason of the lightnesse of it, or at least of the keeper of it, flew abroade before I knewe of it) already wonne such fame, as he which fyred the Temple of *Diana*, I thought it stodee mee vpon, to purchase to my selfe some better fame by some better woorke, and to counteruayle my former vanitee, with some formal grautie¹³³

He therefore produced a text that he was sure would earn him a suitable reputation for *gravitas*: a translation of Stefano Guazzo's *Ciuile conuersation*.

The publication history of another conduct manual illustrates the momentum of the vogue for Italian courtesy literature during the first two decades of Elizabeth's reign. In 1575, George North produced his English translation of Philibert de Vienne's *Philosopher of the court*. Vienne's original treatise was in fact a lampoon of Castiglionean courtliness, designed to expose the perversity of the value system advocated by disciples of *Il Cortegiano*.¹³⁴ It was first published in Lyons, in 1547. Pauline M. Smith has identified a strong 'anti-courtier trend' in mid to late sixteenth century French literature. She ascribes this to the increasingly pivotal status that the royal court assumed in the political and cultural life of the nation, which (she argues)

¹³³ George Pettie, 'The preface to the readers', in Stefano Guazzo, *The ciuile conuersation of M. Steeuen Guazzo*, trans. by George Pettie (London: [Richard Watkins], 1581), sig. i^r.

¹³⁴ Daniel Javitch, 'The Philosopher of the Court: a French satire misunderstood', *Comparative Literature*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Spring, 1971), 97-124; Sydney Anglo, *The Courtier's art: systematic immorality in the Renaissance* (Swansea: University College of Swansea, 1983), pp. 4-5.

encouraged scrutiny and criticism of contemporary courtiers' behaviour. She also highlights the spiralling extravagance of French monarchs and their attendants from the reign of François I onwards. More specifically, she suggests that the cult of Castiglione was viewed with growing hostility because of its Italian origins. Italian infiltration of the French court, following the marriage of Catherine de Medici to the Dauphin in 1533, was widely resented by the native population. Catherine's countrymen were cast as self-serving carpet-baggers, whose polished courtly wiles enabled them to cheat honest patriots out of position and influence. Italian conduct literature was savagely satirized.¹³⁵

In England, however, North's translation was accepted as a straightforward imitation of *Il Cortegiano*.¹³⁶ It is not entirely clear whether North himself was fully aware of the *Philosopher's* satirical character. He was a commercially minded opportunist; in 1561 he had 'exploited the flurry of public interest in Scandinavia, spurred by the courtship of Queen Elizabeth by Erik XIV of Sweden, with his first publication, the *Description of Sweden, Gotland, and Finland*'.¹³⁷ Perhaps his instinct for the topical and popular suggested that a sympathetic appraisal of courtliness would be more attuned to the *Zeitgeist* than a clever parody. Or perhaps he was striving to publish as quickly as possible, and simply failed to register or relay the nuances of Vienne's tongue-in-cheek commentary. Daniel Javitch inclines to the latter view. Whilst demonstrating that the translator modified a few of Vienne's more outrageous statements, he argues that this manipulation of the text was not intended to alter its fundamental significance. The

¹³⁵ Pauline M. Smith, *The anti-courtier trend in sixteenth century French literature* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1966), pp. 98-100, 138-47.

¹³⁶ Javitch, 'French satire misunderstood', 113.

¹³⁷ Ross Kennedy, 'North, George (fl. 1561-1581)', *DNB*, XLI, 102-3.

'anti-courtier trend' described by Pauline Smith did not take root in England until the late 1570s, by which time its spores had been carried across the Channel with news of the St. Bartholomew's day massacre. The blossoming of virulent Italophobia in England was similarly tardy, as the English did not have to compete with an Italian faction at Elizabeth's court. A generation of aspiring courtiers familiar with the teachings of Machiavelli (which were not, as yet, deemed so depraved as to be unusable) accepted the premise that orthodox morality might occasionally need to be modified by statesmen for practical purposes. All of these factors could account for the literal-mindedness of North and his readers.¹³⁸

Javitch also observes that North's *Philosopher* is dedicated to that virtuoso of Renaissance courtliness, Sir Christopher Hatton. He suggests that the latter conformed so exactly to the prototype of the Castiglionean courtier that it would have been an unthinkable insult for North to associate him with a recognised lampoon of his role model.¹³⁹ Javitch may be underestimating Hatton's tolerance and sense of humour in this instance. It was by no means uncommon for (sometimes scathing) denunciations of courtliness to be written for courtiers and by courtiers. In 1542, Francis Bryan published his 'Englished' *Dispraise of the life of a courtier*, which he dedicated to fellow courtier William Parr.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, in 1588 William Rankins dedicated *The English ape, the Italian imitation, the footestepes of Fraunce* to 'the Right Honorable, & my singular good Lord Syr Christopher Hatton'.¹⁴¹ This imaginatively entitled tract

¹³⁸ Javitch, 'French satire misunderstood', 97-124.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 107-8.

¹⁴⁰ Antonio de Guevara, *A dispraise of the life of a courtier*, trans. by Francis Briant (London: Richard Grafton, 1542), sig. aii^r.

¹⁴¹ William Rankins, *The English ape, the Italian imitation, the footestepes of Fraunce* (London: Robert Robinson, 1588), sig. A2^r.

comprised a scorching attack upon the courtly 'Italian Englishman'. According to Rankins, 'our Englishmen blinded (with an Italian disguise) & disfiguring themselves (with euery French fashion) corrupt their naturall manners ... with the peeuyshe pelfe of euery Peacokes plume, (and lyke as Aesopes Dawe) bedecke them selues with others deformity'.¹⁴² If Hatton was willing to be associated with this kind of satire, it seems unlikely that he would have been enraged by a witty parody of Castiglionean court culture.

It is clear that North's dedication to Hatton was not merely a speculative bid for patronage. The former refers to having completed his translation 'vnder the protection of your worships fauoure', and describes himself as Hatton's 'humble Souldier'.¹⁴³ His association with Hatton was evidently durable; in 1581, he dedicated his *Stage of popish toyes collected out of H. Stephanus' apologie upon Herodot* to his long-standing benefactor.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the *Philosopher* was published by Henry Binneman, who elsewhere described himself as 'seruant to the right honourable Sir Christopher Hatton'.¹⁴⁵ North assured Hatton that the 'gladsome beames' of his favour would lend countenance to the translation.¹⁴⁶ Hatton's willingness to sponsor the enterprise reminds us that association with fashionable courtesy manuals also lent countenance to great courtiers.

¹⁴² Rankins, *English ape*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Philibert de Vienne, *The philosopher of the court*, trans. by George North (London: Henry Binneman for Lucas Harison and George Byshop, 1575), sig. Aii^r - Aiii^r. The description is not metaphorical; North was a soldier and a diplomat. He is a typical example of the active commonwealthsman, who undertook literary projects as a means of advancing his career in public service.

¹⁴⁴ Marshall W. S. Swan, 'Introduction', in George North, *The description of Swedland, Gotland and Finland*, ed. by Marshall W. S. Swan (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1946), i-xxx (xv-xvii).

¹⁴⁵ George Best, *A true discourse of the late voyages of discoverie, for the finding of a passage to Cathaya, by the northweast, vnder the conduct of Martin Frobisher generall diuided into three bookes* (London: Henry Bynnyman, 1578), sig. aii^r.

¹⁴⁶ Vienne, *Philosopher*, trans. by North, sig. Aiii^r.

The ‘Englishing’ of Giovanni Della Casa’s *Galateo: or rather, a treatise of the manners and behaiours, it behoueth a man to vse and eschewe, in his familiar conuersation* is also instructive. Della Casa was the humanist Archbishop of Benevento. In his younger days, whilst studying Greek at Padua, he had formed friendships with members of the literary coterie that included Castiglione. His ecclesiastical career followed the textbook trajectory – the hubris and nemesis - of a Renaissance courtier’s. A client of the Farnese family, he was elevated to position and consequence whilst his patrons’ kinsman Paul III sat on the papal throne. In 1549, however, the latter was succeeded by Julius III, who did not belong to the Farnese faction in Rome. With the influence of his sponsors severely curtailed, Della Casa was forced into contemplative retirement until 1555. It was during this period of his life that he composed *Galateo*.¹⁴⁷

In 1576, the text was ‘done into English by Robert Peterson, of Lincolnes Inne Gentleman’.¹⁴⁸ Peterson dedicated his work to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester. Dudley’s behaviour, like that of Hatton, conformed very closely to courtesy manual prescriptions. This fact was acknowledged by his supplicant, who described him as ‘the patterne to expresse any courtesie ... contained’ in the text. Peterson took pains to emphasise that his *Galateo* ‘presumeth not to be guide’ for a courtier as proficient as Dudley. Instead, he asked the earl ‘to vouchsafe [it] as a companion of ease to trace the pathes, which you haue already so well beaten’. Failing that, Peterson would be

¹⁴⁷ Konrad Eisenbichler and Kenneth R. Bartlett, ‘Introduction’, in *Galateo*, by Giovanni Della Casa, trans. by Konrad Eisenbichler and Kenneth R. Barlett (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1986), xi-xxvi (xi-xiii).

¹⁴⁸ John Della Casa, *Galateo: or rather, a treatise of the manners and behaiours, it behoueth a man to vse and eschewe, in his familiar conuersation*, trans. by Robert Peterson (London: Raufe Newbery, 1576; facsimile reproduction Amsterdam; New York: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum; Da Capo Press, 1969), sig. Ai^r.

grateful ‘if your honour daine at highe leasure to peruse it’. Such a vote of confidence ‘will so credit the Author, as wil embolden him to presse amongst the thickest throng of Courtiers’.¹⁴⁹ Peterson obviously hoped for preferment on the strength of his translation. Whether it enabled him to effect the transition from Lincoln’s Inn student to successful courtier is unknown – although Eleanor Rosenberg suggests that the apparent cessation of his literary activities until 1606 indicates that he was otherwise employed in the interim.¹⁵⁰ It seems probable that Peterson was already Leicester’s client (perhaps a probationary acolyte) when *Galateo* was published. In the dedication, he registers his gratitude for ‘honourable fauours shewed vnto him’ by Leicester.¹⁵¹ Moreover, the 1576 edition of the text featured the Dudley emblem of the bear and staff on the inside cover of the title page.

Peterson’s translation was accompanied by two sets of commendatory verses.¹⁵² The authors of both had prior associations with Leicester. Edward Cradocke was an Oxford don and London clergyman;¹⁵³ in 1572, he dedicated a treatise on the subject of divine providence to ‘the right honorable, and his especiall good Lorde and Patrone, Lorde ROBERT’.¹⁵⁴ This publication also reproduced the image of the bear and staff on the reverse side of its title page.¹⁵⁵ Thomas Drant was a poet, translator, minister and

¹⁴⁹ Della Casa, *Galateo*, sig. Aiii^r.

¹⁵⁰ Eleanor Rosenberg, *Leicester: patron of letters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 175-9.

¹⁵¹ Della Casa, *Galateo*, sig. Aiii^v. Peterson is at this point referring to himself in the third person as ‘the Author’.

¹⁵² Two other poems in Italian were also printed. These, however, were produced for Della Casa’s original text rather than Peterson’s anglicised version.

¹⁵³ Robert M. Schuler, ‘Cradocke, Edward (fl. 1552-1594)’, *DNB*, XIII, 923.

¹⁵⁴ Edward Cradocke, *The shippe of assured safetie, wherein wee may sayle without danger towards the land of the liuing, promised to the true Israelites* (London: H. Bynneman, for William Norton, 1572), sig. Aij^r.

¹⁵⁵ Cradocke, *Shippe*, sig. Ai^v.

preacher.¹⁵⁶ He paid tribute to Leicester when he published his *Medicinable morall* in 1566, and his *Praesul* (c. 1578).¹⁵⁷

The involvement of these two men in Peterson's project is interesting; at first glance, they look like improbable devotees of Castiglionean culture. Drant in particular was renowned as a godly zealot, sharply critical of vanity and worldliness. In 1570, he traduced the courtier's lifestyle in a sermon preached before assembled members of the court at Windsor:

Iohn the Baptist eateth wilde hony, and is clad in hard apparel, and not such soft raiment as these tender courtlinges do weare: therefore it is likely that Iohn is no réede, but a constant man in religion ... Courtiers in kinges houses doo weare soft and delicate apparrell, and fare not so hard, nor weare not so heard as Iohn doth: therfore these milksoppes are likely inough to proue réedes, (if they come under duresse) and not hard rockes in religion.¹⁵⁸

Drant was obviously aware that his strictures were provocative and confrontational; he remarked in passing that 'they make it doubtful, whether I may speak agaynst that, or no. For all those that be in kinges houses do accompt of them selues as exempt from controlement of preachers'¹⁵⁹ Yet in 1576, we find this self-appointed scourge of the court commending a popular Italian courtesy manual.

Drant's comments suggest that he, at least, did not recognise the marriage made in Urbino between the courtier and the civil gentleman. Nonetheless, Castiglione's

¹⁵⁶ R. W. McConchie, 'Drant, Thomas (c. 1540-1578)', *DNB*, xvi, 885-6.

¹⁵⁷ J. R., 'Review: *Leicester: patron of letters*', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. 8, no. 31 (August 1957), 285-86 (286). Horace, *A medicinable morall, that is, the two bookes of Horace his satyres, Englyshed accordyng to the prescription of saint Hierome. The wailyns of the prophet Heremiah, done into Englyshe verse. Also epigrammes* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1566), sig. Lv^v – Lvi^r; Thomas Drant, *Thomae Drantae Angli Aduordingamii. Eiusdem Sylua Approbatatur ad normam praescripti regij* (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1576), sig. Fij^r – Fijj^r.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Drant, *Two sermons preached the one at S. Maries Spittle on Tuesday in Easter weeke. 1570 and the other at the court in Windsor the Sondag After Twelfth Day, being the viij. of Ianuary, Before in the Yeare. 1569* (London: John Daye, 1570), sig. kv^r-v.

¹⁵⁹ Drant, *Two sermons*, sig. kv^r.

dialogues effected a plausible synthesis of the behavioural models associated with court and commonwealth. The figure of the sociable, public-spirited gentleman-courtier had no obvious cultural ancestry in England. He almost seems to have been taken out of Italy and parachuted into English literature. This explains why many scholars have emphasized his quintessential ‘foreignness’. Yet, interestingly, during the 1560s and 1570s, characterisations of the *Courtier* as ‘owtlandishe’ were relatively rare. Consider Henry Howard’s justification for dedicating ‘a pece of worke wherin a common profit doth consist’ exclusively to his sister:

this could I defend by the example of many personnes both in witt, learninge and experience excellent; if so noble presidents may be drawen and applied to so base imitation; as Aristotle to his sonne Nicomachus; Tully to his frend Brutus; Isocrates to Nicoles; and to stray no lenger in forren examples even in our tyme after the like sorte was that most excellent worke of the County [sic] of Castiglione called the Courtier first only directed to the Marquesse of Pestora.¹⁶⁰

Howard’s failure to classify the *Courtier* as a ‘forren’ text perhaps falls somewhat short of Hoby’s claim that its eponymous hero ‘is become an Englishman’. Yet Castiglione’s impact on English political culture was profound. The optimistic image of the courtier that was promulgated during the first two decades of Elizabeth’s reign bears the indelible stamp of his influence.

¹⁶⁰ Bod. MS 616, fol. 3^r.

CHAPTER THREE

MODELS OF COURTLINESS

‘I wish we were able to confine the term courtier to its strict meaning, to the holders of specifically Court offices; but that is manifestly insufficient’ G. R. ELTON¹

In his inaugural lecture as Professor of History at the University College of Swansea, Sidney Anglo imagined an infernal awards ceremony, in which Castiglione and Ignatius Loyola competed for recognition as the most effective agent of Hell from the Renaissance era.² Literally playing devil’s advocate, Anglo contested Castiglione’s candidacy on the grounds that there was nothing particularly shocking or innovative in his dialogue: ‘what is the *Libro del Cortegiano* but an elegant amalgam of medieval and Renaissance commonplaces?’³ It is worth addressing this question before we consider the significance of the *Courtier* within Elizabethan political culture. The Urbino interlocutors discuss well-established ideals of gentility, courtesy, honour and merit. Reduced to the sum of his parts, their courtier looks rather like a cut-and-paste conglomeration of humanist truisms, and values that had long been associated with the feudal nobility.

Renaissance humanism and medieval chivalry are often deemed immiscible. One is almost encouraged to envisage them as tectonic plates, grinding away at each other and occasionally convulsing the sixteenth century political landscape. The Pilgrimage of

¹ Elton, ‘Points of contact. III. The court’, 215.

² The scenario was based upon a satire by John Donne.

³ Anglo, *Courtier’s art*, p. 2.

Grace (1536-7) and the Northern Rebellion (1569) have been interpreted as reactions by the socially conservative north of England against the ascendancy of educated, ambitious 'new men' in London.⁴ The Essex revolt (1601) has been presented as the final whimper of an aristocratic cult of honour, rendered obsolete by a newer 'synthesis' of 'humanistic wisdom', reformed religion and law.⁵ It is certainly valid to analyse these episodes (and other, less dramatic developments) in terms of a culture clash. However, it is also worth considering whether Castiglionean courtesy literature might have provided a platform upon which both cultures could be accommodated.

The authors of early modern conduct books tended to conflate knightly and humanist ideals of excellence when describing what a courtier-gentleman should be able to do. The marginal notes in Hoby's *Covrtyer* highlight the relevant areas of expertise. The model courtier must be 'A perfecte horseman' and huntsman. He must be proficient at 'Swimming', 'Leapyng', 'Running', 'Castyng the stone', 'Playe at tenyse' and 'Uawting' [vaulting].⁶ He 'ought to be learned' in 'humanity': 'In the latin and Greeke tung'; 'In poetes'; 'In oratours'; 'In Historiographers'; 'In writinge ryme and prose'.⁷ He must be 'a musicien', and possess 'the cunning in drawyng, and the knowledge in the very arte of peincting'.⁸ The same qualifications are cited in the dialogue *Of cyuile and vncyuile life*, in which the courtier Valentine asserts that 'it shall well become' a gentleman at court

⁴ See, for example, G. R. Elton, 'Politics and the pilgrimage of grace', in *After the Reformation: essays in honor of J. H. Hexter*, ed. by Barbara C. Malament (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp. 25-56, and Stone, *Crisis of the aristocracy*, pp. 251-3.

⁵ Mervyn James, 'At a crossroads of the political culture: the Essex revolt, 1601', in *Society, politics and culture: studies in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 416-65 (p. 459).

⁶ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Diii^v - Diiii^f.

⁷ *Ibid.*, sig. Hiiii^{f-v}.

⁸ *Ibid.* sig. Jiii^{f-v}.

To handle all sorts of armes, both on horseback and foote, leape, daunce, runne, ride, and (if he so like) play at all sortes of games ... It will also stand wel with his condition to entertaine Ladyes ... One other thing also I wish hee vsed: I meane that at the least one howre of euery day hee should read, either in some notable History, or excellent discourse: For that will much exercise the minde, & encrease the knowledge.⁹

In his *Philosopher of the court*, Philibert de Vienne depicts a courtier as someone with ‘vnderstanding of all Artes and liberall Sciences’, a competent mastery of ‘Musicke’, a ‘store of histories, to passe the time meet for any company’, ‘the knowledge of diuers and sundry languages’, ‘The knowledge of Fence, of vaulting, of Tennis, of dauncing, and other sports of exercise’ and ‘some understanding of the state and the affayres of the Realme’.¹⁰ Roger Ascham’s *Scholemaster* declares that

to ride cumlie: to run faire at the tilte or ring: to plaie at all weapons: to shoot faire in bow, or surelie in gon: to vault lustely: to runne: to leape: to wrestle: to swimme: To daunce cumlie: to sing, and playe of instrumentes cunningly: to Hawke: to hunte: to playe at tennes, & all pastimes generally, which be ioyned with labor, vsd in open place, and on the day light, conteining either some fitte exercise for warre, or some pleasant pastime for peace, be not onelie cumlie and decent, but also verie necessarie, for a Courtlie Ientleman to vse.¹¹

The Courtier’s repertoire of physical accomplishments is largely consistent with that of the medieval knight.¹² In the prologue to the *Canterbury tales*, Chaucer highlighted the easy athleticism of the Squire: ‘Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde / [...] Juste and

⁹ Anon, ‘Courtier and cuntrey-gentleman’, p. 74.

¹⁰ Vienne, *Philosopher*, pp. 29-30.

¹¹ Ascham, *Scholemaster*, fo. 19^v – 20^f.

¹² Janet Dickinson makes this point in her recent doctoral thesis. Janet Elizabeth Dickinson, ‘The Essex rebellion, 1601: subversion or supplication?’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southampton, 2005), p. 13.

eek daunce' (lines 94; 96).¹³ The *Fais d'armes et de chevalerie* argued that a noble boy's innate exuberance and physical energy should be harnessed at an early age:

So ought thenne to be shewed vnto them the tourne of swiftnes to caste & fyghte with bothe theyre armes / and the manere how they shall glaunche or with drathe them self from *the* strokes that in trauers or sydlyng may come / to leopen ouer trenchis or dyches / to lanche or cast sperys & dartes and the waye to couere & saue hem self with theyre sheldes / and to doo al other semblable thyngis ...¹⁴

These exercises were obviously intended to train men for the battlefield. Whilst the Courtier is not only, or even primarily, a soldier, the Urbino protagonists agree that he ought to be prepared for military service.¹⁵ Count Lewis prescribes 'vnderstandyng in all exercises of the bodie, that belonge to a man of warre', and skill 'on those weapons that are vsed ordinarily emong gentlemen'.¹⁶ He insists that the Courtier should surpass representatives of all nations in martial sports:

And because it is the peculyer prayse of us Italians to ryde well, and to manage wyth reason, especiallye roughe horses, to runne at the ryng and at tylte, he shall bee in this amonge the beste Italyans. At tourneymente, in kepyng a passage, in fightinge at barriers, he shall be good emonge the best Frenchemen. At *Joco di canne*, runninge at Bull, castinge of spears and dartes, he shall be amonge the Spaniardes excellent.¹⁷

¹³ Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The general prologue to the Canterbury tales', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson & F. N. Robinson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All subsequent references to this edition.

¹⁴ Christine de Pisan, *Here begynneth the table of the rubryshys of the boke of the fayt of armes and of chyualrye*, trans. by William Caxton (Westminster: William Caxton, 1489), sig. Biiij^r.

¹⁵ According to Count Lewis, however, 'the principall and true profession of a Courtyer ought to be in feates of armes'. Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ciiii^v. Castiglione himself fought with Francesco Gonzaga against Spanish forces in Naples, in 1503. He described the experience as a cacophony of 'foco, fiamme, stridi orrendi e feri / fame, roine e martial furore' ('fire, flames, horrendous, ferocious cries, famine, ruins and martial frenzy'). These lines, and the English translation, can be found in Woodhouse, *Castiglione*, p. 10.

¹⁶ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Diii^r.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* sig. Diii^v.

The Count also argues that hunting is ‘one of the chiefest’ activities fit for a courtier, ‘for it hath a certaine lykenesse with warre’.¹⁸

The Courtier’s knightly prowess is to be complemented by a comprehensive grounding ‘in those studyes, which they call Humanitie’. Count Lewis recommends just such a grounding for ‘oure Courtier’,

whom in letters I will haue to bee more then indyfferentlye well seene ... and to haue not only the vnderstandinge of the Latin tunge, but also of the Greeke, because of the many and sundrye thinges that with greate excellencye are written in it. Let him much exercise hym selfe in poets, and no lesse in Oratours and Historiographers, and also in writinge bothe rime and prose, and especiallye in this our vulgar tunge.¹⁹

Theoretically at least, the medieval offices of knight and scholar had been separate and specialist. Vestiges of the ‘separate spheres’ ideology survived into the early sixteenth century. Richard Pace provided a memorable testament to the lingering of aristocratic anti-intellectualism in his educational treatise *De fructu* (1517). Pace cited the example of a gentleman who swore ‘by God’s body’ that he would prefer see his son on the gallows than studying letters: ‘For it becomes the sons of gentlemen to blow the horn nicely, to hunt skilfully, and elegantly carry and train a hawk’.²⁰ John Skelton griped that ‘Noblemen born / to learn they have scorn, / but hunt and blow a horn’.²¹ He might have added that a number of scholars were equally sceptical about the value of

¹⁸ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Diiii^r.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. Hiii^v-Hiiii^r.

²⁰ Quoted in *Early English meals and manners*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall (London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, for the Early English Text Society, 1868), xiii.

²¹ John Skelton, ‘Colyn Cloute’, in *The Poetical works of John Skelton*, ed. by Alexander Dyce, 2 vols (London: Thomas Rodd, 1843), I, lines 621-3. The above quotations from Skelton and Pace are frequently cited in discussions of aristocratic attitudes towards learning in early Tudor England. See, for example, J. H. Hexter, ‘The education of the aristocracy in the Renaissance’, *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 22, no. 1 (March 1950), 1-20, and Stone, *Crisis of the aristocracy*, p. 674.

traditional knightly exercises. Erasmus's well-known reservations about warfare, which he described as 'a foolishe practise' and 'so cruell and despiteous a thyng, as rather it becometh wilde beastis, than men', implied that a chivalric education misguidedly channelled the energies and aspirations of young gentlemen towards the graceless brutality of the battlefield.²² Juan Luis Vives, the author of *The instruction of a Christen woman*, was also concerned about the impact upon women of a culture that glorified aggressive virility. 'It can not lyghtly be a chaste mayd', he warned, 'that is occupied with thinkyng on armour, and turney, and mannes valiaunce'.²³ Vives believed that a programme of serious study, designed to inculcate virtue, was the best way of distracting a woman from the temptations of the flesh, and diverting her energies towards the cultivation of mind and soul.

However, by the early sixteenth century, there was nothing particularly novel or startling about the idea that elite education should tend to the physical, cerebral and spiritual development of its subjects.²⁴ As Arthur Ferguson pointed out, the notion that a warrior-athlete should be literate and virtuous was well established in the fifteenth century.²⁵ During the reign of Edward IV, for example, Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers, was appointed guardian to Edward, Prince of Wales, 'that he may be virtuously,

²² Desiderius Erasmus, *The praise of folie*, trans. by Thomas Chaloner (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1549), sig. Diii^f; Pii^v.

²³ Juan Luis Vives, *A very fruteful and pleasant boke callyd the instruction of a Christen woman*, trans. by Richard Hyrde (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1541), fol. 9^v.

²⁴ In his essay 'On the education of children', Montaigne wrote that those in charge of children should remember that 'we are not bringing up a soul; not are we bringing up a body: we are bringing up a man. We must not split him in two. We must not bring up one without the other but, as Plato said, lead them abreast like a pair of horses harnessed together in the same shaft'. *The essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1987; repr. 1991), pp. 163-99 (p. 185).

²⁵ Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Indian summer of English chivalry: studies in the decline and transformation of chivalric idealism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1960), pp. 182-221.

cunningly and knightly brought up'.²⁶ It was also becoming increasingly common for upwardly mobile men of letters to practise the sports that had traditionally been the preserve of the nobility. John Strype noted that, although Thomas Cranmer's father 'were minded to have his Son educated in Learning, yet he would not he should be ignorant of civil and Gentleman-like Exercises'. Once he had put away his books, the young Cranmer 'would both Hawk and Hunt ... And sometimes he would shoot in the Long-Bow, and many times kill the Deer with his Cross-Bow'.²⁷ Thomas Elyot argued that a gentleman must be physically and mentally equipped to serve his commonwealth. His *Boke named the gouvernour* (1537) recommended an educational programme that combined 'lernynge' with 'those exercises, apte to the furniture of a gentyll mannes personage, adaptyng his bodie to hardnesse, strengthe, and agilitie, and to helpe therwith hym selfe in peryle, whiche maye happen in warres or other necessitie'.²⁸ Humphrey Gilbert envisaged a curriculum for royal wards that encompassed Greek and Latin grammar, Hebrew, oratory, philosophy, mathematics, modern languages, divinity, law and medicine, as well as riding, tilting, shooting and other martial exercises (he hoped that his proposed establishment would 'become a most noble Achademy of Chiuallicie and philosophie').²⁹ In Act III Scene 1 of *Hamlet*, Ophelia responds to the prince's distressing and bewildering behaviour with the following lament: 'O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! / The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword; / [...] quite, quite down!' (III. 1. 151-2; 155).³⁰ A 'noble mind' was evidently

²⁶ *Cal. Pat. Rolls* 1467-77, p. 417.

²⁷ John Strype, *Memorials of the most reverend father in God, Thomas Cranmer* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1694), I, 2.

²⁸ Thomas Elyot, *The boke named the Gouvernour* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1537), fols 57^v – 58^v.

²⁹ Gilbert, 'Queene Elizabethes achademy', p. 12.

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by G. R. Hibbard, *The Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon

expected to integrate the functions of courtier, soldier and scholar. Hamlet's failure to perform any of these roles successfully is seen by Ophelia as proof of his personal disintegration.

The Renaissance courtier could thus aspire to mastery of 'civil' or chivalric arts (or both). Ottaviano's thesis that he should view his myriad talents as a prudent investment on behalf of the commonwealth was rarely contested.³¹ The *De officiis* ethos of public service, epitomized in Cicero's prolifically quoted injunction that 'we be not borne for our selues alone', pervaded sixteenth century conduct literature.³² In *Of cyuile and vncyuile life*, Valentine affirms that 'men are not only borne to themselues', and must be prepared 'not so much to serue their owne turnes as their Prince and Countrey'.³³ The author's prefatory epistle endorses the *vita activa*: 'The life of man may therefore be compared to Iron, which beeinge vsed, becommeth bright and shyning, yet at last worne to nothing: Or if it bee not vsed, but layde vp, doth neuerthesse consume with rustiness'.³⁴ Roger Ascham urged that gentlemen should be brought up 'to serue God, and contrey both by vertue and wisdom', and Philibert de Vienne argued that they should be educated so that 'they may the sooner and better exercise the life actiue, and then take vpon them, to trauell [travail] for the common wealth of their Countrey'.³⁵

Civic activism was often equated with virtue in Renaissance behavioural literature. In the *Courtier*, Ottaviano argued that virtue 'consisteth in doing & practise'.³⁶ The same

Press, 1987). All subsequent references to this edition.

³¹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Mm iiiiv - Nn i^r.

³² Cicero, Marcus Tullius, *Marcus Tullius Ciceroes thre bokes of duties to Marcus his sonne*, trans. by Nicholas Grimalde (London: Richard Tottel, 1556), fol. 9^v.

³³ Anon, 'Courtier and cuntry-gentleman', p. 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, sig. Aiv^r.

³⁵ Ascham, *Scholemaster*, fol. 11^r; Vienne, *Philosopher*, sig. Biii^r.

³⁶ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ss ii^r.

definition was propounded in *Of cyuile and vncyuile life*. Valentine insisted that a virtuous man must be endowed with ‘commendable condicions, wherby [he] may be known, and at occasions vsed, in the seruice of our Prince and Country’.³⁷ The devoted public servant was thus presented as the embodiment of virtue, and the self-serving individualist (implicitly) as its antithesis. The self-awareness, diligence and discipline required of the former was frequently emphasized. Valentine described virtue as ‘a voluntary, & knowing good habite’.³⁸ In the *Courtiers academie*, Signor Gualenguo cited Aristotle’s teaching ‘that vertues and vices in a man, are neither naturall, nor against nature, and that good and wicked habite, not by nature, but by custom is acquired’.³⁹ Such comments suggest that a state of virtue is achievable only through strenuous self-fashioning. Yet virtue could also be depicted as something innate, or God-given. In the *Courtier*, Castiglione noted that ‘vertues were graunted to the worlde for a favoure and gifte of nature’.⁴⁰ Having paraphrased Aristotle, Romei’s Signor Gualenguo argued that ‘man in his naturall estate’ must nonetheless possess some basic inclination ‘to vertue’, as he has been created in the image of God.⁴¹ Several courtesy authors postulated a species of virtue pertaining specifically to the court. Della Casa described courtly manners as ‘either a vertue, or the thing that comes very nere to vertue’. He argued that sociable virtues were more significant than moral ones, ‘For these be such things as a man shall neede always at all hands to vse, because a man must necessarily be familiar with men at all times, & euer haue talk & communication with them: But iustice, fortitude, and the other greater, and more noble virtues, are

³⁷ Anon, ‘Courtier and cuntry-gentleman’, p. 42.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁹ Romei, *Courtiers academie*, p. 80.

⁴⁰ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Lii^r.

⁴¹ Romei, *Courtiers academie*, pp. 86-90.

seldome put in vse'.⁴²

The supreme social virtue – the natural flair that distinguished an exemplary courtier from a technically proficient one - was defined as Reckelessness, or *sprezzatura*. Castiglione's Canossa argued that 'the Courtier ought to accompany all his doinges, gestures, demeaners, finally al his mocions with a grace, and this, me think, ye put for a sauce to euery thing, without the which all his other properties & good condicions were litle woorth'.⁴³ When pressed, Canossa elaborated:

But I, imagynyng with my self offerntymes how this grace commeth, leaving a part such as have it from above, fynd one rule that is most general which in thys part (me thynk) taketh place in all thyngs belongyng to a man in worde or deede above all other. And that is to eschew as much as a man may, and as a sharp and dangerous rock, Affectation or curiosity and (to speak a new word) to use in every thing a certain Reckelessness, to cover art withal, and seeme whatsoever he doth and sayeth to do it wythout pain, and (as it were) not myndyng it.⁴⁴

Sprezzatura became inextricably associated both with Castiglione and with Renaissance ideals of courtly conduct. In Lorenzo Ducci's *Ars aulica*, aspiring royal attendants were advised 'to shunne a most dangerous rocke [note the appropriation of Canossa's metaphor], that is *curious and open affectation*'.⁴⁵ The cult of sophisticated artlessness

⁴² Della Casa, *Galateo*, trans. by Peterson, p. 2. Philibert de Vienne sardonically highlighted a tendency to regard the behaviour prescribed for courtiers as inherently and self-sufficiently virtuous:

Vertue is a manner of lyuing according too the manner of the Courte ... And euen as it was aunciently affirmed, that if wee followe Nature and doe no more than oure naturall reason sheweth vs, wee shoulde neuer doe euill: so, if wee followe the manner and customes, in due and true order of the Courte, wee shall euer doe that is seemelye, good, and well. For who is so rashe, foolishe, or madde, that wyll saye any thing is euyll doone, whiche is doone by a Gentleman Courtier, well instructed.

Vienne, *Philosopher*, pp. 17-8.

⁴³ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. E1^r. The passage quoted above is Cesare Gonzaga's paraphrase of Ludovico Canossa's argument.

⁴⁴ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Eii^r.

⁴⁵ Lorenzo Ducci, *Ars aulica: or the courtiers arte*, trans. [Edward Blount?] (London: Mech. Bradwood for Edward Blount, 1607), p. 88.

was so fashionable that its most dedicated disciples became a target for satirists. The *Philosopher of the court* mocked those who,

supposing themselves perfit dauncers, for that they haue heard say it is an excellent grace not to seeme to haue care of or to thinke of their daunce, do in dauncing before noble damsels, frame their countenance with a counterfet modestie, and letting their cape slip off the one shoulder to shewe their gay ierkins or dublets, keeping euer this good mean, that it may be supposed they deliuer their trippes and trickes easily, without labour or regarde of theyr daunce, by little and little lets it fall off on the chamber floure: And thus the gallants glorying in their own shadowes, tread their two simples with a double tricke, and beleeeue they haue done singularly well ...

‘I leaue to common coniecture,’ added de Vienne, ‘howe the lookers on doe laugh at it.’⁴⁶

The definition of *sprezzatura* as a kind of grace is interesting. The word ‘grace’ often features in the context of behavioural literature. However, it was apparently invested with a wide range of meanings. Even within the *Courtier*, different usages of the term can be detected. In his study of *Two Renaissance courtesy books* (the *Courtier* and *Galateo*), the literary scholar Harry Berger distinguished between the ‘grace’ that is *sprezzatura*, and that which is denoted in the original Italian text by the word *grazia*. He observed that ‘Castiglione’s interlocutors initially use the word “grazia” in a manner that conflates grace as natural or supernatural endowment with graceful behaviour. “Sprezzatura” ... designates a learned behavioural skill rather than an inborn gift’.⁴⁷ The Urbino protagonists begin by presenting the courtier’s ‘grace’ as an innate, God-given property (‘some there are born endowed wyth suche graces, that they seeme not to

⁴⁶ Vienne, *Philosopher*, p. 34.

⁴⁷ Harry Berger, Jr., *The absence of grace: sprezzatura and suspicion in two Renaissance courtesy books* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), xi.

have bene borne, but rather facioned with the very hand of some God'; 'I wyll have [our courtier] to be fortunate in this behalfe'). They subsequently concede that those who 'are not by nature so perfectly furnished, with studye and diligence maye polishe and correct a great part of the defaultes of nature'.⁴⁸ Having established that art can improve on nature, and that a courtier can mould himself into a model of *sprezzatura* if lacking congenital *grazia*, they discuss how this feat of self-fashioning can be accomplished. From this we infer that grace is a heavenly endowment, which can nonetheless be imitated passably by intelligent human endeavour.

Castiglione depicts it as a general, rather than a particularly focused, quality. It is the 'sauce' that enhances 'all [the courtier's] doings, gestures, demeaners'.⁴⁹ It is 'an ornament to frame and accompanye all his actes'. Its effect will be 'to assure men in his looke, such a one to bee woorthy the companye and favour of every great man'. Its power will be such that 'whoso speaketh with hym or yet beholdeth hym, muste nedes beare him an affeccion for ever'.⁵⁰ Philibert de Vienne agreed that courtly grace was difficult to define precisely. He identified it as the attribute 'which Cicero in his Offices calleth *Decorum generale*': 'And for that the matter to him, seemeth so confused as it is not yet framed into direct and right rules: he sayde, it might be better conceiued in imagination, than set forth in writing'. Vienne attempted to clarify the issue; he named prudence, justice, temperance and magnanimity as the 'foure vertues' that constituted 'the assured and certain causes, and very springs, from whence procedeth honesty, which we likewise call Courtly ciuilitie'. 'Of the which ciuilitie', he continued, 'well

⁴⁸ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ciii^r.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. Ei^r.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, sig. Ciii^r.

framed, & ... applyed, is formed, borne, and nourished this good grace'.⁵¹ He later reiterated the importance of virtue as a prerequisite for grace, asserting that when man is ruled by reason '*the spirit will not deliuer from hir, any thing but vertue: from whence this good grace shal then be seene to proceede*'.⁵² Grace, then, is presented as a visible manifestation of virtue. Like Castiglione, Vienne treats it as a property to 'seene' and admired by the possessor's associates.

Other authors, however, demonstrate a very different understanding of the term 'grace'. Simon Robson espoused a far less moralistic interpretation than that of Vienne. He treated grace as nothing more or less than an easy and pleasant personal manner, referring to it repeatedly as 'smyling grace'.⁵³ Particularly, he seems to have regarded it as a mechanism for negotiating awkward social episodes. In his first chapter, he considers the question of whether a courtier should 'give the place' to a man 'whose liuing and birth is worse then his owne, and yet ... for his wisdom and grauitie ... be well esteemed of by others'. This is a delicate problem. An act of gratuitous self-abasement would damage the courtier's standing in the eyes of his companions – but so too would his failure to demonstrate respect for a revered individual. Robson's solution is that he should give place, 'but with sutch a modest audacitie, mingled with a smyling grace ... as the rest of the company may well perceiue ... that it is offered rather of a curteous disposition, then of a sheepishe simplicite'.⁵⁴ In chapter two, a similarly sticky social scenario is postulated: our young gentleman encounters an individual who lies, and tells tall stories, in the hope of making his listeners seem ignorant or credulous.

⁵¹ Vienne, *Philosopher*, p. 94.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁵³ R., *Covrte of ciuill courtesie*, pp. 1; 33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Robson recommends a non-confrontational approach; one should say something noncommittal, but ‘with sutch a grace, as the countenance may shewe the minde, and yet the speeche keepe them from quarell’.⁵⁵ Grace is treated as a facility for disabling a tactical social assault, whilst glossing over one’s implicit challenge to the attacker’s integrity. The next reference to ‘smiling grace’ occurs in an analysis of how to receive praise in public – an experience which, whilst undoubtedly pleasant, nonetheless requires adept and tactful handling.⁵⁶ Grace, therefore, features in *Court of ciuill courtesie* as a more-or-less morally neutral catalyst for diffusing potentially tense and embarrassing situations. It is the ultimate social lubricant.

Grace was a word charged with religious and political, as well as social, significance. In his 1618 catechism entitled *Necessary notes for a courtier*, Nicholas Breton posed the question ‘What is the chiefe grace of a Courtier?’. The answer he supplied was ‘The feare of God, and the fauour of a King’.⁵⁷ This response is interesting, as it brackets together two distinct interpretations of the term. It was, of course, conventional for courtiers to refer in linear sequence to the benefits conferred by, and the obligations owed to, their heavenly and earthly monarchs. Walter Mildmay instructed his son firstly to ‘Fear God’ and secondly to ‘Obey thy Prince’.⁵⁸ Burghley wrote to Robert Cecil that he was ‘sworn first’ to God, and then to the Queen.⁵⁹ Memorial verses to Sir Christopher Hatton demanded: ‘Was not his care set on his God for aye? / And did not

⁵⁵ R., *Covrte of ciuill courtesie*, p. 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁷ Nicholas Breton, ‘Necessary notes for a courtier’, in *Inedited tracts*, ed. by Hazlitt, pp. 207-11 (p. 208)

⁵⁸ Northamptonshire Record Office, Westmoreland (Aprethorpe) MSS, Misc. 35, fols 15b-16a.

⁵⁹ CUL, MS Ee. iii. 56, no. 85.

he his soueraigne Queen obey?'.⁶⁰ The implication of such observations was that if one had 'The feare God', one would behave in a manner that invited 'the fauour of a King'. The states of fear and favour were therefore related, and ideally would be interdependent. Yet despite this connection, the type of grace that encompassed devotion to God had different connotations from that implied by royal patronage. The former suggested a soul-saving gift of the capacity to know and serve the Almighty. The latter was a political commodity, universally desired for its utility in procuring temporal power and material riches. Perhaps the most obvious similarity between the two (and the reason Breton juxtaposed them under the umbrella-term 'grace') was that both made the difference between success and failure, salvation and damnation. In a courtly context, royal favour was analogous to divine election.

The spiritual significance of grace inevitably complicated the usage of the same noun in a secular context. Roger Ascham was infuriated by its annexation to the vocabulary of courtly manners and morals. He claimed that if a court attendant 'be innocent and ignorant of ill, they say, he is rude, and hath no grace, so vngraciouslie do som gracelesse men, misuse the faire and godlie word GRACE'. He advised the reader who 'would know, what grace they meene' to 'go, and looke, and learn emonges them': 'ye shall see that it is: First, to blush at nothing ... to dare do any mischief, to contemne stoutly any goodnesse, to be busie in euery matter, to be skilfull in euery thing, to acknowledge no ignorance at all. To do thus in Court, is counted of some, the chief and

⁶⁰ I. Phillips, 'A commemoration of the life and death of *Sir Christopher Hatton*, knight, *Lord Chancellor of England*', reproduced in *A Lamport garland from the library of Sir Charles Edmund Isham, Bart.* (London: J. B. Nichols & Sons for the Roxburghe Club, 1881), p. 1.

greatest Grace of all'.⁶¹ Ascham expanded on his theme:

Moreouer, where the swing goeth, there to follow, fawne, flatter, laugh and lie lustelie at other men's liking. To face, stand foremost, shoue back: and to the meaner man, or vnknowne in the Court, to seeme somewhat solumne, coye, big, and dangerous of looke, taulk, and answe: To thinke well of him selfe, to be lustie in contemning of others, to haue some trim grace in a priuie mock. And in greater presens, to beare a braue looke: to be warlike, though he neuer looked enimie in the face in warre ... to be able to raise taulke, and make discourse of euerie rishe: to haue a verie good will, to heare him selfe speake: To be seene in Palmestrie, wherby to conueie to chast eares, som fond or filthie taulke:

And if som Smithfield ruffian take vp, som strange going: som new mowing with the mouth: som wrinching with the shoulder, som braue prouerbe: some fresh new othe ... som new disguised garment, or desperate hat, fond in facion, or gaurish in colour, what soeuer it cost, how small soeuer his liuing be, by what shift soeuer it be gotten, gotten must it be, and vsed with the first, or els the grace of it, is stale and gone ...⁶²

This vehement diatribe casts God-given grace as Hyperion to the satyr of the courtier's 'graceless grace'. Ascham evidently deemed the linguistic conflation of the two antithetical entities extremely inappropriate.⁶³

The concept of *sprezzatura*, so central to the self-presentation of the Courtier, is often regarded as quintessentially aristocratic.⁶⁴ After all, it proclaims that a gentleman's talents are innate, not acquired; he is brilliant because he was born that way, and because it befits one of his status to be brilliant. The value of hard work and discipline is implicitly discounted. The Courtier is even advised not to aspire to anything other than a modest competence at chess, because everyone knows how much effort is

⁶¹ Ascham, *Scholemaster*, fol. 14^v.

⁶² *Ibid.*, fols 14^v-15^f.

⁶³ As we have seen, Ascham had no objection to the *Courtier*, or Castiglione's concept of *sprezzatura*.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Eduardo Seccone, 'Grazia, sprezzatura, affettazione in the Courtier', in *Castiglione: the real and the ideal in Renaissance culture*, ed. by Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 45-67 (p. 60).

required to become ‘couning at it’.⁶⁵ By contrast, as Mary Crane has observed, sixteenth century humanist literature tended to emphasize the moral worth of diligent busyness, and the corrosive effects of idleness (‘What bringeth ruste to Iron smothe?’).⁶⁶ Crane also argues that non-aristocratic but ambitious English humanists sought to justify their participation in public affairs by identifying themselves and their aspirations with pre-validated, nonthreatening truisms. Their conspicuous subscription to a ‘common culture’ was designed to allay fears that their values and ambitions were innovative, self-promoting, and would ultimately undermine the social order.⁶⁷ Crane regards individualism as the prerogative, or privilege, of the nobility.⁶⁸ A nobleman’s social pre-eminence was uncontroversial, and his political activism was taken for granted. He was consequently placed under less pressure to authorize his exercise of power. According to this analysis of Tudor political culture, *sprezzatura* represented an unambiguous assertion of aristocratic identity. The ‘reckless’ courtier does not seek to explain himself through reference to the ‘common culture’; such explanation would demystify him. He prefers not to demonstrate how he has constructed himself. Instead, he assumes the persona of a conjurer, unveiling accomplishments as if they were scarves drawn from his sleeves, or rabbits pulled out of his hat. *Sprezzatura* accentuates his individualism by obscuring the cultural context of his actions and abilities – whereas the essence of humanist ‘framing’ is contextualisation.

Yet Castiglione’s Courtier arguably occupies a halfway house between the poles of

⁶⁵ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Piii^v.

⁶⁶ Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing authority: sayings, self and society in sixteenth century England* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1960), pp. 94; 119. Nicholas Bacon, *The recreations of his age* (Oxford: Daniel, printed c. 1903, issued 1919), p. 3.

⁶⁷ Crane, *Framing authority*, pp. 12-38.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

‘transcendent dilettantism’ and studious self-referencing.⁶⁹ The Urbino interlocutors agree that he should practise *sprezzatura*, but they also deconstruct the concept. Cesare Gonzaga acknowledges that some individuals are lucky enough to be born with a God-given capacity for nonchalant grace. However (as we noted earlier), on behalf of ‘such as of nature haue onely so much, that they be apte to beecome gracious in bestowinge labour, exercise, and diligence’, he ‘would faine knowe what art, with that learning, and by what meane they shall compasse this grace’.⁷⁰ To highlight the need for ‘labour, exercise, and diligence’ is, of course, to explode the mystique of *sprezzatura* entirely. Canossa, who is charged with revealing the tricks of the trade, suggests that ‘euen as the bee in the greene medowes fleeth alwayes aboute the grasse chousynge out flowres: so shall our Courtyer steale thys grace from them that to hys seming haue it, and from ech one that parcell that shal be most worthy praise’.⁷¹ As Crane has observed, the metaphor of the bee flitting from flower to flower in a meadow, extracting the sweetest nectar from each bloom, was frequently deployed by humanist scholars to describe the process of ‘gathering’ wisdom to which one would subsequently frame oneself.⁷² The key to *sprezzatura*, it would seem, is for the Courtier to ‘source’ his behaviour in precedents and examples. Moreover, the protagonists proceed to justify this ‘art that appeereth not to be art’, by citing other circumstances under which it has conventionally been practised. Canossa recalls having read ‘that there were some excellent Oratours, which among their other cares, enforced themselues to make euery man beleve that they had no sight in letters, and dissemblinge their conning, made semblant their orations to

⁶⁹ The phrase ‘transcendent dilettantism’ is Sidney Anglo’s; see Anglo, ‘Courtier: changing ideals’, p. 36.

⁷⁰ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ei^r.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, sig. Eii^r.

⁷² Crane, *Framing authority*, p. 58.

be made very simply, & rather as nature and trueth lead them, then study and arte'.⁷³

De Medici adds that

This in like maner is *verified* [my italics] in musicke: where it is a verye greate vice to make two perfecte cordes, the one after the other, so that the verye sence of our hearing abhorreth it, and often times deliteth in a seconde, or in a seuen, which in it selfe is an vnpleasaunt discord and not tollerable: and this proceadeth because the continuance in the perfit tunes engendreth urksomenesse and betokeneth a to curious harmonye ...⁷⁴

Canossa invokes 'a proverbe emonge some most excellent poincters of old time, that *To muche diligence is hurtfull*'.⁷⁵ *Sprezzatura* is thus thoroughly contextualized.

Castiglione addresses concerns about its morally subversive potential by highlighting its cultural ubiquity and well-established antecedents. His treatment of the concept exemplifies the humanist techniques of 'gathering' and 'framing'; and his repeated warnings about how hard the Courtier must work to sustain the illusion of aristocratic dilettantism are couched in the humanist vocabulary of diligence, endeavour, and painstaking. As Sidney Anglo perceptively remarks, 'amateurism is stressed throughout *Il Cortegiano* to such an extent that, in the end, it creates a profession of itself'.⁷⁶

The Urbino interlocutors suggest that a courtier should be able 'To frame himself to the company' - in other words, to modify his conduct according to the character and tastes of those around him.⁷⁷ The ability to read, and adapt to, the temperament of one's prince was obviously an invaluable political asset. As David Starkey has noted, the Eltham Ordinances of 1526 instructed the gentlemen of Henry VIII's Privy Chamber to

⁷³ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Eii^r-v.

⁷⁴ Ibid., sig. Eiii^r-v.

⁷⁵ Ibid., sig. Eiii^v.

⁷⁶ Anglo, 'Courtier: changing ideals', p. 36.

⁷⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Diiii^r.

study their master, so that they could anticipate his needs, desires and humours ‘by his looke or countenance’.⁷⁸ This injunction was observed by royal acolytes throughout the Tudor period. On 29 March 1600, having recently come up to court, Dudley Carleton recorded that his fellow courtiers ‘make [the Queen’s] lookes theyr Kalenders’.⁷⁹

Prudence and ambition dictated that a courtier should focus first and foremost upon cultivating his compatibility with the monarch. However, he was also expected to interact successfully with a range of companions in various social contexts.⁸⁰ The *Philosopher of the court* referred to ‘a certayne framing and agreeing in all our actions, to the pleasing of the worlde’ habitually practised by competent courtiers.⁸¹ Prefatory verses published with the *Covrt of ciuill courtesie* promised that the handbook would show a young gentleman ‘at all assays how he himselfe shall frame’ to best effect.⁸² *Galateo* instructed the reader ‘to frame and order thy doings ... to please those with whom thou lyuest’.⁸³ The chivalrous knight was similarly expected to engage pleasantly with men and women of all estates. In the *Wife of Bath’s tale*, the ‘lusty bachelere’ of King Arthur’s court is reminded that a true chevalier does not reserve his courtesy exclusively for his social superiors and equals.⁸⁴ His consideration and civility accommodates all those whom he encounters, irrespective of rank, appearance, gender or circumstances.

A great deal of ink was expended on the issue of how a knight or courtier should

⁷⁸ *A collection of ordinances and regulations for the government of the royal household, made in divers reigns* (London: John Nicols for the Society of Antiquaries, 1790), p. 156; David Starkey, ‘Introduction’, in *English court*, ed. by Starkey, pp. 1-24 (p. 7).

⁷⁹ NA, SP 12/274/86.

⁸⁰ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ciii^r.

⁸¹ Vienne, *Philosopher*, p. 95.

⁸² R., *Covrt of ciuill courtesie*, sig. Aiii^v. The phrase ‘at all assays’ suggests a wide range of scenarios.

⁸³ Della Casa, *Galateo*, trans. by Peterson, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Chaucer, ‘The Wife of Bath’s tale’, in *Riverside Chaucer*, line 883.

behave towards women. The noble cult of courtly love achieved its apogee during the late medieval period. Chaucer's Squire is a lover: 'So hoote he lovede that by nyghtertale / He sleep namoore then dooth a nyghtyngale (lines 97-8)'.⁸⁵ We are told that he has undertaken feats of chivalry in France 'in hope to stonden in his lady grace' (88).⁸⁶ He feeds his passion with music: 'Syngyng he was, or floytyng, al the day' (91). The relationship between knighthood and troubadour romance is explored in the *Knight's tale*, which narrates the story of Palamon and Arcite. Each of these valiant knights becomes enamoured of a lady named Emily. Their rivalry, and their pursuit of Emily, quickly escalates into an all-consuming feud. They finally resolve to settle their quarrel in the lists. The two former friends fight bloodily and brutally, and whilst Arcite wins the contest, a fall from his horse leaves him with appalling internal injuries.⁸⁷ He dies horribly, leaving Palamon to marry Emily. The Knight's gruesome description of Arcite's undignified end plainly undermines the idea that desire for a beautiful woman could or should override considerations such as friendship, loyalty, humanity and restraint.⁸⁸

Throughout the first half of the sixteenth century, progressive scholars expressed deep reservations about the heady concoction of blind love and violence (the latter enacted in the name of the former) offered up by the authors of courtly romances. The Arthurian cycle, with its tales of fornication, adultery and incest, was deemed particularly suspect. Ascham famously denounced Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*,

⁸⁵ Chaucer, 'General prologue'.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 85-88.

⁸⁷ Chaucer emphasizes the brutish nature of their combat by likening them to goaded, bloodthirsty lions and tigers. Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Knight's tale', in *Riverside Chaucer*, lines 2626-33.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, lines 2743-61.

the whole pleasure of which booke standeth in two speciall poyntes, in open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye: In which booke those be counted the noblest Knightes, that do kill most men without any quarell, and commit fowlest aduoultures by sutlest shifte: as Sir Launcelote, with the wife of King Arthure his master: Syr Tristram with the wife of kyng Marke his vncler: Syr Lamerocke, with the wife of king Lote, that was his own aunte.⁸⁹

Vives complained that ‘There is an vse nowe a dates, worse than amonge the pagans, that bokes writen in our mothers tonges that be made but for idel men and women to rede, haue none other matter but of war and loue’. He wondered ‘What places amonge [such romances] be for chastity vnarmed and weake?’⁹⁰ Ascham was also unenthusiastic about early Renaissance models of courtly love. He wrote censoriously of ‘Englishe men Italianated’, who ‘haue in more reuerence, the triumphes of Petrarche: than the Genesis of Moses’.⁹¹ He clearly associated Petrarchan passion with irreligion, dismissing it as a self-indulgent diversion for idolatrous and worldly wastrels. For men of Ascham’s mental and spiritual constitution, traditional representations of the gentleman-courtier as a lover were problematic.

The Urbino Courtier is an expert practitioner in the arts of love. Like the Squire, he relies heavily upon music. Federico Fregoso advises that singing, whilst accompanying oneself on the lute or the viol, is the best way of captivating a woman (not least because the sight of an instrument clasped close to one’s chest will undoubtedly set her heart

⁸⁹ Ascham, *Scholemaster*, fol. 27^{r-v}.

⁹⁰ Vives, *Instruction of a Christen woman*, trans. by Hyrde, fol. 10^r. In his *Vanitie and vncertaintie of artes and sciences*, Henry Cornelius Agrippa claimed that

There is founde no stronger ingine to batter the honestie as well of wedded wiues, as the chastitie of vnmarried maydes and widowes, then the reading of wanton histories: there is no woman of so good disposition, that herewith is not corrupted, and I woulde thinke it a miracle, if there be founde any, either woman or mayde, of so perfecte chastitie or honestie, whiche with such readings and histories of straunge lust, is not oftentimes enflamed euen vnto fury.

Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Of the vanitie and vncertaintie of artes and sciences*, trans. by Ja. San. (London: Henry Wykes, 1569), sig. 98^r.

⁹¹ Ascham, *Scholemaster*. fol. 28^r.

fluttering).⁹² Cesare Gonzaga observes that an infatuated gentleman will deploy every talent in his arsenal of accomplishments to attract the attention, and secure the admiration, of his lady. Gonzaga calls attention to the lover's 'precisenesse in sundrye thinges, inuentions, meery conceites, vndertaking enterprises, sportes, daunses, games, maskeries, iustes, tourneimentes, *the* which thinges [his lady] knoweth al to be taken in hand for her sake'.⁹³ De Medici stipulates that the Courtier's intentions towards women must always be honourable: 'It is meete the Courtier beare verie greate reverence towarde women, and a discreete and courtiouse person ought never to touch their honestie'. However, Pallavicino doubts whether it is possible to court so silly and insincere a creature as a woman honourably.⁹⁴

In Books I-III, the protagonists seem interested primarily in discussing the techniques of courtship, and exchanging repartee about the differences between the sexes. In Book IV, however, Bembo's discourse illuminates the purpose and potential of human love. Just as Ottaviano reveals the virtuous agenda that underpins and validates the Courtier's political manoeuvres, so Bembo justifies the cultivation of amatory accomplishments. Wooing should not be an idle pastime, or an excuse for vainglorious display. Still less should it steer the Courtier and his beloved down the 'primrose path of dalliance' (although Bembo acknowledges that 'where sensuall love in every age is naught, yet in yonge men it deserveth excuse, and perhappes in some case lefull').⁹⁵ Instead, the initial attraction that is fostered and fuelled by music, 'maskeries', dancing, games and poetry, should represent 'the lowermost steppe of the stayers, by the whiche a man may

⁹² Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Miiii^v.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, sig. Hh iii^v.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, sig. Aa i^v.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, sig. Tt iii^f.

ascende to true love'.⁹⁶ Post-chivalric moralists objected to traditional courtly love, on the grounds that characters who indulged in it were frequently impelled to degrade themselves. This objection does not apply to the Courtier. His love elevates him to the spiritual plane, where he will be inspired to pursue 'the beauty that is seene with the eyes of the minde': 'Thus the soule kindled in the most holye fire of true heavenly love, fleeth to couple her selfe with the nature of Aungelles'.⁹⁷

Honour was similarly depicted as a potential catalyst to virtue in medieval and early modern conduct literature. The heroes of chivalric romances were usually inspired to undertake valiant enterprises by an urgent desire for 'worthy fame'.⁹⁸ Renaissance courtesy authors also represented virtue and honour as cause and effect. The *Philosopher of the court* quoted Cicero's statement that 'Vertue will haue no other recompense for hir paines and dangers, than praise and honour'.⁹⁹ Vienne also reversed the formula by citing reputation as a powerful incentive to virtue.¹⁰⁰ Humphrey Gilbert asserted that 'honour is sufficient a paymente' for virtue.¹⁰¹ The discourse *Of cyuile and vncyuile life* similarly depicted honour as a derivative of virtue, with Valentine informing his rustic counterpart Vincent that 'your honour or worship, resteth not either in your Countrey aboade, or keeping of many seruaunts, but rather in your owne vertue'.¹⁰² Vincent's notion that his honour might be embodied in his house and servants suggests a more material interpretation of the concept than that advocated by

⁹⁶ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Tt iii^v.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, sig. Xx ii^v – Xx iii^v.

⁹⁸ Stephen Hawes, *The historie of graunde Amoure and la bell Pucel, called the pastime of plesure* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1509; repr. John Wayland, 1554), sig. Aiiii^f.

⁹⁹ Vienne, *Philosopher*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ Gilbert, 'Queene Elizabethes achademy', p. 11.

¹⁰² Anon, 'Courtier and cuntry-gentleman', p. 42.

Valentine. The *Courtiers academie* considers a wide range of ‘honours’ that can be bestowed upon an individual. These include ‘Statues, Images, Temples, Altars, Sepulchers, Crownes, publike stipendes’, and ‘barbarous customes ... as to giue the place, to bow, to kisse the hand, the hemme of the vesture, the knee, the foote, putting off the hat, and such like’.¹⁰³ Tangible objects and gestures are therefore treated, not merely as symbols, but as actual units of honour. Honour could evidently be construed as the physical manifestation of achievement or status.¹⁰⁴

There was also a school of opinion to the effect that honour comprises the esteem in which an individual is held by his contemporaries – and is hence not necessarily related to his true or essential self. This viewpoint is articulated in the *Courtiers academie*: ‘By a man of honor ... I meane all those whatsoeuer they bee, good or wicked, who haue not lost the good opinion that the worlde conceiued of them’.¹⁰⁵ For those who agreed with this statement, honour clearly represented an extra-personal entity. However, many argued (more Stoically) that honour was an intrinsic state of being, unaffected by a person’s surroundings or common repute. Della Casa cited Theseus’s insistence that ‘I will not haue my life honoured with other mens woordes, but with my owne deedes.’¹⁰⁶ The *Courtiers academie* distinguished these two interpretations, describing reputation and as ‘honor naturall’ (‘the most precious of all goods externall’), and intrinsic merit as ‘honor acquired’ (an inner disposition obtained through habitual practice of virtue).¹⁰⁷

Whatever one’s definition of honour, the concept was endowed with enormous significance in courtly and aristocratic society. ‘[H]onour is the marke whereat we all

¹⁰³ Romei, *Courtiers academie*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁴ See Peltonen, *Duel*, pp. 35-43.

¹⁰⁵ Romei, *Courtiers academie*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁶ Della Casa, *Galateo*, trans. by Peterson, p. 54.

¹⁰⁷ Romei, *Courtiers academie*, pp. 78-79.

shoulde tende our desire', declared Philibert de Vienne. He subsequently remarked that 'the end of all our Philosophie and vertue ... is honour and good reputation'.¹⁰⁸ The *Courtiers academie* also portrayed honour as an overarching concern for members of the socio-political elite, describing it as absolutely 'necessarie in a man noble and ciuill'.¹⁰⁹ Uncompromising pronunciations of this nature were by no means exaggerated; early modern gentlemen regarded their honour as a vital component of their personae, and would go to extraordinary (sometimes completely self-destructive) lengths to preserve it. The extent to which honour was prized in civil society was often regarded as morally problematic. It posed the question of whether there was anything one should *not* do in defence of one's honour. In the *Courtiers academie*, the protagonists discuss whether a man who is justly denounced for some fault should challenge his accuser to protect his reputation. Opinion is divided, but when one speaker suggests that provoking a duel under such circumstances would be monstrously unjust, Signor Gualenguo replies that 'A man, how good or wicked soeuer hee bee, must respect no other thing but to preserue [the] opinion ['of the world'] For honour perisheth not before this opinion be lost'.¹¹⁰ Philibert de Vienne satirizes such thinking when he nominates the suicidal Roman matron Lucrece as a role model for honour-obsessed courtiers:

What hart of a woman had she? was it not vertuously done in regard of hir honor, to leaue life, & despise death [could this have been an oblique reference to the duelling phenomenon?]; nothing remembering the will of God? who would not (as shee knewe, and as the world was then of opinion) y^t the soule shoulde passe out of the bodie, without leaue of him that placed

¹⁰⁸ Vienne, *Philosopher*, pp. 53, 80-81.

¹⁰⁹ Romei, *Courtiers academie*, p. 78.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

it there ...¹¹¹

The idolization of honour by courtiers and aristocrats was clearly controversial.

As well as considering the extent to which the Courtier should replicate aristocratic patterns of behaviour, the Urbino protagonists discussed whether he actually needed to be noble. The idea that noblemen were uniquely qualified by birth to exercise power and influence within the body politic enjoyed a long pedigree. That this idea was often underpinned by a belief in genetic determinism is illustrated by Book III, chapter 3 of the *Morte d'Arthur*, in which a humble cowherd brings his son, Tor, to Camelot, and asks King Arthur to make the youth a knight: 'I have thirteen sons, and all they will fall to what labour I put them, and will be right glad to do labour, but this child will not labour for me, for anything that my wife or I may do, but always he will be shooting or casting darts, and glad for to see battles and to behold knights, and always day and night he desireth of me to be made a knight'. It transpires that Tor is not, in fact, the cowherd's son. He is the product of one of those liaisons to which Ascham objected so strongly, between the cowherd's wife and King Pellinore.¹¹² His spontaneous interest in, and aptitude for, chivalric pursuits is an unambiguous instance of nature trumping nurture. In the chivalrous *Historie of Huon of Bourdeaux*, the Emperor Charlemagne observes that, as 'a good Tree bringeth foorth good fruit', so one would expect the sons of 'a valiaunt & true knight' to 'resemble their good Father'.¹¹³ The sixteenth century

¹¹¹ Vienne, *Philosopher*, pp. 85-86.

¹¹² Thomas Malory, *Le morte d'Arthur*, 2 vols (London: J. M. Dent, 1906; repr. 1953), I, 73-4.

¹¹³ These quotations are from a 1601 reprint of Lord Berners' early sixteenth century translation from the French. The original publication date of Berners' translation is unknown. Anon, *The ancient, honorable, famous, and delightfull historie of Huon of Bourdeaux, one of the peeres of Fraunce, and Duke of Guyenne*, trans. by John Bouchier, Lord Berners (London: Thomas Purfoot for Edward White, 1601), sig. B6^r.

French poet Pierre de Ronsard, inhabiting a society that was perhaps more caste-oriented than that of England, informed the Duc d'Epemon that 'The eagle is descended from the eagle, and the noble lion engenders the lion; thus you, a valorous son, are born of a valorous father, and will become powerful and glorious in the service of your King'.¹¹⁴ However, such emphasis on lineage and blood tended increasingly to be challenged by the humanist thesis that 'a righte gentleman is sooner séene by the tryall of his vertue then blasing of his armes'.¹¹⁵ As Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes have pointed out, early modern social commentators often brokered a compromise between the competing claims of lineage and merit. They argued that noble birth was highly conducive to greatness, but that (like the corporeal love described by Bembo) it needed to be substantiated by virtue and wisdom to realise its true potential.¹¹⁶

The Urbino interlocutors appeared to favour this Aristotelean mean.¹¹⁷ Canossa initially asserts that he 'wyll haue this our Courtyer therefore to be a Gentleman borne & of a good house'. Pallavicino contends that 'this noblenesse of birthe is not so

¹¹⁴ W. L. Wiles, *The gentleman of Renaissance France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 38.

¹¹⁵ John Lyly, 'Euphues to a young gentleman in Athens names Alcious, who leauing his studie followed all lyghtnes and lyued both shamefully and sinfully to the grieffe of his friends and discredite of the Vniuersitie', in *Euphues: the anatomy of wyt* (London: [T. East] for Gabriel Cawood, 1578), fols 83^v–85^r (fol. 84^r). For analysis of the debate about the relative merits of lineage and virtue, see Peltonen, *Classical humanism*, pp. 35-9.

¹¹⁶ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The gentry in England and Wales: 1500-1700* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 30-33. Thomas Hoby's widow Elizabeth described her second husband, John Russell, as 'Right noble twice, by virtue and by birth'. Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, *Chronicles of the tombs: a select collection of epitaphs* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1857; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1968), p. 348. The Elizabethan minister John Bridges observed that 'true Nobilitie consisteth not so much in the goodes of fortune, gorgeous apparell, and prowde and hauty lookes and behauior, as in courteous countenance, and other virtuous qualities of the minde, the verye true implements and furniture of a right Courtier'. Rudolf Gwalther, *An hundred, threescore and fiftene homelyes or sermons, vppon the Actes of the Apostles, written by Saint Luke*, trans. by John Bridges (London: Henry Denham, 1572), sig. a2^v.

¹¹⁷ Aristotle himself argued that men 'become good and excellent through three things. These three are nature, habit, and reason'. Aristotle, *The politics*, trans. by Carnes Lord (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1984), p. 218.

necessarie for the Courtyer'. He seems to anticipate a degree of conservative scepticism: 'And if I wiste that any of you thought it a straunge or newe matter, I would alledge vnto you sondrye, who for all they were borne of most noble bloude, yet haue they been heaped full of vyces: And contrarywise, many vnnoble that haue made famous their posteritie'.¹¹⁸ However, nobody claims that the Courtier will innately or inevitably be worthier for having illustrious ancestry. Canossa highlights the usefulness of pedigree as an incentive, or admonition, to virtue:

For noblenesse of birth (is as it were) a clere lampe that sheweth forth and bringeth into light, workes both good and badde, and enflameth and prouoketh vnto vertue, as wel with the feare of slaunder, as also with the hope of praise ... the noble of birthe counte it a shame not to arriue at the leaste at the boundes of their predecessours set fourth vnto them.¹¹⁹

He also advises that a well born courtier will find it easier to establish himself socially and politically:

For where there are two in noble mans house which at the first haue geuen no prooffe of themselues with woorkes good or bad, assoone as it is knowen that the one is a gentleman borne, and the other not, the vnnoble shall be muche lesse esteemed with euerye manne, then the gentleman, and he muste with much trauaile and long time imprint in mennes heades a good op[i]nion of himselfe, which the other shal geat in a moment, and onely for that he is a gentleman
...¹²⁰

The arguments in favour of the Courtier's nobility are thus pragmatic, and implicitly acknowledge the supremacy of virtue. Significantly, there is no hint that the *Book of the*

¹¹⁸ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ciii^r-^v.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. Cii^v.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, sig. Ciiii^r.

Courtier is intended exclusively for scions of the old aristocracy.¹²¹

Castiglione can be said to have reinvented the medieval knight as a Renaissance commonwealthsman, without entirely subsuming the former into the latter. His dialogue appealed to scholars and soldiers alike. His friends' project of describing the perfect courtier is undertaken in a genuine spirit of inquiry, and their ideas are sufficiently catholic to engage representatives of more than one culture. Unlike *Of civiile and vnciuile life*, the *Courtier* does not seek to pit one code of conduct against another. Neither, in the final analysis, does it encourage the reader to endorse one particular *modus vivendi* and discount alternative options. It rather facilitates synthesis, suggesting that various skills and ideals can be yoked together in pursuit of a benevolent agenda. Throughout sixteenth century Europe, it offered viable models of courtly conduct to a wide range of constituencies – from the aristocratic, to the humanistic, to the feminine.

Thomas Hoby's friends have not traditionally been associated with Castiglionean courtliness. In the first *Dictionary of National Biography* (published between 1885 and 1904), they were almost universally classified as statesmen. The epithet was applied to Smith, Walsingham and Mason.¹²² Cecil was labelled a 'minister of state'. Other Athenians were defined by the offices they held - from Bacon ('lord keeper') to Mildmay ('chancellor of the exchequer').¹²³ No member of the Cambridge connection was presented as a courtier. The tradition of portraying these individuals as statesmen

¹²¹ See Richard Cust, 'Catholicism, antiquarianism and gentry honour: the writings of Sir Thomas Shirley', *Midland History*, vol. 23 (1998), 40-70 (48-53).

¹²² Mason attended Oxford, but became a close associate of the 'Cambridge connection'.

¹²³ Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 63 vols (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885-1904); LIII, ed. by Lee (1898), 124; LIX, ed. by Lee (1899), 231; IX, ed. by Stephen (1887), 146; XXXVI, ed. by Lee (1893), 425; II, ed. by Stephen (1885), 366; XXXVII, ed. by Lee (1894), 374.

not courtiers - and the assumption that the two roles should be differentiated – enjoys a long pedigree. In 1641, Robert Naunton published his *Fragmenta Regalia, or, observations on the late Queen Elizabeth, her times and favorits*. He divided the men at Elizabeth’s court into three basic types: *Togati*; Martialists or *Militiae*; and courtiers. Naunton appears to have regarded these three categories as mutually exclusive. He conceded that Philip Sidney met the criteria for a courtier and a martialist: ‘They have a very quaint, and factious figment of him, that Mars and Mercury fell at variance, whose servant he should be’.¹²⁴ He also described Sir John Perrot as ‘a brave Courtier, but rough ... as being in his constellation destined for Armes’.¹²⁵ Yet Naunton’s astrological references suggest that he considered courtiers constitutionally different from soldiers. He similarly distinguished courtiers (such as Hatton) from *Togati* (such as Burghley, Walsingham and Nicholas Bacon). The latter were accredited with the gravitas of Roman senators. The former were dismissed as ‘meer vegetable[s] of the Court’.¹²⁶

Naunton’s analysis of Elizabethan politics, particularly his perception of entrenched factionalism in the royal entourage, has been subjected to increasingly critical scrutiny over recent decades. It is worth reviewing the extent to which *Togati*, *Militiae* and courtiers actually inhabited separate spheres. The Urbinese model of courtliness accommodated all three functions. It encouraged men such as Leicester, Sidney, Essex and Raleigh to combine serious military ambitions with the job of entertaining the monarch. These politicians cultivated a chivalric style of courtiership, and their

¹²⁴ Robert Naunton, *Fragmenta regalia* (London: I. Sudbury and George Humble, 1641), p. 20. According to Naunton, soldiers were Martian and courtiers were Mercurial. See his concluding remarks on the earl of Leicester (p. 15).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

approximation to the Urbino prototype has often been noted.¹²⁷ Nobody, by contrast, suggests that the self-fashioning of Naunton's *Togati* was influenced by Castiglione. Yet, as we shall see, the *Togati* drew inspiration from Castiglionean themes when constructing their public personae. The *Book of the Courtier* delineated 'civil' and 'martial' ideals of courtly conduct. Many of the so-called statesmen of the Elizabethan era functioned as 'civil' courtiers – a fact that has rarely been acknowledged since Naunton's day.

Naunton portrayed the *Togati* as extremely intelligent and able politicians. Burghley was 'a person of a most subtill and active spirit', who 'having a pregnancy to great inclinations ... came by degrees to a higher conversation with the chiefest affairs of State, and Councils'. Walsingham was 'one of the great Engines of State', said 'to have had certain curiosities, and secret wayes of intelligence above the rest'. Robert Cecil was a purely political creature ('a pregnant proficient in all discipline of State').¹²⁸ It may not be over-fanciful to suggest that this rather sterile characterisation of the *Togati*, which emphasised cold intellect and political acumen above all else, owed something to Robert Cecil's physical deformity. A hunched back precluded him from

¹²⁷ Leicester, for example, is often represented as an archetypal *cortegiano* (Schrinner, *Castiglione und die englische Renaissance*, p. 82). He was a peer of the realm, although whether it would have been advisable for him to derive inspiration from his illustrious ancestors was another matter. He served Elizabeth as Master of the Horse, and accompanied her when she indulged in that most aristocratic and athletic of pastimes, hunting. He courted the queen, and established an intimate friendship with her. He was a councillor, entrusted with weighty affairs of state. It took him several decades to compass all of these personae, but his achievement is highly impressive nonetheless. Sir Philip Sidney, who earned a posthumous reputation as the English incarnation of Castiglione's Courtier, also enacted the roles of soldier, scholar, devoted public servant and Petrarchan lover. See McKerrow, *Works of Nashe*, p. 7. Fulke Greville praised Sidney's intellectual abilities in his *Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, published in *The prose works of Fulke Greville*, ed. by John Gouws (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 3-135 (pp. 5-6). Sidney's reputation as a great lover is derived from his *Astrophil and Stella*, through which he explores his desire for a woman who is the 'light of [his] life', but from whom he is 'misled' by 'honour's cruell might'. Philip Sidney, 'Astrophil and Stella', in *The poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. by William A. Ringler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), no. 91, lines 1-2.

¹²⁸ Naunton, *Fragments*, pp. 16-17; 20; 39.

being cast as a courtier in the Castiglionean image.¹²⁹ His biographers therefore focused exclusively upon his mental capacities. As Naunton put it, ‘though his little crooked person could not promise any great supportation, yet it carryed thereon a head, and a headpeece of a vast content’.¹³⁰ From a Caroline perspective, Robert Cecil represented a recently living link with the Athenians. He was the tribe’s most illustrious offshoot. It is by no means inconceivable that his representation as a de-corporealised intelligence affected contemporary perceptions of his forebears. They certainly seem to have suffered on occasion from slightly one-dimensional biographical treatment.

A more obvious influence can be detected behind Naunton’s predominantly cerebral depiction of Burghley and Walsingham. The image of a consummate politician, applying his formidable powers to the business of statecraft with dispassionate calculation, is strongly evocative of Machiavelli. Machiavellian portraits of great Elizabethan ministers were by no means novel in the seventeenth century. From the 1570s onwards, disaffected Catholic commentators had excoriated leading members of the Protestant establishment as unscrupulous, ruthless and diabolically cunning.¹³¹ The Machiavellian mud slung at Walsingham stuck. His detractors would doubtless be gratified by the longevity of their caricature. Their success is partly attributable to his enduring reputation for rabid, unscrupulous zealotry. Over the past five decades he has been described as a ‘fanatic’,¹³² a ‘conviction-politician’, ‘a single-minded

¹²⁹ Naunton described Cecil as ‘a Courtier from his Cradle’- but by this he simply meant that the son of Lord Burghley was a precociously devious politician. Naunton, *Fragmenta*, p. 39.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40. See also Pauline Croft, ‘Can a bureaucrat be a favourite? Robert Cecil and the strategies of power’, in *The world of the favourite*, ed. by J. H. Elliott and L. W. B. Brockliss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 81-95.

¹³¹ See chapter four.

¹³² Geoffrey Elton, *England under the Tudors* (London: Methuen, 1955; 2nd edn 1974), p. 408; Neville Williams, *All the Queen’s men* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972; repr. Cardinal, 1974), p. 147.

ideologue',¹³³ and 'the embodiment of the crusading spirit, a serious and sombre-looking man'.¹³⁴ His association with Mary Queen of Scots also cemented his reputation as a spy-master. This calculating creature of the shadows scarcely resembles Castiglione's courtier. The latter is clever and contriving, but is distinguished above all else by his vibrant humanity. He is a social being, and he sparkles in the company of his fellow men. The Machiavellian construct of Walsingham has been so thoroughly dehumanised that it is almost impossible to imagine him behaving in a similar manner. It seems implausible that the 'single-minded ideologue' - the devoted 'fanatic' - would expend his time and energy on superfluous social intercourse.

Burghley's reputation suffered less long-term damage from the attentions of Catholic dissidents. However, he and other Athenians were still portrayed as primarily cerebral individuals. The historiographical climate of the mid twentieth century was conducive to such characterisations. During the 1940s, 50s and 60s, scholars emphasised the bureaucratic features of Tudor government. Geoffrey Elton, in particular, stressed the importance of professional bureaucrats within the body politic. He portrayed the 'statesmen of the age' as 'somewhat humdrum but very sound civil servant[s]'.¹³⁵ Elton acknowledged that such men were 'no strangers to the Court', but insisted that they were not 'its creatures' (or vegetables). His solution to the obstinate refusal of 'statesmen' and courtiers to differentiate themselves was to propose that court politics be stripped of all its cultural paraphernalia: 'We need no more reveries on accession tilts

¹³³ John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 252, 280.

¹³⁴ J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934; repr. 1952), p. 227.

¹³⁵ Thomas Cromwell was Elton's archetypal statesman. See Elton, 'Points of contact. III. The court', 215. The epithet 'a somewhat humdrum but very sound civil servant' was applied to Walter Mildmay. Burghley was similarly described as 'rather drabber' than his mistress, 'the brilliant queen'. Elton, *England under the Tudors*, pp. 263, 410.

and symbolism, no more pretty pictures of gallants and galliards; could we instead have painful studies of Acatry and Pantry, of vicechamberlains and ladies of the Privy Chamber?'.¹³⁶ Such 'painful studies' would identify the real politicians who had (literally) been masquerading as courtiers.

Socio-economic historians also chronicled the rise of the 'middling sort' and the 'new gentry'. These proto-bourgeois classes featured prominently in contemporary analyses of the British civil wars. The upheavals of the mid seventeenth century were interpreted as a forceful demonstration of their agency.¹³⁷ Moreover, it seemed obvious that the power they wielded then was the product of an evolutionary process. Even the hothouse environment of the early 1640s could not have propelled them from a state of political infancy to one of maturity in the space of a few short years. Historians such as R. H. Tawney therefore traced the activism of the commercially minded *nouveau riche* back to the early Elizabethan era.¹³⁸ Lawrence Stone developed Tawney's hypothesis when he argued that a 'crisis in the affairs of the hereditary *elite*, the aristocracy' meant that 'For a time this group lost its hold upon the nation, and thus allowed political and social initiative to fall into the hands of the squirearchy'.¹³⁹ Such theories suggested that 'middling' men had been playing an increasingly important part in commonwealth affairs for at least a century before the crisis of the Caroline regime.

The combined effect of Elton's bureaucratic emphasis and Tawney's neo-Marxist analysis was to generate considerable interest in a particular type of individual within

¹³⁶ Elton, 'Points of contact. III. The court', 225.

¹³⁷ See, for example, Christopher Hill, *The English revolution: 1640* (London: Lawrence & Wisheart, 1940; 3rd edn 1955; repr. 1985), pp. 11-20.

¹³⁸ R. H. Tawney, 'Rise of the gentry', 1-38.

¹³⁹ Stone, *Crisis of the aristocracy*, p. 13.

the Tudor and Stuart political establishments. This was the self-made arriviste. His origins were non-aristocratic (he ‘sprung from that middle class from which the Tudors drew their best servants’).¹⁴⁰ He usually demonstrated his precocity at grammar school, and subsequently at Oxford or Cambridge. On leaving university, he was drafted into the service of an expanding state. His industry and talent then won him office and influence. Every stage of his career was marked by hard work, aspiration and achievement. Members of the Athenian tribe conformed rather nicely to this stock-type. The assumption that a courtier’s role was essentially decorative impeded recognition of the possibility that the Athenians might have functioned in such a capacity.¹⁴¹

Over recent decades, however, the courtier’s stock has been reappraised. In 1985, David Starkey demonstrated the extent to which Henry VIII’s personal attendants wielded genuine power within the English body politic.¹⁴² Courtliness could no longer be dismissed as a purely recreational pastime for men of aptitude, and a serious pursuit for mediocrities only. The prizes available to proficient disciples were enticing enough to engage the most talented individuals. Moreover, Starkey argued that ability to court

¹⁴⁰ Neale made this comment about Cecil. Neale, *Elizabeth I*, p. 62.

¹⁴¹ For example, Conyers Read produced two enormously influential biographies of Cecil and Walsingham. These volumes were so meticulously researched and well written that they (rightly) became standard reference works on their subjects. They depicted their subjects unambiguously as sober men of business. Read’s conception of a courtier can be gauged from *Mr Secretary Cecil*, in which he summarised the career of Cecil’s father Richard. Having described Richard’s ‘painfully slow’ promotion at Court (from Page of the Chamber to Groom of the Wardrobe to Yeoman of the Wardrobe), Read wrote:

He never got beyond that [Yeoman of the Wardrobe]. But always he remained close to the royal person. Probably he should be classified among the courtiers. Henry VIII evidently thought well of him in that role, took him along to the Field of the Cloth of Gold and later to the siege of Boulogne. But the King made nothing more of him.

Read added that ‘Henry VIII had too keen an eye for a good man to have missed Richard if Richard had had the qualities which won for his son a unique position beside Henry’s great daughter’. Read, *Mr Secretary Cecil*, p. 20. Courtiers, we infer, were simply royal attendants who lacked the capacity to be serious politicians.

¹⁴² David Starkey, *The reign of Henry VIII: personalities and politics* (London: George Philip, 1985; repr. Vintage, 2002), esp. xi-xiii.

was not a luxury but a necessity for early modern 'statesmen': 'to survive, the minister had to have the aptitudes of a courtier and the favourites had to have the skills of a politician and often the techniques of an administrator as well. For both, in fact, the goal they strove for was the same: influence, or, in the sixteenth century's own language, the favour of the prince'.¹⁴³ He took issue with Elton's attempt to maintain 'the distinction between courtier and councillor', on the grounds that 'Not only were courtiers and councillors pursuing (and achieving) similar goals and using similar methods, *they were often the same person*'. He cited the significant 'overlap in personnel between the Privy Chamber and the Privy Council'; there was obviously no overlap during Elizabeth's reign, but Elizabethans were still disinclined to discriminate between statesmen and courtiers.¹⁴⁴

The notion that some Elizabethan ministers were 'mere' politicians and bureaucrats has also been challenged as a result of new, interdisciplinary approaches to history and biography. It has been argued that the personae of Elizabeth's councillors were informed, not merely by their political and social circumstances, but by the cultural influences to which they were exposed. Historians have analysed the personal and professional impact of their classically inspired education. Markku Peltonen highlighted the ubiquity of 'the classical humanist vocabulary' in Elizabethan political discourse.¹⁴⁵ Patrick Collinson drew attention to the ease with which humanistically schooled politicians adopted classical republican solutions to monarchical problems.¹⁴⁶

Collinson's concept of monarchical republicanism has not only generated invaluable

¹⁴³ Starkey, *Personalities and politics*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁴ Starkey, 'Introduction', in *English court*, pp. 12-3.

¹⁴⁵ Peltonen, *Classical humanism*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Patrick Collinson, 'The monarchical republic of Queen Elizabeth I', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, vol. 69 (spring 1987), no. 2, 394-424.

insights into episodes such as the Bond of Association (1584); more generally, it has encouraged early modern historians to contextualize politics by seeking out the texts that shaped the mental worlds of policy makers. Yet the fact that it has loomed so large in Elizabethan historiography for the past two decades may help to explain why Castiglione's contribution to political discourse has attracted relatively little attention. The *Courtier* is not a republican text. It presupposes a personal monarchy, and its primary concern is to explore the ways in which an individual can flourish and do good in that environment. As we noted in chapter two, it does not envisage the Courtier as the creature of his prince. It encourages him to play an active part in public affairs; to counsel his master with candour; and, if necessary, to correct his inadequacies, errors and vices. Several of the protagonists even argue that a Courtier is not bound to serve a tyrannical lord (although they do not discuss the possibility of active resistance).¹⁴⁷ None of this alters the fact that Castiglione's dialogue is essentially about personal monarchies – the opportunities they present and the challenges they pose.

Scholars such as David Starkey and Jennifer Richards have pointed out that Castiglione drew heavily on Cicero's *De oratore* when composing the *Courtier*.¹⁴⁸ The Courtier and the Orator share an underlying agenda – to persuade those around them to act virtuously in the interest of the commonwealth – and Castiglione undoubtedly borrowed material from Cicero. In his dedicatory letter to Hastings, Hoby compared *De oratore* with the *Courtier*:

¹⁴⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Oii^r – Oiii^v.

¹⁴⁸ Starkey, 'Castiglione's ideal and Tudor reality'; Jennifer Richards, 'Assumed simplicity and the critique of nobility: or, how Castiglione read Cicero', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 2 (Summer 2001), 460-86. Castiglione acknowledged his debt to *De oratore*, but Richards argues that scholars have not taken this acknowledgment seriously in the past.

Cicero bringeth in to dispute of an Oratour, CRASSVS, SCEVOLA, ANTONIVS, COTTA, SVLPITIVS, CATVLVS, and CESAR his brother, the noblest & chiefest Oratours in those dayes: CASTILIO to reason of a Courtier, the Lorde OCTAVIAN FREGOSO, SYR FRIDERIKCE [sic] his brother, the Lorde JVLIAN DE MEDICIS, the L. CESAR GONZAGA, the L. FRANCESCOMARIA DELLA ROVERE, COVNT LEWIS OF CANOSSA, the L. GASPAR PALLAVICIN, BEMBO, BIBIENA, and other most excellent Courtiers ... Both Cicero and Castilio professe, they folowe not any certayne appointed order of preceptes or rules, as is vsed in the instruction of youth, but call to rehearsall, matter debated in their times too and fro in the disputacion of most eloquent men and excellent wittes in euey woorthy quality, the one company in the olde tyme assembled in Tusculane, and the other of late yeeres in the newe Palaice of Vrbin.¹⁴⁹

Starkey suggested that Castiglione's great achievement lay in the fact that he 'successfully transplanted Cicero from the forum to the Renaissance court'.¹⁵⁰ Yet Castiglione would scarcely have needed to reinvent Cicero's Orator if the latter had proved fit for purpose in a courtly environment. The whole point of the *Courtier* is that he is *not* a republican orator, and can therefore exploit a political paradigm that disarms a Brutus or a Demosthenes.¹⁵¹ He does not belong in a republic, monarchical or otherwise, and has consequently played a relatively peripheral part in many recent analyses of late sixteenth century political culture.¹⁵²

Cultural historians have argued that Elizabethan politicians did not only derive certain ideas and attitudes from the intellectual training they received during their formative years; they were also endowed with distinctive approaches to policy-making and self-presentation. Mary Crane has explored how the processes of gathering and framing (gathering knowledge or wisdom from a text or scenario, and framing it in a culturally and socially acceptable format) shaped the methodology and ideology of humanist

¹⁴⁹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, prefatory material, sig. Aiiii^r.

¹⁵⁰ Starkey, 'Castiglione's ideal and Tudor reality', 233.

¹⁵¹ See the comparison between Aristotle and Calisthenes in Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ssii^v.

¹⁵² Two notable exceptions are Richards, *Rhetoric and courtliness*, pp. 43-54, and Javitch, *Poetry and courtliness*, pp. 18-49. Both studies examine the relationship between the *Courtier* and *De oratore*.

councillors.¹⁵³ Stephen Alford has examined memoranda drafted by Cecil during the early years of his tenure as Elizabeth's Secretary. Alford highlights the extent to which Cecil's thought processes and political tactics were informed by the techniques of classical rhetoric – techniques that he could hardly have avoided internalizing during the course of his studies.¹⁵⁴ Like the concept of monarchical republicanism, this rhetorical methodology appears irrelevant, if not inimical, to the *Courtier*. It deliberately illuminates the processes whereby decisions are made and desirable outcomes achieved. It requires the politician to show his working out; and, as we, have already noted, that is something that the *Courtier* prefers not to do.

Rhetorical skills and republican values did not prohibit the Athenians from utilizing the alternative behavioural strategies suggested by the *Courtier*. Their contemporary biographies were clearly influenced by courtly conduct literature. Burghley's career was (predictably) the most thoroughly documented of all the Athenians' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Two detailed *Lives* survive from this period. The first was known as the *Anonymous life of William Cecil*, until Alan G. R. Smith convincingly attributed it to Michael Hicke. The second is *Certain observations concerning the life and reign of Queen Elizabeth*, which Evelyn and Conyers Read identified as the work of John Clapham.

The *Anonymous life* was written shortly after the death of its subject in 1598. Hicke, the author, had been working for Burghley since 1573. In 1580, he became one of the Cecil's secretaries.¹⁵⁵ He evidently liked and admired his master, and the biography

¹⁵³ See above, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵⁴ Alford, *Early Elizabethan polity*, esp. pp. 14-24.

¹⁵⁵ Alan G. R. Smith, 'Introduction', in Michael Hicke, *The anonymous life of William Cecil, Lord*

was a tribute *in memorandum*. It was intended to demonstrate that Burghley had been everything a man in his position ought to be. Like modern biographers, Hickes paid tribute to Burghley's indisputably statesmanlike qualities. He saluted him as a 'grave and great councillor' – indeed, 'the wisest and gravest councillor of this age'.¹⁵⁶ These descriptions are entirely consistent with the image of a serious, sober man of business. However, Hickes drew attention to other aspects of Burghley's demeanour and conduct. Early on in his narrative, he recounted the story of a youthful prank played by Cecil (as he was then) on a fellow Gray's Inn student.¹⁵⁷ Conyers Read also included this anecdote in *Mr Secretary Cecil*. Read was inclined to treat the episode as an isolated incident - the antics of 'a youth sowing his first, and probably his last, wild oats'.¹⁵⁸ Yet Hickes gives us no reason to suppose that such exuberant behaviour was typical only of Burghley in his salad days. He consistently highlighted his hero's capacity to amuse and entertain. He asserted that the Lord Treasurer 'loved to be merry', and that even as an elderly man, 'if he could get any of his old acquaintance who could discourse of their youth or of things past in old time, it was notable to hear what merry stories he would tell'.¹⁵⁹ We are evidently meant to conclude that this mastery of presentational comedy was a lifelong accomplishment.

The *Life* dwells extensively upon Burghley's conversational skills. 'He was of the sweetest, kind and most tractable nature that ever I found in any man', Hickes enthused, 'gentle and courteous in speech, sweet in countenance, and pleasingly sociable with

Burghley, ed. by Smith (Lewiston, NY; Queenston, Ontario; Lampeter, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), p. 10.

¹⁵⁶ Hickes, *Life of Cecil*, pp. 70; 73.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁵⁸ Read, *Mr Secretary Cecil*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁵⁹ Hickes, *Life of Cecil*, pp. 120-22.

such as he conversed'.¹⁶⁰ He was a highly adaptable raconteur:

His ordinary speeches were commonly cheerful, merry, and familiar, but witty, sharp, and pithy, without dullness or sourness. And whatsoever company he came into, either old, young, men or women, great or mean, he could talk aptly and delightfully, and withal so merrily as was much pleasing to all hearers, and yet not without gravity nor unfit for a great councillor.¹⁶¹

Compare this with Canossa's description of the Courtier's social versatility (the passage that reminded Gabriel Harvey of Thomas More): 'Likewise in company with menne and women of all degrees, in sportinge in laughyng, and in iestyng he hath in hym a certayne sweetenesse, and so comely demeanours, that whoso speaketh with hym or yet beholdeth him, muste nedes beare him an affection for ever'.¹⁶² Moreover, Hickes observes that

what business soever was in [Cecil's] head, it was never perceived at his table where he would be so merry as one would imagine he had nothing else to do, directing his speech to all men according to their qualities and capacities as he raised mirth out of all men's speeches, augmenting it with his own, whereby he wanted no company so long as he was able to keep company.¹⁶³

This apparently effortless affability provides a textbook example of *sprezzatura*. Burghley, who according to Hickes could be 'gentle, merry, courteous' to anyone in any situation, was thus presented as a model of Castiglionean civility.¹⁶⁴

He was similarly depicted by John Clapham in *Certain observations concerning the life and reign of Queen Elizabeth*. Clapham, like Hickes, was a long-term member of

¹⁶⁰ Hickes, *Life of Cecil*, p. 119.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁶² Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ciii^r.

¹⁶³ Hickes, *Life of Cecil*, pp. 121-22.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Burghley's establishment: 'a great part of my time, even from my tender age, I spent in his house and about seven years in attendance upon his own person'.¹⁶⁵ Like Hickes, he made no secret of his regard for Burghley ('It is a hard matter for a man strongly possessed with affections ... to retain a true measure in speaking or writing').¹⁶⁶ Having prepared his readers for a flattering portrait, Clapham complimented Burghley by drawing attention to the easy Recklessness of his manners: 'surely to him that had seen his behavior only at his table, with what pleasant, familiar and ordinary talk he passed the time, Cecil might have seemed a man free from all care and business'.¹⁶⁷ Again, we see a self-confessed hagiographer fashioning Burghley in the image of the Courtier.¹⁶⁸ Too often, contemporary references to Burghley's conversation and table manners have been treated as interesting but ultimately trivial biographical tidbits. Yet it is surely inadvisable to ignore the persistent, pointed juxtaposition of such 'trivia' with serious descriptions of Burghley's political function. Allusions to his civility cannot be dismissed as background detail; they must instead be recognised as integrated elements of his public persona. In Hickes's words, 'Here have you, Christian reader, the description of a perfect, wise, grave and great councillor' – table manners and all.¹⁶⁹

There is plenty of evidence that Burghley deployed the arts of courtliness in his capacity as a statesman-councillor. In true Urbinese style, he conducted a great deal of

¹⁶⁵ John Clapham, *Elizabeth of England: certain observations concerning the life and reign of Queen Elizabeth by John Clapham*, ed. by Evelyn Plummer Read and Conyers Read (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951), p. 71.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁶⁸ At the Gray's Inn Christmas revels of 1594-5, members of the 'Order of Knighthood of the Helmet' were exhorted to 'read and peruse' courtesy literature ('*Guizo*, the *French Academy*, *Galiatto* the Courtier'), on the grounds that it would make them 'accomplished with Civil Conversations, and able to govern a Table with Discourse'. [Francis Bacon and Francis Davison], *Gesta Greyorum, or, the history of the high and mighty prince, Prince Henry of Purpoole*, ed. by William Canning (London: W. Canning, 1688), p. 29.

¹⁶⁹ Hickes, *Life*, p. 146.

business at firesides and dinner tables. Roger Ascham's *Scholemaster* opens with a description of a supper party hosted by the then William Cecil for the Queen, assorted Privy Councillors and other notable office-holders.¹⁷⁰ Such events were by no means infrequent; on 13 July 1561, Henry Machyn noted in his diary that 'The Quen('s) grace whent from the Charterhouse by the Clerkyne-welle over the feeldes unto the Sayvoy unto master secretoire Syselle to soper, and ther was the Counsell and mony lordes and knyghtes and lades and gentyll-women'.¹⁷¹ Ascham observed that Cecil's soirées were ostensibly recreational affairs: 'M. Secretarie hath this accustomed maner, though his head be neuer so full of most weightie affaires of the Realme, yet, at diner time he doth seeme to lay them alwaies aside: and findeth euer fitte occasion to taulke pleasantlie of other matters'.¹⁷² However, these dinners clearly served a serious purpose. As well as affording opportunities for networking, they facilitated the exchange of ideas and the formulation of policy. Ascham's famous manifesto for educational reform was, after all, inspired by a conversation that took place at just such an event.

The impact of courtesy literature can be discerned in the contemporary biographical treatment of other councillors. For example, Grace Mildmay recorded that her father-in-law, Sir Walter, 'was a very pleasant conceited man at his table'.¹⁷³ The rest of her observations are primarily concerned with Mildmay's godly credentials and public service. Yet she evidently considered it important to include this testament to his civility in her character sketch. In a posthumous eulogy to Mildmay, Thomas

¹⁷⁰ Ascham, *Scholemaster*, sig. Bj^r.

¹⁷¹ Henry Machyn, *The diary of Henry Machyn, citizen and merchant-taylor of London*, ed. by John Gough Nichols (London: J. B. Nichols & Son for the Camden Society, 1848), p. 263.

¹⁷² Ascham, *Scholemaster*, sig. Bj^r.

¹⁷³ Grace Mildmay, 'Marital life', reproduced in Linda Pollock, *With faith and physic: the life of a Tudor gentlewoman Lady Grace Mildmay 1552-1620* (London: Collins & Brown, 1993), pp. 31-40 (p. 32).

Churchyard commended him for his ‘sugred speech, that quonched bitter gall’.¹⁷⁴ Churchyard’s choice of words is interesting; the phrase ‘sugred speech’ has a morally ambiguous quality, implying as it does a degree of misrepresentation or flattery (consider *Hamlet*, III. 1. 48-50: ‘with devotion’s visage / And pious action we do sugar o’er / The devil himself’). Yet Churchyard makes it clear that all of Mildmay’s words and actions were directed towards the service of his God, his queen and his country. Mildmay is thus presented as a Castiglionean politician, using pleasing, palatable and mildly disingenuous language to promote the common weal.

Many fashionable portraits of Tudor ‘statesmen’ conform to Castiglione’s description of what a courtier should look like. Mary Crane has argued that sobriety of dress distinguished humanist counsellors from aristocratic courtiers, noting that Cecil was ‘famous for his plain dress and would have made a clear visual contrast to the leaders of the opposing factions of courtiers (Leicester, Hatton, Essex)’.¹⁷⁵ According to Crane’s analysis, a George Clifford, third earl of Cumberland (resplendent in his azure jousting armour) self-consciously projected himself as a courtier, whereas a Francis Walsingham (simply attired in black) deliberately disavowed the cult of courtliness.¹⁷⁶ In Book II of the *Courtier*, however, Federico Fregoso argues that the appearance of a royal acolyte should ‘bee rather somewhat graue and auncient, then garishe. Therefore me thinke a blacke coulour hath a better grace in garmentes then any other, and though not throughly blacke, yet somwhat darke’. He concedes that ‘vpon armour it is more meet to haue sightly and meery coulours, and also garmentes for pleasure, cut, pompous and

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Churchyard, *A reuyuing of the deade* (London: [E. Allde] for Edward White, 1591), sig. A4^v.

¹⁷⁵ Crane, *Framing authority*, p. 119.

¹⁷⁶ See Roy Strong, *Nicholas Hilliard* (London: Michael Joseph, 1975), p. 46, and Roy Strong, *The English icon* (London: The Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art, with Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 263.

riche. Likewise in open showes about triumphes, games, maskeries, and suche other matters, because so appointed there is in them a certein liuelinesse and mirth'. Generally, however, he 'coulede wishe they should declare the solemnitie that the Spanyshe nation muche obserueth'.¹⁷⁷ This visual 'solemnitie' reinforced the Courtier's 'sober, & circumspecte' demeanour.¹⁷⁸ It was an image to which many Tudor courtiers aspired. Referring to Holbein's portrait of a sombrelly clad Anthony Denny (one of the chief gentlemen of Henry VIII's Privy Chamber), W. A. Sessions observed that 'Although this early courtly model of Puritan humanism appears to lack Burgundian chivalry or Castiglione's *sprezzatura* ... he certainly possesses the gravitas Castiglione in the first book of the *Courtier* requires'.¹⁷⁹ Sessions is right to detect shades of the Courtier in Denny's grave and studiously unpretentious image. In fact, the suggestion that Denny does not evince *sprezzatura* can be challenged. Well cut and coloured black clothes did not flaunt themselves in the eye of the beholder, but they were expensive. They were thus ideally suited to create the impression of unostentatious but authentic elegance.

It is generally recognised that 'chivalric' courtiers could, and did, subscribe to the image of the serious and scholarly royal acolyte.¹⁸⁰ It is less frequently acknowledged

¹⁷⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Oiiii^v – Pi^r. Whilst discussing the significance of Hamlet's dark attire, Roland Mushat Frye noted that the Spanish king Philip II 'indicated his seriousness of mind and purpose by wearing black armor' in portraits. Roland Mushat Frye, "Looking before and after": the use of visual evidence and symbolism for interpreting Hamlet', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 1 (Winter, 1982), 1-19 (15).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. Di^r.

¹⁷⁹ W. A. Sessions, *Henry Howard, the poet earl of Surrey: a life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 364 and plate 18.

¹⁸⁰ Frye, "Looking before and after", 15:

Even famous warriors who aspired to be recognized as men of serious mind would have themselves portrayed in black, as we see both in the portrait of Sir Francis Drake, and in a superb Hilliard miniature portrait of Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, and National Portrait Gallery, London).

that humanist politicians could adopt aristocratic modes of behaviour, if the occasion demanded it. As English ambassador in Paris, Francis Walsingham knew how to behave like a seigneur (when his finances permitted).¹⁸¹ In 1571, for example, he rode into the French capital with Lord Buckhurst and the earl of Rutland, accompanied by a well-turned out retinue of stout compatriots.¹⁸² This is a practice that Vincent identifies as characteristic of the old-fashioned, landed nobility and gentry in *Of civiile and vnciuile life* ('our seruingmen ... follow vs in the streetes, when wee bee at London, or any other great Towne').¹⁸³ Thomas Nelson's epitaph to Walsingham presents the Secretary as a munificent practitioner of traditional hospitality and charity. Walsingham 'pittied euery strangers sute that came vnto his gate'; he 'did good to rich and poore that came vnto [his] gate'; and he was 'the comfort of the poore, that to them almes did giue'.¹⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that Nelson describes suitors and paupers congregating at Walsingham's gate, instead of fighting their way through the mêlée at court. It may be no more than a figure of speech, but it implies an aristocratic paradigm for virtuous conduct. A seventeenth century commentator similarly commemorated Burghley as a 'noble & potent Courtier'.¹⁸⁵

Since the 1980s, it has generally been acknowledged that the distinction between

¹⁸¹ Walsingham, like most other ambassadors, was perennially short of funds. On 22 June 1572, he notified Cecil that 'my diet is thin, my family reduced to as small a portion as may be, and my horse being onely twelve'. The important issue was not so much that Walsingham regarded this situation as a personal hardship (although his shortage of money was a serious worry). Rather, he recognised that it behoved an ambassador to live in a more lordly manner. The aristocratic ideals of ostentatious display and hospitality fulfilled a useful diplomatic function. Dudley Digges, *The compleat ambassador* (London: Tho. Newcomb for Gabriell Bedell and Thomas Collins, 1655), p. 213.

¹⁸² See Rivkah Zim, 'Dialogue and discretion: Thomas Sackville, Catherine de Medici and the Anjou marriage proposal 1571', *Historical Journal* vol. 40, no. 2 (June, 1997), 287-310 (294).

¹⁸³ Anon, 'Courtier and cuntrey-Gentleman', p. 34.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas Nelson, *A memorable epitaph, made vpon the lamentable complaint of the people of England, for the death of the right honorable Sir Frauncis Walsingham Knight* (London: William Wright, 1590).

¹⁸⁵ BL, Add. MS 25348, fol. 7^r.

courtiers and councillors is rather artificial. However, this insight has presented us with a new problem. The political style of a Leicester or Hatton appears very different to that of a Burghley or a Walsingham. Hence, although we accept that they were all, in some sense, courtiers, it seems impossible to treat them as a single, homogeneous group. We overcome this obstacle by persuading ourselves that Leicester and Hatton were courtly, whereas Burghley and Walsingham were not. Leicester and Hatton embodied the cultural ideal of the courtier, whereas Burghley and Walsingham were simply skilled practitioners of court politics.

Instead of discriminating between 'courtly' courtiers and their professionally competent counterparts (which essentially resurrects the old courtier/counsellor division), we should recognise that there were different models of courtliness. Some Elizabethan courtiers favoured the traditional knightly paradigm, whilst others subscribed to more modern, humanistic and 'civil' codes of conduct. These models were intended to complement each other, and could easily be interchanged or integrated. In the *Book of the Courtier*, neither is accorded precedence. The courtliness of the Athenians was just as valid and authentic as that of their more flamboyant colleagues. They were monarchical republicans who happened also to be *cortegiani*; or vice versa.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANTI-COURTIER DISCOURSE

The *Book of the Courtier* envisaged its titular hero as a highly skilled and dedicated servant of his prince and country. Historically, such positive constructs of court acolytes were rare. Criticism of courtiers enjoyed a long literary pedigree in England - and more generally, throughout western Europe.¹ The aim of this chapter is to isolate the components of medieval anti-courtier rhetoric that still had currency in the early Tudor period. The second half of the chapter will also address the emergence of new themes, inspired by Italophobia and contra-Machiavellianism, during Elizabeth's reign. Chapter five then examines the process whereby various strands of anti-courtier invective were interwoven to produce a distinctively Elizabethan discourse. Chapter six considers the cynicism with which courtiers were characterised during the last decade of Tudor rule. It assesses the extent to which this cynicism was engendered by the pressures of the so-called 'nasty nineties', and highlights the continued contribution of old literary devices to fin de-siècle critiques of the court.

As D. A. L. Morgan points out, the term 'courtier' was not commonly used before the late fifteenth century.² Ever since the Norman Conquest, however, the king's *familiares*, or *curiales*, had attracted attention. Rosemary Horrox notes that criticism of these characters 'remained constant over a surprisingly long period'.³ The consistency

¹ For an excellent survey of anti-court literature in England, which analyses the evolution of this genre from the medieval to the Renaissance period, see Claus Uhlig, *Hofkritik im England des Mittelalters und der Renaissance: Studien zu einem Gemeinplatz der europäischen Moralistik* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973).

² Morgan, 'House of policy', pp. 25-70.

³ Rosemary Horrox, 'Caterpillars of the commonwealth? Courtiers in late medieval England', in *Rulers*

of anti-courtier invective is particularly noticeable in descriptions of curial dress and demeanour. Censorious Anglo-Norman clerics provided the template for such descriptions. William of Malmesbury (c. 1090 - c. 1142) despaired of William II's *familiares*: 'Long flowing hair, luxurious garments, shoes with curved and pointed tips became the fashion. Softness of body rivalling the weaker sex, a mincing gait, effeminate gestures and a liberal display of the person as they went along, such was the ideal fashion of the younger men'.⁴ Eadmer (c. 1064 – c. 1124) was similarly unimpressed: 'Now at this time it was the fashion for nearly all the young men of the Court to grow their hair long like girls; then, with locks well-combed, glancing about them and winking in ungodly fashion, they would daily walk abroad with delicate steps and mincing gate'.⁵ Orderic Vitalis (c. 1075-1143) also objected to long hair and unmanly fashions at court. He attributed the vogue for 'shoes with curved and pointed tips', described by William of Malmesbury, to an Angevin count named Fulk le Rechin ('a man with many reprehensible, even scandalous, habits'). According to Vitalis, the count was afflicted with appalling bunions, and had his shoes made long and pointed in an attempt to conceal his unsightly disfigurement. This novelty was imitated by 'a certain worthless fellow at King Rufus's court': 'Before then shoes always used to be made round, fitting the foot, and these were adequate for the needs of high and low, both clergy and laity. But now laymen in their pride seize upon a fashion typical of

and ruled in late medieval England: essays presented to Gerald Harriss, ed. by Rowena E. Archer and Simon Walker (London & Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1995), pp. 1-15 (p. 4).

⁴ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regvm Anglorvm: The history of the English kings*, ed. and trans. by R. A. B. Mynors, completed by R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998-9), 1 (1998), 559-61.

⁵ Eadmer, *Eadmer's history of recent events in England: historia novorum in Anglia*, trans. by Geoffrey Bosanquet (London: Cresset Press, 1964), p. 49.

their corrupt morals'.⁶

Clerical chroniclers depicted the courtier as a wanton fop, arrayed in effeminate and outlandish attire. This image remained instantly recognisable throughout the early modern era – hence Federico Fregoso's strictures about 'garishe' garb.⁷ Yet medieval critics of the court popinjay were not only interested in what he wore, but why he wore it – or more precisely, what his appearance revealed about his habits and character. Vitalis' story about Fulk le Rechin highlights the enduring association of strange courtly fashions with deformity (physical, mental or spiritual). The infamous pointed shoes were originally designed to hide the ugly malformation of le Rechin's feet. The style was adopted *en masse* by courtiers, as if they aspired to his unfortunate condition. In the Renaissance era, the idea that courtiers would mimic physical deformities in their desperation to keep abreast of the latest fashions still appealed to raconteurs and satirists. Cesare Gonzaga insists that the Urbino Courtier should 'not do, as a frende of ours, whom you al know, that thought he resembled much kyng *Ferdinande* the yonger of *Aragon*, and regarded not to resemble hym in anye other poynt but in the often lyftyng vp hys head, wryng therewythall a part of hys mouth, the whych custome the king had gotten by infymitye'.⁸ This anecdote was repeated in Arthur Golding's translation of the *Politicke, moral and martial discourses written in French by M. Jacques Hurault* (although some of the particulars were altered).⁹ The courtier

⁶ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. and trans. by Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-80), IV, 187.

⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Oiiii^v – Pi^f. See chapter five for a discussion of late sixteenth century stage caricatures of the effete courtier.

⁸ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Eii^f.

⁹ 'The booke intituled the *Courtier*, maketh mention of a Spaniard that held his neck awry, as Alfonso king of Aragon did ... of purpose to follow the king's fashion, and to counterfeit him in all he could'. Jacques Harault, *Politicke, moral and martial discourses*, trans. by Arthur Golding (London: Adam

Lodowick Lloyd also observed wryly that

Courts of Kings and Princes cannot be without limping and halting. In *Meroe* a Kingdome of *India*, if the kings were lame, or halt, or in any part of their bodies, his Courtiers by the law in *Meroe* should be also lame, and halt as the kings did. It is histored that in *Macedonia* in the time of Philip, and in *Neapolis*, in the time of Ferdinandus, for that these two kings held their necks a litle on the leftside though it was a natural defect in others, yet in Princes followed and imitated: and yet no longer than these Princes lived.¹⁰

Such acquired deformities could be treated as amusing illustrations of the courtier's ridiculous impressionability; or, more seriously, as physical manifestations of his self-inflicted spiritual misshapeness.¹¹

The foppish courtier's flamboyant dress and hairstyles were often deemed indicative of lasciviousness, or sexual deviancy.¹² William of Malmesbury wrote that the courtly young men who flaunted their long hair and flowing robes in the eye of the beholder were 'a menace to the virtue of others and promiscuous with their own'.¹³ Orderic Vitalis claimed that, whilst 'the effeminate predominated everywhere' at court, 'foul catamites, doomed to eternal fire, unrestrainedly pursued their revels and shamelessly

Islip, 1595), p. 141.

¹⁰ Lodowick Lloyd, *The tragiomedie of serpents* (London: Thomas Purfoot for Arthur Johnson, 1607), pp. 81-2.

¹¹ A satirical poem from the 1380s - 'Syng I wolde, but alas' - claimed that courtiers were unable, or unwilling, to kneel in church 'ffor hurting of here hose', and because of 'her longe toes'. The suggestion that courtly fashions prevent their wearers from paying homage to God hints at their damnable nature. The poem highlights the perceived correlation between corporeal and spiritual defects. The satirist notes that the ridiculous clothes worn by courtiers constrain them physically, impeding their natural movements. This artificial crippling, he intimates, reflects and accelerates the warping of their souls. Anon, 'Syng I wolde, but alas', in *Satirical songs and poems on costume: from the 13th to the 19th century*, ed. by Frederick W. Fairholt (London: T. Richards, for the Percy Society, 1849), pp. 43-8 (p. 47). For the dating of 'Syng I wolde, but alas', see Richard Firth Green, 'Jack Philipot, John of Gaunt, and a Poem of 1380', *Speculum*, vol. 66, no. 2 (April 1991), 330-41 (330-1).

¹² See C. Warren Hollister, 'Courtly culture and courtly style in the Anglo-Norman world', *Albion*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 1988), 1-17 (9-10).

¹³ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regvm Anglorvm*, I, 561.

gave themselves up to the filth of sodomy'.¹⁴ Bishop Serlo of Séz explicitly associated luxurious fashions with promiscuity and homosexuality when he preached before Henry I's court in 1105: 'Long beards give them the look of he-goats, whose filthy viciousness is shamefully imitated by the degradations of fornicators and sodomites'.¹⁵ The courtier's reputation for licentiousness endured. John Lydgate (c. 1370-1451) upbraided courtly 'galaunts' for their lustful self-indulgence:

For all thy loude lechery / thou lepest so fast aboute
That good loue and lawe ben almoost lorne
Of lust and lykyng ledest thou suche a route
That laches and lechery haue clenness to torne ...¹⁶

Castiglione acknowledged that the sexual morality of courtiers (male and female) was routinely deplored: 'they say in these dayes ... [that] in Courtes there reigneth nothyng elles but enuye and malyce, yll maners, and a most wanton lyfe in euery kinde of vice: the women enticefull past shame, and the men womanishe. They dispraise also the apparalle to be dishonest and to soft'.¹⁷ Assessing 'By how muche the comon welthes and the courtes of the tyme passed wer more perfit then the courtes of the tyme present', the Spanish bishop Antonio de Guevara concluded that the 'continencie and abstinence' of early sixteenth century courtiers left much to be desired - 'seyng that scant in fiftie

¹⁴ Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV, 189.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, 65. Henry Cornelius Agrippa also associated courtiers with lascivious goats; see below, p. 15.

¹⁶ Lydgate also inveighed against extravagant fashions ('wanton werynge of clothes'). He blamed both the fashions and the promiscuity of 'galaunts' upon pernicious French influences. [John Lydgate], *Here begynmeth a treatyse of a galaunt* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1510), sig. Aii^r-v.

¹⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Li^v. Both Castiglione's observations and Lydgate's strictures are cited in Retha M. Warnicke, 'Sexual heresy at the court of Henry VIII', *HJ*, vol 30, no. 2 (June 1987), 247-68 (251-2).

yeres ye shal not fynde one that will bridle his lust and desyre'.¹⁸

The courtier's costly and fanciful dress also symbolized his idleness. Orderic Vitalis pointedly compared the functional, serviceable clothes worn by William the Conqueror's liegemen with the impractical garb of the contemporary court popinjay:

Our ancestors used to wear decent clothes, well-adapted to the shape of their bodies; they were skilled horsemen and swift runners, ready for all seemly undertakings. But in these days the old customs have almost wholly given way to new fads ... [Courtiers] sweep the dusty ground with the unnecessary trains of their robes and mantles; their long, wide sleeves cover their hands whatever they do; impeded by these frivolities they are almost incapable of walking quickly or doing any kind of useful work.¹⁹

By 'useful work' and 'seemly undertakings', Vitalis meant military exploits. Comparisons between the public-spirited, self-sacrificing soldier and the courtly wastrel formed a staple component of anti-courtier discourse from the classical era onwards.²⁰ The pointlessness of the courtier's existence was also contrasted with the hard work and fruitful toil of the agricultural labourer. Thomas Starkey, a chaplain to Henry VIII, composed his *Dialogue between Reginald Pole & Thomas Lupset* in the mid 1530s. During the course of the dialogue, Pole comments that 'there be among us too few ploughmen and tillers of the ground, and too many courtiers and idle servants'. The 'ill proportion' of courtiers to ploughmen and tillers, he argues, represents 'a great deformity' within the body politic.²¹

Clerical diatribes against court popinjays should be placed in the context of a

¹⁸ Guevara, *Dispraise*, sig. Iv^v – Ivi^f.

¹⁹ Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV, 189.

²⁰ See chapters five and six.

²¹ Thomas Starkey, *A dialogue between Reginald Pole & Thomas Lupset*, ed. by Kathleen M. Burton (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 147.

continuous campaign by the Church to control the appearance and manners of laymen.²² Medieval clergymen worried that the vices and vogues that were showcased by the court were also rife throughout society. Whilst Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury were fretting about decadent fashions and sexual permissiveness in the royal entourage, the Church was issuing edicts to combat corresponding trends within the general populace. The synod of Rouen (1096) decreed that all men should keep their hair short, or risk excommunication. The synod of Westminster (1102) also insisted on short hair and appropriate clothing for men, and explicitly prohibited homosexual activity.²³ Archbishop Anselm insisted that the monarch's companions should conduct themselves with exemplary devotion and decorum, *pour encourager les autres*.²⁴ Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, clerics – and, subsequently, godly reformers – lambasted courtiers for projecting an image of vain, sensual worldliness to their social inferiors. ‘Take hede therefore,’ warned Roger Ascham, ‘ye great ones in *the* Court, yea though ye be *the* greatest of all, take hede, what ye do, take hede how ye liue. For as you great ones vse to do, so all meane men loue to do’. Great courtiers, he added, were ‘makers or marrers, of all mens maners within the Realme’.²⁵

The figure of the courtly fop loomed large in anti-curial literature between the eleventh

²² C. Stephen Jaeger has argued that court culture was distinctively secular; hence, it was viewed with suspicion by ‘conservative clerics and the monastic world’. By associating courtly codes of conduct with sin, the Church staked its claim to demand the modification of these codes, and indeed called into question their very legitimacy. C. Stephen Jaeger, *The origins of courtliness: civilizing trends and the formation of courtly ideals 939-1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 262.

²³ Hollister, ‘Courtly culture in the Anglo-Norman world’, 9-10; John Boswell, *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: gay people in western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 215.

²⁴ Eadmer, *Historia novorum*, pp. 49-50.

²⁵ Ascham, *Scholemaster*, fol. 21^v.

and sixteenth centuries. His attributes were barely modified over half a millennium. He was indolent, extravagant and effete. His sexual appetites were voracious, and often perverted. His clothing was bizarre, and reflected his aberrant nature. It also prevented him from accomplishing anything useful. His soft self-regard was thrown into unflattering relief by the masculine vigour of soldiers, or the honest exertion of those who tilled the soil. His persona evolved as a conflation of clerical concerns about court culture, and its influence over the rest of society.

Another stereotype invoked by critics or enemies of prominent royal servants was that of the over-mighty curialist. This proud, ambitious, greedy politician bestrode the court like a Colossus, often dwarfing the prince whose interests he purported to serve. During the reigns of the Norman and Plantagenet kings, he was usually a churchman. We should not exaggerate the difficulty of combining a court career with holy orders.²⁶ The saga of Becket's relationship with Henry II has cast a long shadow over English historical consciousness, but the competing demands of ecclesiastical and curial service did not usually result in such a bloody mess.²⁷ Nonetheless, the fact that many influential courtiers were clerics rendered them vulnerable to allegations of improper pride and worldliness when they exercised power, or enjoyed its trappings. Orderic Vitalis attacked William II's protégé, Ranulf Flambard, bishop of Durham, for his rapacity and prodigality. Vitalis blamed Flambard's failings as a churchman and administrator upon the fact that he was first and foremost a courtier, 'educated from

²⁶ The twelfth century monk Gervase of Chichester wrote that 'It will not detract from churchmen's worth and merit if they decide to attach themselves to princely courts and follow laymen's camps, provided that their motive is love and desire to correct the princes or to forward the business of churches, and providing that they do not harbour ambitions secretly'. These were, of course, significant provisos. From Beryl Smalley, *The Becket conflict and the schools: A study of intellectuals in politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), p. 227.

²⁷ I use the phrase advisedly.

boyhood with base parasites among the hangers-on of the court'. This early immersion in the unsavoury milieu of the royal entourage had made him grasping and ambitious. It also left him 'addicted to feasts and carousals and lusts'.²⁸ Vitalis thus painted a decidedly unflattering portrait of Flambard as a courtly prelate - hungry for power, devoted to lucre and partial to the sins of the flesh.

The format for such caricatures did not alter significantly over the next four centuries. William Longchamp, bishop of Ely and Richard I's right-hand man, was caustically described as 'Caesar more than Caesar' - extravagant, overbearing and inordinately ambitious.²⁹ Cardinal Wolsey, arguably the last of the great ecclesiastical *familiares regis*, was accused of 'high pride and coueteousnes' ('he compted himselfe egall with princes, and by craftie suggestion gatte into his handes innumerable treasure').³⁰ Wolsey's arrogant sense of entitlement was lampooned by Skelton: 'Ye are so puffed with pride, / That no man may abide / Your high and lordly looks'.³¹ The Cardinal's detractors also noted that 'he was vicious of his body and gaue the clergie euil example'.³² The deadly sins of pride, avarice and lust were thus invoked by critics who

²⁸ Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV, 171-3.

²⁹ Ralph V. Turner, 'Longchamp, William de (d. 1197), administrator and bishop of Ely', *DNB*, XXXIV, 381-4 (383). The chronicler Richard of Devizes described Longchamp as 'a remarkable person who made up for the shortness of his stature by his arrogance, counting on his lord's affection and presuming on his good will'. *The chronicle of Richard of Devizes of the time of King Richard the first*, ed. and trans. by John T. Appleby (London; Edinburgh; Paris; Melbourne; Johannesburg; Toronto; New York: Thomas Nelson, 1963), p. 9.

³⁰ Edward Hall, *The vnion of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (London: Richard Grafton, 1548) ff. Clxxxiii^r; Clxxxiii^v.

³¹ John Skelton, 'Colin Clout', in *The Complete Poems of John Skelton*, ed. by Philip Henderson (London: J. M. Dent, 1931; repr. 1959), p. 267

³² Hall, *Vnion of Lancastre & Yorke*, fol. Clxxxiii^v. The distaste that curialist clergymen sometimes excited can be gauged from a zoological simile deployed by Francis Meres: 'The Crocodile sometimes liueth vpon the land, & sometimes in the water; shee layeth her egges vpon the land, & seeketh her prey in the water: so some are both Courtiers and ecclesiastical persons, but in both places very pestilent fellows.' Francis Meres, *Palladis tamia: wits treasury being the second part of wits commonwealth* (London: P. Short for Cuthbert Burbie, 1598), fol. 216^v. Meres also observed that 'A Mule ingendered of a Horse and an Asse, is neither Horse nor Asse: so some whilst they would be

represented Wolsey as an abuser of clerical *and* courtly office.³³

Medieval *curiales* were often entrusted with judicial, as well as ecclesiastical, responsibilities.³⁴ Strands of anti-curial satire are therefore strongly evocative of popular invective against exploitative lawyers. Writing in the middle of the twelfth century, John of Salisbury deplored the fact that powerful courtiers exploited the people and enriched themselves through the (mal)administration of justice:

Christ Himself is excluded and, if He knocks at the gate, it is not opened to Him; they who do everything for a price and nothing for free flee from and put to flight divine grace. If requests are to be presented, if a case is to be examined, if the execution of a sentence is to be ordered, if bail is to be rendered – in all cases, money talks ...

‘But why is it’, he asked rhetorically, ‘that I protest about the venality of everything among courtiers when those things which cost nothing, such as the lack of some act, are subject to sale? ... For indeed the tongues of lawyers are harmful unless, as it is customarily said, you bind them with cords of silver’.³⁵ Salisbury thus linked the grasping avarice of lawyers with that of courtiers. The image of the legally adept and unscrupulous courtier, who used his expertise to extract wealth from others, was still current in Henry VIII’s reign. In his satire addressed to John Poyntz, Sir Thomas Wyatt argued that he was unsuited to court life because ‘I cannot wrest the law to fill the

both Courtiers and Prelats, are neither’ (fol. 215^v).

³³ Greg Walker points out that John Skelton’s irreverent characterisation of Wolsey, which is usually interpreted as anti-courtier satire, was substantially shaped by the conventions of anti-clerical satire. Greg Walker, *John Skelton and the Politics of the 1520s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; repr. 2002), pp. 124-153.

³⁴ See Ralph V. Turner, ‘The reputation of royal judges under the Angevin kings’, *Albion*, vol. 11, no. 4 (Winter 1979), 301-16.

³⁵ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: of the frivolities of courtiers and the footprints of philosophers*, ed. and trans. by Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; repr. 1992), pp. 85-6. All subsequent references to this edition.

coffer'.³⁶

The idea that royal acolytes maintained a luxurious lifestyle by exploiting the poor and vulnerable was a consistent theme of medieval anti-courtier discourse. Peripatetic courts lived off the land, and the severe strain they placed upon local resources was often resented. The Anglo-Saxon chronicler noted this phenomenon in 1104: 'wherever the king went, there was complete ravaging of his wretched people caused by his court'.³⁷ William of Malmesbury wrote that, under the benighted rule of William II, 'courtiers devoured the substance of the country people and engulfed their livelihood, taking the very food out of their mouths'.³⁸ Social commentators were also concerned that the costs of pursuing a career at court were passed on from those who incurred them to tenants and other dependents. Eadmer records that, after Anselm was elevated to the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury,

he presented himself at the royal court at Christmas time, and was honourably received by the king ... But then the king's mind was turned against him, at the instigation of the devil and of evil men, because he refused to despoil his tenants in order to give the king £1000 as a thank-offering for his munificence. So, having angered his lord, he left the court.³⁹

Anselm is depicted as a conscientious objector to the brigand mentality of courtiers with little or no sense of social responsibility.

Images of consumption were frequently invoked by those who denounced exploitative

³⁶ Thomas Wyatt, 'Satire addressed to John Poynz', in *The collected poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. by Kenneth Muir (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), line 34.

³⁷ Quoted in Hollister, 'Courtly culture', 10-11. Hollister points out that Henry I made a sustained effort to control the excesses of his followers, and lighten the burden that they imposed upon the people; thereafter 'the lamentations of the monk historians became muted'.

³⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regvm anglorvm*, I, 559.

³⁹ Eadmer, *The life of St. Anselm*, ed. and trans. by R. W. Southern (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), p. 67.

court acolytes. The fourteenth century chronicler Thomas Favant described the favourites of Richard II as ‘devourers’.⁴⁰ In a Middle English poem entitled *Mede and muche thank*, the courtly ‘gloser’ was likened to the drone, which feasts upon the honey produced by other bees without contributing to the hive’s supply.⁴¹ As Rosemary Horrox has noted, the caterpillar, with its voracious appetite and tendency to destroy the plants on which it feeds, also served as a metaphor for the selfish courtier.⁴² A poem which has been dated to 1414 complained of ‘wastours’, or unprofitable consumers, at court.⁴³ Courtiers were not only accused of expending and ingesting the resources of realm; they were routinely depicted as profligate devourers of their own wealth and supplies. In the early sixteenth century, Agrippa wrote that noble courtiers ‘accompt it an honour, if in a famous bankette at one time, they riottously consume their substaunce’.⁴⁴

Predatory courtiers were often satirized using animal imagery. *Piers Plowman* recounts the fable of the mice who were terrorized by a marauding cat, and decided that one of them should tie a bell around the neck of their tormentor, so that they would be alerted to his presence (predictably, nobody volunteered for this delicate mission).

⁴⁰ ‘History or narration concerning the manner and form of the miraculous parliament at Westminster in the year 1386, in the tenth year of the reign of King Richard the second after the Conquest, declared by Thomas Favant, clerk’, trans. by Andrew Galloway, in *The letter of the law: legal practice and literary production in medieval England*, ed. by Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 231-52 (233).

⁴¹ Anon, *Mede and muche thank*, in *Twenty six political and other poems*, ed. by J. Kail (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. for the Early English Text Society, 1904), pp. 6-9 (p. 8).

⁴² Horrox, ‘Caterpillars of the commonwealth?’. The phrase ‘caterpillars of the commonwealth’ occurs in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*. See William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. by Charles R. Forker, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Thomson Learning, 2002; repr. 2005), II. 3. 166. Dorothy Earnshaw traced the expression back to Thomas Lodge’s ‘Truth’s complaint over England’, in his *Alarvm against vsurers* (1584). See Kenneth Muir, *The sources of Shakespeare’s plays* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 62-5.

⁴³ Anon, ‘Dede is worchyng’, in *Twenty six poems*, pp. 55-60 (58).

⁴⁴ Agrippa, *Vanitie*, fol. 112’.

Langland described how the mice and the rats convened for

... a conseil for here comune profit;
For a cat of a courte cam whan hym lyked
And overlepe hem lyghtlich and laughte hem at his wille,
And pleyde with hem perilouslych, and possed aboute. (Prologue, 148)⁴⁵

This is generally interpreted as a reference to the depredations of Richard II's courtiers. At the time of the Merciless Parliament (1388), Richard's household was described as a 'filthy nest' of vicious, destructive birds.⁴⁶ Richard III and his counsellors were also depicted as an unholy menagerie of grubbing, grasping animals: 'The catte, the ratte, and Louell our dogge, / Rulyth all Englande vnder a hogge'.⁴⁷ William Caxton presented Reynard the fox as the archetypal courtier – thieving, pitiless, addicted to violence, but immune from justice because of his skill at manipulating an impressionable king.⁴⁸ Agrippa concluded that 'what naughtines so euer in any place is found in cruel beasts, al this seemeth to be assembled in the route of courtiers'. He likened low-born courtiers to insatiable predators:

So doth the Storke her younge ones feede
with Lisardes founde in fieldes.
They also seeke the same when flushe
they flee and make them yeelde
So doth the Egles fierce and other worthie birdes in woode,
Still hunte the Hare and Goate and bringe
the prairie to nest for foode.
And afterwarde when that the younge

⁴⁵ William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 10.

⁴⁶ 'History ... declared by Favant', p. 242.

⁴⁷ Robert Fabyan, *The new chronicles of England and of France*, ed. by Henry Ellis (London: F. C. and J. Rivington et al, 1811), p. 672.

⁴⁸ Anon, *The history of Reynard the fox*, trans. by William Caxton, ed. by F. N. Blake (London; New York; Toronto: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1970). All subsequent references to this edition.

be ripe they hast do make,
Vnto the praie, when hunger leane
doth cause their entrailes ake
Assone as they haue tasted it
When out of egge they rake.⁴⁹

In another passage, he warned that at court,

Foxe, the mutabilitie of the Chameleon, the variety of the Liberde, the biting of the Dogge, the despeiratnesse of the Elephant, the reuengement of the Camel, the fearefulnes of the Hare, the laciuousnes of *the* Goate, the vncleannes of the Sowe, the Simiplicitie of the Sheepe, the follie of the Asse, the scoffinge of the Ape ...⁵⁰

The royal entourage was thus presented as a veritable menagerie of vice.

Three types of courtier, in particular, were associated with the image of the greedy, self-serving, tyrannical curialist. There was widespread consensus that powerful royal servants who had sprung from humble backgrounds were likely to abuse their positions.⁵¹ The underlying assumption was that a parvenu would always be conscious of what he had previously lacked, what he had suffered, and (ominously) who had oppressed him. Youthful deprivation would have left him with a ravenous appetite for wealth and luxury. The twelfth century courtier Walter Map cautioned that ‘villeins ... (or rustics, as we call them) vie with each other in bringing up their ignoble and degenerate offspring in those arts which are forbidden to them; not that they may shed vices, but that they may gather riches’.⁵² In the early sixteenth century, Henry

⁴⁹ Agrippa, *Vanitie*, fol. 111^r;

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 115^r. See also Meres, *Palladis tamia*, fol. 216^{r-v}, for comparisons between the courtier and the chameleon, the Indian tortoise and the crocodile.

⁵¹ For an interesting analysis of this attitude, see Ralph V. Turner, ‘Changing perceptions of the new administrative class in Anglo-Norman and Angevin England: the curiales and their conservative critics’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2 (April 1990), 93-117.

⁵² Map, *De nugis curialium*, p. 13.

Cornelius Agrippa issued a similar warning about the avarice of ‘common or meane Courtiers’: ‘hauinge escaped the extremities of labours, they will doo nomore seruice without recompence: but afterwarde wilbe rewarded for al thinges ... they alwaies stande gapinge like Rauins, for giftes of the Courte’.⁵³ Such villeins were driven by avarice; but they would happily commit any other sin in order to entrench their ascendancy. Agrippa suggested that the low-born were so desperate for riches, power and status that they would literally prostitute themselves and their families.⁵⁴ Moreover, having suffered oppression themselves, they would not scruple to inflict it upon others. This concern had been voiced by the fourth century court poet, Claudian:

Nothing is so cruel as a man raised from lowly station to prosperity; he strikes everything, for he fears everything; he vents his rage on all, that men may deem he has the power. No beast so fearful as the rage of a slave let loose on free-born backs; their groans are familiar to him, and he cannot be sparing of punishment that he himself has undergone; remembering his own master he hates the man he lashes.⁵⁵

Not even the prince was immune from the vindictiveness of arrivistes. Commiserating with Henry VIII on the treachery of Wolsey in 1529, the French king François I pronounced himself saddened but not surprised. As Francis Bryan reported to Henry,

⁵³ Agrippa, *Vanitie*, sig. 114^v.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, sig. 101^r:

many thorowe this guide and capitaine of bawdrie haue from moste base estate, climbed in a manner to the highest degree of Nobilitee. This man hath made his wife the kinges concubine, and hath benne one of his preuie counsaile, that man, his daughter, and hath benne created Earle: this man hath procured some Married wife to fulfill the Princes desire, & woorthie of large stipende, foorthwith is become the kinges Chamberlaine ...

These strictures demonstrate how various prejudices could be yoked together to create a more virulent strain of anti-courtier discourse. In this instance, Agrippa superimposes the image of the lascivious courtier onto that of the unscrupulously ambitious upstart.

⁵⁵ Claudian, ‘In Eutropium’, in *Claudian*, trans. by Maurice Platnauer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922), 153. Walter Map endorsed the wisdom of ‘the famous poet’: ‘Nothing is harsher than the ennobled clown’; ‘Nor [is there] any fiercer beast / Than a slave’s vengeance on a freeman’s back’. Map, *De nugis curialium*, p. 15.

'He perceaved muche faythefull kyndenes in Yow, and thought ever that so pompeos and ambysious a harte, spronge out of so vyle a stocke wold once shew forthe the basenes of his nature, and most comonlye against Him that hath rayed him from lowe degree to highe dignytye'.⁵⁶ 'Villainous' courtiers, we infer, do not honour or acknowledge their political and social obligations.

Basely-born upstarts were not the only breed of courtier from whom little was expected, besides a capacity to plunder, punish and humiliate others without compunction. Similar concerns were expressed about foreign court acolytes. 'Outlandish' courtiers, it was argued, were unlikely to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the interests of the realm and its inhabitants. They would, instead, be uninhibitedly acquisitive. They would ingratiate themselves with the king, and use his favour to accumulate rewards and offices that should have been reserved for his faithful subjects. The Poitevin, Savoyard and Lusignan courtiers of Henry III, for example, were frequently accused of engineering this scenario. The Osney abbey chronicler complained that Henry 'loved aliens above all Englishmen, and enriched them with innumerable gifts and possessions'.⁵⁷ From the twelfth century onwards, foreign courtiers were also blamed for introducing degenerate fashions and manners to England. Richard of Devizes recounted the future King John's explosive outburst against his brother Richard's lieutenant, the Normandy-born William Longchamp, whom John described as the 'son of perdition ... who first carried across to Englishmen from the

⁵⁶ 'Sir Francis Bryan to King Henry VIII, 1529', in *State papers published under the authority of Her Majesty's Commission: King Henry VIII*, 11 vols (London: HMC, 1830-52), VII (*Foreign Correspondence, 1527-1537*), 211-5 (213).

⁵⁷ Translation from D. A. Carpenter, 'King Henry III's 'Statute' against aliens', *English Historical Review*, vol. 107, no. 425 (October 1992), 925-44 (926).

foolishness of the French the preposterous custom of serving on bended knee'.⁵⁸ The 'preposterous customs' of continental courts, and the lamentable willingness of Englishmen to adopt them, provided critics of the courtier with fodder throughout the medieval and early modern periods.

Complaints about exploitative courtiers also targetted individuals whose youth, inexperience and wantonness should have disqualified them from high office (but did not). The fourteenth century bishop of Rochester, Thomas Brunton, preached a sermon addressing the outrages perpetrated by Richard II and his cronies. Brunton argued that a monarch should rely on the counsel of men - 'non pueri, juvenes et lascivi'.⁵⁹ He cited the example of Rehoboam, son of Solomon, who inherited the kingdom of Israel and was advised by his father's old counsellors to alleviate the oppression of his people; 'But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him' (1 Kings, ch. 12, v. 8). These arrogant youths urged him to prove that he was a greater and more terrible man than his father:

Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now, whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions (1 Kings, ch. 12, v. 10-11).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Chronicle of Devizes*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ 'Not boys, juvenile and lascivious'. This portion of the sermon is reproduced in G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), pp. 579-81.

⁶⁰ G. L. Harriss describes the biblical account of Rehoboam's misgovernment as a story 'which all medieval kings learnt'. G. L. Harriss, 'The king and his subjects', in *Fifteenth century attitudes: perceptions of society in late medieval England*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 13-28 (pp. 19-20).

The most striking feature of the Rehoboam story is the selfish indifference of the king's friends to the suffering of his people. The immature courtier, like the minion, is presented as a profoundly unsympathetic creature. Egotistical, lacking compassion and determined to impress his personality and status on those around him, he enriches and advances himself by grinding poor commonwealthsmen into the dust. These assumptions about youthful *familiares regis* were still prevalent in the sixteenth century; in his *Tree of the commonwealth*, Edmund Dudley warned Henry VIII that 'syldome it profiteth a prince to gyve confydence to young counsell'.⁶¹

Young men, foreigners and those of inferior birth were deemed especially inclined to overbearing, manipulative and oppressive behaviour when entrusted with high curial office. Representatives of all three categories were routinely cast as evil councillors. They were accused of encouraging the king to disregard his own well-being, and that of his people, for the sake of entrenching their privileged positions and promoting their private agendas. Identifying 'evil counsellors' as agents of disorder and malaise enabled malcontents to criticise the government, without appearing to inculcate the Crown itself. 'Syng I wolde, but alas', a stinging indictment of Richard II's regime, attributes the sickness of the body politic to the selfish and sinful behaviour of royal acolytes (among other reprobates). The poet grudgingly exonerates Richard himself, suggesting that 'The kyng knowith not alle'.⁶² Intriguingly, however, in the British

⁶¹ Edmund Dudley, *The tree of the commonwealth*, ed. by D. M. Brodie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 27.

⁶² *Satirical songs on costume*, ed. by Fairholt, p. 46. The phrase 'The kyng knowith not alle' also occurs in a poem complaining of injustice and misgovernment in Henry VI's reign: 'Trouthe and pore men ben appressede, / And myscheff is nothyng redressede; / The kyng knowith not alle'. 'A warning to King Henry', in *Political poems and songs relating to English history, composed during the period Edward III to that of Richard III*, ed. by Thomas Wright, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1859-61), II (1861), 229-31 (230).

Library manuscript, the word ‘not’ was inserted as an amendment.⁶³ It is unclear whether the original omission of the negative was deliberate or not; in any case, the alteration reminds us of the fine line that existed between criticism of corrupt courtiers and potentially treasonous attacks upon the monarch. During the course of the Merciless Parliament, the Lords Appellant asserted that the false friends who surrounded King Richard had hardened his heart against his natural councillors, to enrich themselves at the expense of the people.⁶⁴ The ensuing cull of favourites apparently failed to curb Richard’s propensity to lean on evil counsellors; the French chronicler Jean Froissart noted that, when the king departed for Ireland in 1399, disgruntled Londoners were murmuring that ‘Rycharde of Burdeaulx / hath belued so moche yell counsaile / that it can nat be hydden nor suffred any lengar’.⁶⁵ Froissart had previously observed that Edward II brought England to the brink of ruin by heeding the ‘euyll counsell’ of his selfish companions.⁶⁶ Similar charges were levelled at members

⁶³ BL, Harley MS 536, fol. 34^v. The insertion does not improve the scanning of the line.

⁶⁴ According to the Appellants, Richard’s favourites,

perceiving the tender age of our said lord the king and the innocence of his royal person, so caused him to believe many falsities devised and plotted by them against loyalty and good faith, that they cause him to devote his affection, firm faith, and credence entirely to them, and to hate his loyal lords and lieges, by whom he ought rather to have been governed. And also, encroaching to themselves royal power, in disenfranchising our said lord the king of sovereignty, impairing and diminishing his royal prerogative and regality, they caused him to obey them to such an extent that he was sworn to be governed, counselled, and led by them ...

Having illegitimately monopolized the king’s trust and favour, they persuaded him to give them various lordships, castles, towns and manors ... whereby they have been greatly enriched and the king himself has been impoverished, having nothing by which to support himself and bear the charges of the kingdom, except by imposing and taking imposts, taxes, and tributes from his people, to the disinheritance of his crown and the destruction of the realm.

The parliament rolls of medieval England, 1275-1504, ed. by Chris Given-Wilson et al., 16 vols (London: Boydell Press and the National Archive, 2005), VII, ed. by Chris Given-Wilson, 84-6.

⁶⁵ Jean Froissart, *Here begynneth the thirde and fourthe boke of sir Iohn Froissart of the cronycles of Englande, Fraunce, Spayne, Portyngale, Scotlande, Bretayne, Flau[n]ders: and other places adioynynge*, trans. by John Bourchier, Lord Berners (London: Richard Pynson, 1525), fol. CCCvi^v.

⁶⁶ Jean Froissart, *Here begynneth the first volum of sir Johan Froyssart of the cronycles of Englande, Fraunce, Spayne, Portyngale, Scotlande, Bretayne, Flau[n]ders: and other places adioynynge*, trans. by John Bourchier, Lord Berners (London: Richard Pynson, 1523), fol. vi^r.

of Henry VI's household in 1450, the year of Jack Cade's rebellion.⁶⁷

The strategy of blaming malevolent royal acolytes for unpopular or controversial policies retained its popularity in the sixteenth century. It proved particularly useful as a means of challenging unwelcome alterations to religious doctrine and observance. Allegations of corruption and scheming in the monarch's immediate circle abounded in 1536-7, during the Pilgrimage of Grace. Robert Aske's Proclamation to the City of York (15-16 October 1536) referred to 'evil persons, being of the king's council', who had not only 'incensed his grace with many and sundry new inventions, which be contrary [to] the faith of God', but had 'spoiled and robbed ... the whole body of this realm'. The Lincoln Articles (9 October 1536) were more explicit, informing Henry VIII 'that we your true subjects think that your grace takes of your council and being about you such persons as be of low birth and small reputation which hath procured the profits [of the dissolution] most especially for their own advantage, the which we suspect to be the Lord Cromwell and Sir Richard Rich, Chancellor of Augmentations'.⁶⁸

Popular ballads propounded the same diagnosis of the ills that were afflicting the

⁶⁷ The rebel proclamation of grievances denounced the clique of courtiers 'dayly and nyghtely abowte his hyghnesse': 'they sey that oure Sovereigne lorde is above his lawe'; 'they seye the Kynge schuld lyve upon his Comyns'; 'they enforme the kynge that the Comyns wolde ffurst destroye the Kynge's ffrendes and aftur hymeselfe'; 'they ... call us risers and treyturs and the kynge's enymys, but we schalle ffounde his trewe lege mene and his best freendus'. The proclamation observed 'that our Soveraygne lorde may wele undurstand that he hath hadde ffalse counsaile, ffor his lordez em lost, his marchundize is lost, his comyns destroyed, the see is lost, ffraunce his lost, hymself so pore that he may not [pay] for his mete nor drynk; he oweth more than evur dyd kynge in Ingland'. In November 1450, the Commons' *Petitio ad removendam certas personas a presentia regia* echoed the rebels' complaints: 'the persones hereafter in this bille named, hath been of mysbehavyng aboute your roiall persone ... by whose undue meanes your possessions have been gretely amenused, youre lawes not executed, and the peas of this your reame not observed nother kept, to youre grete hurt, and troble of the liege people of this your reame'. The House therefore requested that the offending courtiers 'be voided and amoved fro youre moost noble presence, persone, and estate, terme of here lyfes'. Transcription of MS Misc. 306, from the library of Magdalen College, Oxford, reproduced in I. M. W. Harvey, *Jack Cade's rebellion of 1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 188-90; *Parliament rolls, 1275-1504*, XII, ed. by Anne Curry and Rosemary Horrox, 184-5.

⁶⁸ Quotations taken from 'Select Documents', in R. W. Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the politics of the 1530s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 455-64.

kingdom: 'Crim, crame, and riche / With thre ell and liche / As sum men teache / God theym amend!'.⁶⁹ Historians have often pointed out that the Pilgrimage involved a variety of groups and individuals, with an eclectic range of motives. Yet a significant number of participants ostensibly concurred that the (assorted) evils against which they protested could be attributed to one or two false friends of the king.⁷⁰

The success of evil counsellors was usually attributed to their flattering tongues. Courtiers had been associated with the vice of flattery since ancient times, and the sycophantic courtier was a well-established figure of opprobrium in medieval and Renaissance political discourse. John of Salisbury complained that honest men could not compete with the deceitful toadies who systematically colonised the households of the great:

This plague of flatterers has increased to the extent that – God's indignation notwithstanding – if by chance courtly opinions should come into conflict, one fears that the moderate and good man would not readily have the power to expel rather than be expelled. For disgusting uncleanness and cancerous affliction gradually pervades everything, so that never or rarely is someone not defiled by this illness.⁷¹

John Gower, a critic of Richard II who subsequently allied himself with Henry Bolingbroke, warned that 'many a worthy kynge' had been deceived by courtiers 'that

⁶⁹ Anthony Fletcher, *Tudor rebellions*, 3rd edn (Harlow: Longman, 1983; repr. 1988), p. 108.

⁷⁰ Geoffrey Elton argued that the commons were persuaded to demand the removal of Cromwell, Rich and Audley by their social superiors – members of a conservative ('Aragonese-Marian') court faction who saw Cromwell and his associates as a threat to their influence over the King. Hence 'the northern risings represent the efforts of a defeated court faction to create a power base in the country for the purpose of achieving a political victory at court'. Elton's interpretation does not alter the fact that, whoever was responsible for nominating the culprits, a variety of pilgrims found it expedient to invoke their existence. Elton, 'Politics and the Pilgrimage of Grace', p. 50-51.

⁷¹ Salisbury, *Policraticus*, p. 19.

conne please and glose', to the detriment of his own reputation and authority.⁷² The prevalence of flattery at court was also deplored by the Nun's Priest in the *Canterbury Tales*:

Allas, ye lordes, many a fals flatour
Is in youre courtes, and many a losengour,
That plesen yow wel moore, by my feith,
Than he that soothfastnesse unto yow seith. (3325-8)⁷³

Having recounted the adventures of Reynard the fox, Caxton concluded that flattering and backstabbing were the only reliable means of negotiating court politics:

Now who that coude sette hym in reynardis crafte / and coude behaue hym in flater yng and lyeng as he dyde / he shold I trowe be herde / bothe wyth the lordes spyrytuel and temporel ... The rightwys peple ben al loste / trouthe and rightwysnes ben exyled and fordriuen / And for then ben abyden wyth vs couetyse / falshede / hate and enuye / Thyse regne now moche in euery contre / For it is in the pope's court / the emperours / the kynges dukes or any other lordes where someuer it be eche man laboureth to put other out fro his worship / offyce and power / for to make hym sylf to clymme hye with lyes / wyth flater yng ...⁷⁴

Agrippa claimed that 'None but flatterers doo prosper [at court], and whisperers, sclaunderers, talebearers, false accusers, complainers, abusers, venemous tongues, supplanters, inventors of mischiefes'.⁷⁵

The idea that the court was an environment in which only the vicious could flourish

⁷² For thei that conne please and glose
Ben as men tellen, the norices
Unto the fostringe of the vices,
Wherof full ofte netheles
A kynge is blamed gylteles

John Gower, 'Confessio Amantis', in *The works of the English poets, from Chaucer to Cowper*, ed. by Samuel Johnson and Alexander Chalmers, 21 vols (London: J. Johnson et al., 1810), II, 7-274 (221).

⁷³ Chaucer, 'The Nun's Priest's tale', in *Riverside Chaucer*.

⁷⁴ *Reynard*, trans. by Caxton, p. 110.

⁷⁵ Agrippa, *Vanitie*, fol. 111'.

enjoyed the status of a truism throughout the medieval period. The virtuous were exhorted to safeguard their piety and purity by shunning the households of princes entirely. Lucan's injunction - 'Exeat aula, / Qui volte esse pius' - was repeated by preachers, invoked by satirists and cited by socio-political commentators.⁷⁶ 'For who is it', demanded John of Salisbury,

whose virtue is not cast aside by the frivolities of courtiers? Who is so great, who is so resolute, that he cannot be corrupted? He is best who resists for the longest time, who is strongest, who is corrupted the least. For in order that virtue be unharmed, one must turn aside from the life of the courtier. He who said the following providently and prudently expressed the nature of the court: 'He departs from the court who wishes to be pious.'⁷⁷

St Edmund of Abingdon (1175-1240) endorsed this advice from the pulpit.⁷⁸ Agrippa quoted directly from Lucan in his *Vanitie*: 'in summa aut nequitiae, malitiae, impietatae insistendum, aut aula cedendum. Non impune licet, nisi cum fatis, exeat aula, qui vult esse pius'.⁷⁹

Some critics of the court alleged that it was almost impossible for courtiers to practise true religion. This concern was often voiced by religious reformers in the early-to-mid sixteenth century. Erasmus observed that Peter's denial of Christ took place in just such a setting. Peter had followed his master to the high priest's palace, and sat with the

⁷⁶ 'Quit the court, whoever wants to be pious'. Lucan, *The civil war (Pharsalia)*, with an English translation by J. D. Duff, Loeb classical library (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press; W. Heinemann, 1928), VIII, 493-4.

⁷⁷ Salisbury, *Policraticus*, p. 90.

⁷⁸ BL, Harley MS 325, fol. 163^v.

⁷⁹ Henrici Cornelii Agrippae, *De incertitudine & uanitate scieniarum declamatio inuectiua* ([Basle: s. n., 1530]), sig. p ij^r. Sanford translated this passage as: 'to be short, they must abide in wickednesse, naughtinesse or impietie, or departe from the Courte. None but fooles escape vnpunished: let him leaue the Courte, that wilbe good'. Agrippa, *Vanitie*, fol. 111^r.

attendants there whilst Jesus was interrogated.⁸⁰ Fearful of being recognised as a disciple, and worried that his simple ‘countray language’ would betray him, he was transformed into ‘a right courtier ... For he begyneth to sweare depely, and to curse withal, that he neuer in al his lyfe tyme knew this Iesu, whom they spake of’. Erasmus concluded that it was dangerous ‘for Christes disciple to be knowen in bishops, and princes courtes’: ‘Unlesse he vtterly denye himselfe to bee Christes disciple, he standeth in ioepardie to lose his life’.⁸¹ Other commentators drew the same moral from the Book of Daniel. Analysing Daniel’s consignment to the lions’ den, at the behest of King Darius’s ‘familiar’, Jean Calvin concluded that the godly should expect to be persecuted at court. Monarchs, he argued, were regrettably prone to surround themselves with proud, ambitious, irreligious acolytes.⁸² The holiness of a man such as Daniel would naturally fill such individuals with jealous rage.⁸³ They would seek to destroy him, and to prevent him from communing with the God who had so manifestly favoured him. The Protestant polemicist George Joye also suggested that the story of Daniel highlighted the dangers and difficulties of practising religion in a princely entourage. Joye observed that Daniel was exceptional, to the extent that ‘being in the kings courte / nether for threatens nor for contempt / or plesure / nor by power wolde he be ouercomen or tempted once to swarue from the trewe worship, worde, and fere of

⁸⁰ Mark ch. 14, v. 54.

⁸¹ Desiderius Erasmus, *The first tome or volume of the paraphrase of Erasmus vpon the Newe Testamente* (London: Edwarde Whitchurche, 1548), fol. xciiii.

⁸² ‘[T]he more proude and dissolute euery man is, the more authoritie hath hee in Princes courtes’; ‘kynges ... set none vp but euill men, of no valewe, and whom God hath marked wyth some note of ignominy’. Jean Calvin, *Commentaries of the diuine Iohn Caluine, vppon the prophet Daniell*, trans. by Anthony Gilby (London: John Day, 1570), fol. 94^{r-v}.

⁸³ ‘For there is no doubt but that they did know Daniel to bee an holy man and approued of God ... they are blinded with that wicked affection of enuy. And whence cometh enuy, but of ambition?’. Calvin, *Commentaries*, fol. 95^r.

god'.⁸⁴

Numerous satirists likened the irreligious court to the most god-forsaken place imaginable: hell.⁸⁵ This conceit was explored with particular deftness by Walter Map. In his *De nugis curialium* (*Courtier's trifles*), Map insisted that he was not suggesting that the court actually *was* hell - 'only it is almost as much like hell as a horse's shoe is like a mare's'.⁸⁶ 'Have you read how Tantalus down there catches at streams which shun his lips?' he inquired conversationally. 'Here you may see many a one thirsting for the goods of others which he fails to get, and like a drinker, misses them at the moment of seizure'. He steered the reader adroitly through the underworld like a polished tour-guide:

Sisyphus there bears a boulder from the bottom of a valley to the summit of a lofty hill; and when it has rolled back, he carries it up again from the vale, only to fall once more. Here too there are many who reckon it nothing to have climbed the hill of riches, but try to urge their souls, fallen back into the valley of covetousness ... Ever changing his posture of a minute before, Ixion down there is whirled round on his wheel, up, down, hither and yonder; and Ixions

⁸⁴ George Joye, *The exposition of Daniel the prophete gathered oute of Philip Melanchton, Iohan Ecolampadius, Chonrade Pellicane [and] Out of Iohan Draconite* ([Antwerp: Successor of A. Goinus], 1545), fol. 20^r. It is worth noting that the authors of scriptural commentaries were not always implacably hostile to courtiers. Certain biblical characters, including Daniel, were sometimes cited as positive role models for royal servants. The Protestant reformer Johannes Agricola compiled a collection of German proverbs, including the following: 'Als bald Petrus gen hofe kam / ward ein schlack draus' (roughly translated, 'As soon as Peter came to court, he was a rogue'). Considering this adage, Agricola reflected that 'Der hof ist an yhm selbs nicht böse / der herrn dienst ist auch nicht böse ... Also hat Joseph gedienet dem Pharao. Daniel dem Könige von Babylonien. Naaman dem Könige von Syrien' ('The court is not, in itself, evil. Serving a lord is also not evil ... Joseph served the Pharaoh; Daniel the king of Babylon; Naaman the king of Syria'). However, Agricola conceded 'das zu hofe viel vrsachen sind / nicht from zu bleiben' ('at court there are many reasons not to stay holy'). From Johann Agricola, *Drey hundert Gemeynere Sprichwörter* (Haganaw: I. Setzerium, 1529), quoted in Helmuth Kiesel, „Bei Hof, bei Höll“: *Untersuchungen zur literarischen Hofkritik von Sebastian Brant bis Friedrich Schiller* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979), p. 115.

⁸⁵ Sydney Anglo notes that medieval commentators regarded the court 'if not as Hell itself, then certainly as an antechamber to that establishment'. Anglo, 'Courtier: changing ideals', p. 34. 'Lang zu hofe / lang zu helle' ('a long time at court is a long time in hell') was among the German proverbs collected by Agricola. Kiesel, „Bei Hof, bei Höll“, p. 113.

⁸⁶ Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 15-7.

are not wanting here, turned around by the wheel of fortune.⁸⁷

Regrettably, the text of *De nugis curialium* is incomplete, and several of Map's analogies have been lost. He concluded his comparative survey of Hades and the court with the assurance that

so far I bear witness of what I have seen. But, for the rolling flames, the blackness of darkness, the stench of the rivers, the loud gnashing of the fiends' teeth, the thin and piteous cries of the frightened ghosts, the foul trailings of worms and vipers, of serpents and all manner of creeping things, the blasphemous roarings, evil smell, mourning and horror – were I to allegorize upon all these, it is true that correspondences are not wanting among the things of the court, but they would take up more time than I have at my disposal.

'Besides,' he added, 'to spare the court seems only courteous'.⁸⁸ Peter of Blois, a contemporary of Map who, like the latter, spent some time in the service of Henry II, was blunter in his condemnation of court life. 'If you want to be swallowed up in lasting torment by death and the marsh of hell,' he wrote bitterly, 'then put your trust in princes and in their sons'. He dismissed courtiers as 'men whose lives are lost, torturing themselves with labors, crucifying themselves with cares'.⁸⁹

Comparisons between the court and hell belonged to a literary tradition that emphasised the miseries of curial life. In this tradition, the courtier was cast as a tormented creature. The awful sights, sounds, smells and sensations to which he was subjected were reported with shuddering relish. Alain Chartier (c. 1385 – c. 1433) was a courtier and diplomat in the service of the French kings Charles VI and Charles VII. Whilst employed by the latter, he produced a short essay entitled the *Curial*. This was

⁸⁷ Map, *De nugis curialium*, p. 9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸⁹ Translated from the Latin by C. Stephen Jaeger, and reproduced in *Origins of courtliness*, pp. 59-60.

presented as ‘a lettre ... to hys brother / whyche desired to come dwelle in Court / in whyche [the author] reherseth many myseryes & wretchednesses therin vsed / For taduyse hym not to entre in to it’.⁹⁰ Chartier depicted the courtier’s lot as a profoundly unwholesome and peculiarly painful one. He warned his brother ‘that thou shalt haue labour wythoute fruyt, / And shalt vse thy lyf in perylle / And shalt gete many enuyous at the’. He emphasised the uncertainty and fragility of success: ‘to them whom fortune the variable hath most hyely lyfte vp / and enhaused / resteth nomore but for to falle fro so hye doun’.⁹¹ He cautioned against the morally corrosive effect of a court career, ‘whyche maketh a man to leue hys propre maners / And to applye hym self to the maners of other’.⁹² Chartier contrasted the peaceful and orderly existence enjoyed by his brother with the discomfort and incontinence of a courtier’s lifestyle, describing the latter in occasionally revolting detail:

thou lyest in thyn house lyke an Emperour ... And we tremble for drede to dysplayse the lordes of hye houses / Thou mayest ete when thou hast hungre / at thyn houre and at thy playsir / And we ete so gredyly & gloutounously that otherwhyle we caste it vp agayn and make vomytes / Thou passest the nyght in slepyng as longe as it playseth the / And we after ouermoche drynkyng of wynes and grete paynes lye doun ofte in beddes ful of vermyne / & somtyme with stryfe & debate ...⁹³

He ended his epistle with a string of oxymorons: ‘And yf thou demandest / what is the lyf of them of the courte I answeere the brother / that it is a pouere rychesse / An habundance miserable / an hyenesse that falleth / An estate not stable / A sewrte

⁹⁰ Alain Chartier, *Here foloweth the cople of a lettre whyche Maistre Alayn Charetier wrote to hys Brother*, trans. by William Caxton ([Westminster: William Caxton, 1483]), sig. i^r.

⁹¹ Chartier, *Lettre*, sig. ii^r-v.

⁹² ‘For yf he be verytable / men shal holde hym at schole of fayntyse / yf he loue honest lyf / men shal teche hym to lede dyshonest lyf / yf he be pacyent / & sette by no prouffyt / he shal be left to haue suffraunce’. Chartier, *Lettre*, sig. iii^r.

⁹³ Chartier, *Lettre*, sig. iii^v.

tremblyng / And an euyl lyf".⁹⁴ The courtier's (illusory) blessings were thus undermined by their juxtaposition with his (actual) burdens.

In 1444, the humanist scholar Aeneas Silvius produced a similarly gloomy tract entitled *De curialium miseriis*. Silvius was appointed poet laureate at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III in 1442, and remained in the Emperor's service for twelve or thirteen years.⁹⁵ The letters he wrote during this phase of his career indicate that, whilst ambitious and eager to remain at the hub of political affairs, he found the lifestyle of a courtier disagreeable. 'We are all squeezed together in the same abode', he wrote to Sigismund, duke of Austria, 'many as we are, we eat and drink at the same table ... One cannot even spit comfortably, but one must needs soil the clothes of a neighbour'.⁹⁶ *De curialium miseriis* was originally conceived as a stylish epistle to Johannes de Eich. It was clearly a literary set-piece. Nonetheless, we can reasonably assume that it expressed sincere objections on the part of its author to his current mode of existence.

Alexander Barclay's early sixteenth century translation of the letter reconfigured it into a discussion between two shepherds, Coridon and Cornix. The former initially intends to seek his fortune at court - but is dissuaded by his more experienced companion. Coridon imagines the courtier to be a glamorous, carefree creature, surrounded by amusing companions and devoted to sophisticated recreation. Cornix disabuses him of this illusion: 'Not so Coridon, oft vnder yelowe lockes, / Be hid foule

⁹⁴ Chartier, *Lettre*, sig. [v]^v.

⁹⁵ Wilfred P. Mustard, 'Introduction', in Aeneas Silvius, *De curialium miseriis epistola*, ed. by Mustard (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins Press; Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1928), pp. 11-18 (p. 12).

⁹⁶ William Boulting, *Aeneas Silvius: orator, man of letters, statesman and pope* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908), p. 116.

scabbes and fearfull French pockes'. He argues that courtiers should be ashamed 'to iet so vp and downe / When they be debtours for dublet, hose and gowne'. Furthermore, 'where we labour in workes profitable, / They labour sorer in worke abhominable'.⁹⁷ The court is 'the deuils mouth'; 'the well of misery'; 'the baiting place of hell'.⁹⁸ Those who inhabit it (by implication) are the damned. They are 'Flatterers and lyers, carriers of fafell, / Iuggelers and disers' – in short, the dregs of humanity.⁹⁹

The image of the tormented courtier was often invoked in conjunction with praise of the countryside. The logical extension of telling courtiers to leave the court, and reminding them how wretched they were there, was to identify a place where they could go in peace, to love and serve the Lord. The pastoral genre, developed by Theocritus and Virgil, idealised rustic life for its innocence, honesty, and simple pleasures.¹⁰⁰ The rural Eden was usually compared with 'some more complex type of civilization'.¹⁰¹ Its perfection was defined by the corruption of the city or court. Guevara's *Dispraise*, for example, contrasts the vacuousness of a courtier's existence with the value of a countryman's honest life:

hath not the courtier cause to complaine, that occupieth himselfe in nothyng but in eatyng, drinkyng, & sleapyng, and in the meane season of his better age, that is to say, his youth consumeth away, as the sume of smoke, which procedes of idlenes in the court & doyng nothyng? where contrarywyse he might in the village exercise himself to his honor, and to the helth of his body

⁹⁷ Alexander Barclay, *Certayne egloges of Alexander Barclay priest, whereof the first three conteyne the miseryes of courtiers and courtes of all princes in generall, gathered out of a booke named in Latin, Miseriae cvrialivm, compiled by Aeneas Syluius, poet and orator*, ed. by Beatrice White (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, for the Early English Text Society, 1928), pp. 10-11.

⁹⁸ Barclay, *Miseryes of courtiers*, pp. 10, 18.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ S. K. Heninger, Jr., 'The Renaissance reversion of pastoral', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 22, no. 2 (April-June, 1961), 254-61.

¹⁰¹ W. W. Greg, *Pastoral poetry and pastoral drama: a literary inquiry, with special reference to the pre-Restoration stage in England* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1906), p. 4.

and profite of his neighbour.¹⁰²

The countryside is thus presented as the natural context for peaceful and virtuous living.¹⁰³

Before Castiglione published the *Courtier*, the literary treatment of court acolytes, in England and elsewhere in Europe, had been overwhelmingly negative. A number of hostile stereotypes circulated for centuries, and were subjected to surprisingly little modification. Firstly, there was the courtly fop. This vacuous creature was effeminate, extravagant and addicted to novelty. His predilection for exotic clothes and hairstyles could be interpreted as a symptom of rampant or deviant sexuality. Secondly, the over-mighty favourite was a familiar object of hatred and scorn. Arrogance, corpulence, carnality and dictatorial conduct were consistent themes in his characterisation. He was closely allied to the figure of the exploitative courtier, whose predatory instincts and lack of humanity were often depicted through bestial imagery. Youthful, lowborn and foreign court acolytes were deemed particularly callous and exploitative (the young courtier lacked the wisdom and maturity to demonstrate compassion, the villein lacked the inclination and the foreigner lacked the incentive). The flattering evil counsellor – the serpent whom the unsuspecting prince nurtured in his bosom – was a popular scapegoat for tyrannical or incompetent government. The construct of the godless

¹⁰² Guevara, *Dispraise*, sig. [d viii]^r – e i^v. The *Dispraise* was originally published in 1539, under the Spanish title *Menosprecio de Corte y Alabanza de Aldea*.

¹⁰³ It is true that by the early sixteenth century, the debate about the relative merits of the cosmopolitan *vita activa* and the bucolic *vita contemplativa* was no longer regarded as an open and shut case. Thomas More's *Utopia* famously considered the moral pros and cons of court service, before concluding that the former outweighed the latter. More suggested that the bucolic ideal of irreproachable private purity could and should be sacrificed in exchange for the opportunity to make a positive, practical contribution to public affairs. Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. by Paul Turner, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965; repr. 1981) pp. 41-42 and 57-64. All subsequent references to this edition. As Peltonen has demonstrated, the validity of More's argument was widely accepted throughout the Elizabethan era. Peltonen, *Classical humanism*, pp. 18-35.

courtier was invoked by moralists and preachers who subscribed to Lucan's maxim, 'Exeat aula, / Qui volte esse pius'. The *De curialium miseris* genre was based upon the construct of the tormented courtier, who subjected himself to a disgusting and draining way of life in the hope of rewards that would probably never materialise. Finally, pastoral authors contrasted the courtier's sinful, frenetic and joyless existence with the pure, honest pleasures of life in the country. The *Courtier*, with its optimistic vision of the courtier's benevolent potential, thus contravened centuries of literary tradition. It offered a defiant challenge to conventional wisdom: 'I perceive not who should refuse this name of a Perfect Courtier, which (in my mind) is woorthie verye great praise.'¹⁰⁴

As we noted previously, the popularity of Castiglione's work in England helped to transform the 'name of a Perfect Courtier' from an ironic oxymoron into a legitimate and honourable aspiration. Yet many of the anti-courtier texts mentioned above remained accessible during the early Elizabethan era. Lucan's advice about avoiding the court was frequently quoted.¹⁰⁵ Other histories and chronicles containing outraged invective against courtly manners and morals were owned and circulated in manuscript format. Sir John Prise (d. 1555) bequeathed a copy of Malmesbury's *Gesta regvm Anglorvm* to his son Richard, and instructed the latter to have the text printed.¹⁰⁶ John Stow also owned the *Gesta regvm Anglorvm*; he lent it, with several other manuscript

¹⁰⁴ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ss ii^v.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Richard Rainolde, *A chronicle of all the noble emperours of the Romaines* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1571), fol. 12^v: 'then *Pothinus* vttered a sentence out of *Lucan* the Poete. *Exeat aula qui vult esle pius*'. See also Lyly, *Euphues*, fol. 78^r: 'I feare me the Poet to say truely. *Exeat aula qui vult esse pius*'.

¹⁰⁶ 'Item I wyll that my sonne Richarde shall put my booke in printe that I have made against Polidorus storye of Englande / And to annex to the same some pece of Antiquitee that is not yet printed out of the written bookes of histories that I haue in my house / As William Malmesburie de regibus Anglorum or Henricus Huntington'. John Prise, 'The will of Sir John Prise of Hereford, 1555', transcribed by F. C. Morgan, *The National Library of Wales Journal*, vol. IX (1955-56), 255-61 (257).

chronicles, to fellow historian Dr. David Powell.¹⁰⁷ Holinshed cited ‘Guilielmus Malmesburiensis’ as one of the authors whom he had consulted during the composition of his *Chronicle*.¹⁰⁸ Archbishop Matthew Parker acquired a copy of Eadmer’s *Historia* from Dr. Henry Johns.¹⁰⁹ He also donated a twelfth century manuscript of John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* and *Metalogicus* to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.¹¹⁰ Transcriptions of the former treatise were clearly consulted by mid sixteenth century resistance theorists, most notably John Ponet and George Buchanan.¹¹¹ John Bale also cited *Policraticus* when attacking Bishop Bonner in 1554.¹¹² Other anti-courtier essays and epistles were collected as presentation manuscripts. A fine illuminated manuscript of Alain Chartier’s work is preserved in the Bodleian library. On the verso side of the final folio, the name ‘Robertus Dudley’ is beautifully inscribed, with numerous flourishes and motifs.¹¹³

Many of the relevant tracts and dialogues were available in print. Alexander Barclay’s

¹⁰⁷ John Stow, *A survey of the cities of London and Westminster*, ed. by John Strype, 2 vols (London: A. Churchill, J. Knapton, R. Knaplock, J. Walthoe, E. Horne, B. Tooke, D. Midwinter, B. Cowse, R. Robinson and T. Ward, 1720), I, xix. *Gesta Regum Anglorum* was published by Henry Savile in 1596, in a compendium of medieval histories. Henry Savile, *Rerum Anglicarum scriptores post Bedam praecipui, ex vetustissimis codicibus manuscriptis nunc primum in lucem editi* (London: G. Bishop, R. Nuberie & R. Barker, 1596). Malmesbury’s description of William II’s degenerate courtiers occurs on fol. 69^v.

¹⁰⁸ Holinshed, *First and second volume of chronicles*, sig. Aiiij^f. Holinshed also counted John Gower and John Lydgate among the ‘helpers of our English toong’ - a wave of late medieval poets who continued Chaucer’s work of developing English as a literary language. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ B. Dickins, ‘The making of the Parker Library’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, vol. 6 no. 1 (1972), 19-34.

¹¹⁰ J. E. Sandys, ‘Review of *Ioannis Saresburiensis episcopi Carnotensis Policratici sive de nugis curialiam et vestigiis philosophorum libri VIII*, ed. by Clemens C. I. Webb’, *English Historical Review*, vol. 26, no. 101 (January 1911), 165-7 (167).

¹¹¹ The Marian exile John Ponet was an early advocate of opposition to tyrants. He outlined his views in *A shorte treatise of politike power*, which was published in Strasbourg in 1556. The *Treatise* is strongly evocative of *Policraticus*. See Winthrop Hudson, *John Ponet (1516? -1556): advocate of limited monarchy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942), p. 166.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Bod. Rawl. MS A 338, fol. 113^v.

reworking of *De curialium miseris* was printed in 1523, 1530, 1548 and 1560.¹¹⁴ Alain Chartier's *Innumerable myseries* had been 'Englished' by William Caxton in 1483. In 1549, John Day and William Seres published a new edition of the Caxton translation, embellished by Francis Segar. Caxton's translation of *Reynard the fox*, originally published in 1481, was not reissued after 1525. However, material from *Reynard* was 'borrowed' by mid sixteenth century authors, in much the same way as jokes and anecdotes from the *Courtier* were appropriated.¹¹⁵ *Piers Plowman* was printed in 1550 and 1561. Agrippa's *Of the vanitie and vncertaintie of artes and sciences*, translated by James Sanford, was published in 1569 and reprinted in 1575. The anti-curial *Familiar epistles* of Guevara, translated by Edward Hellowes, had an excellent print run between 1574 and 1584, during which time four editions were produced. Francis Bryan's translation of Guevara's *Dispraise* was first published in 1542, and again in 1575 as *A looking glasse for the court*.¹¹⁶ The *Looking glasse* was produced by Thomas Tymme, who hoped to bolster his literary credentials and secure the patronage of Lord John Russell. Tymme expressed regret that Bryant's *Dispraise* was no longer widely read, and announced his intention 'to reuiue the same'.¹¹⁷

The Elizabethan circulation of anti-courtier texts can be gauged from the frequency with which they occur in book-lists and inventories. Among the students and employees of Oxford University, Lucan's *Pharsalia* and Agrippa's *Vanitie* were enormously popular. *Pharsalia* is mentioned in the book-lists of John Tatham (1576),

¹¹⁴ In the 1523 edition, only the first of Barclay's eclogues was reproduced.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, James Holly Hanford, 'The source of an incident in *Gammer Gurton's needle*', *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 25, no. 3 (March 1910), 81.

¹¹⁶ See Daniel Javitch, 'French satire misunderstood', 118.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Tymme, *A looking glasse for the court* (London: [Thomas East] for William Norton, 1575), [ii]^v.

Nicholas Lombard (1575), Richard Seacole (1577), James Reynolds (1577), John Lewis (1579), Thomas Tatham (1586), John Forster (1584), Anthony Tye (1584) and Robert Dowe (1588).¹¹⁸ *Of the vanitie and vncertaintie of artes and sciences* circulated widely in Latin before the publication of Sanford's translation. The Latin title appeared in the inventories of William Napper (1569), John Tatham, Nicholas Lombard, John Reynolds (1571), Thomas Bolt (1578) and Thomas Tatham.¹¹⁹ John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* was owned by John Glover and James Reynolds.¹²⁰ Inventories drawn up on behalf of John Badger (1577), Richard Seacole and Edward Higgins featured Froissart's *Chronicle* – with the name of the chronicler variously spelled 'phrosarde', 'Frosord' and 'Froisarde'.¹²¹ Guevara's *Familiar epistles*, containing were in the possession of John Tatham and Robert Singleton (the probate inventory of the latter was drawn up in 1577).¹²²

The extent to which pamphleteers, playwrights and preachers adapted traditional strands of anti-courtier discourse to suit their purposes during the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign will be analysed in chapters five and six. Before we embark upon such an analysis, however, we should note that late sixteenth century critics of the court did not simply resurrect classical and medieval stereotypes. They also responded specifically to contemporary cultural trends. Two such trends had a particularly significant impact upon the courtier's image. The first was the growing suspicion with

¹¹⁸ *Private libraries in Renaissance England*, IV, 263, 169; V, 142, 105, 294; VI, 88, 18, 49, 150.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, III; 173; IV, 261, 170, 103; V, 206; VI, 87.

¹²⁰ We encountered John Glover in chapter two, as the owner of French and Italian copies of the *Courtier*. *Private libraries in Renaissance England*, V, 221, 106.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, V, 12, 140; VI, 195. Higgins was another collector of multi-lingual *Courtiers*. He also owned *Piers Plowman* (VI, 199).

¹²² *Ibid.*, IV, 261; V, 180.

which Italian manners and morals were regarded in England.¹²³ The second, related, phenomenon was the spectacular deterioration of Machiavelli's reputation, and the permeation of Machiavellian rhetoric into polemical discourse.

The association of Renaissance court culture with Italy was close enough to ensure that their reputations, if not interdependent, were at least vulnerable to each other's fluctuations. Elizabethan authors tended to evoke one of two basic stock types when describing or inventing Italian characters. The first can conveniently be referred to as the popinjay. This ridiculous figure was derided for his effete fashions and manners: 'Italy, the paradise of the earth and the epicure's heaven, how doth it form our young master? It makes him to kiss his hand like an ape, to cringe his neck like a starveling, and to play at hey pass, repass, come aloft, when he salutes a man'.¹²⁴ His vanity made him excessively quarrelsome: 'The Italians are as iealous as any of theyr women'.¹²⁵ He was utterly shallow and devoid of any serious principle: 'theyr rype wittes are ... soone ouershadowed with vice, and theyr senses ... blinded with self loue'.¹²⁶ His lasciviousness was notorious: 'These are such as chose for lust, and not for loue'.¹²⁷ He served as a contemptible figure of fun.

It should be noted that such foibles were not exclusively associated with 'Italianate' foreigners. Similar attributes were ascribed to representatives of other nations – particularly Catholic Frenchmen and Spaniards. Austin Saker's description of a

¹²³ Pauline Smith highlights the link between Italophobia and anti-courtier rhetoric in sixteenth century France. Smith, *Anti-Courtier Trend*, pp. 130-47.

¹²⁴ Thomas Nash, *The vnfortunate traoueller, or, the life of Iacke Wilson* (London: T. Scarlet for C. Burby, 1594), sig. L4^v.

¹²⁵ Robert Albott, *Wits theater of the little world* (London: J[ames] R[oberts] for N[icholas] L[ing], 1599), fol. 74^v.

¹²⁶ Robert Greene, *Mamillia: a mirrour or looking-glasse for the ladies of Englande* (London: [T. Dawson] for Thomas Woodcocke, 1583), fol. 7^v.

¹²⁷ Greene, *Mamillia*, fol. 7^v.

Spanish gallant closely resembled the popular stereotype of a touchy and quarrelsome

Italian:

Yes, for the Spaniard is proude, so is he stately: he is haughty, so is hee arragant ... If thou talke with him, hee is as testy & froward as may bee: if thou vse any conference, so contrary and crosse as thou wouldst not imagine: if thou walke with him in the streetes, or also in the Church, thou must turne as he turneth, otherwise, hee will imagine thou disdaynest him, and so shalt purchase his displeasure ...¹²⁸

The translator Robert Ashley sneered at ‘those magnificent *Don Diegos* and *Spanish Caulieros*, whose doughtiest deedes are bragges and boastinges, and themselues (for the most part) shadowes without substaunce’.¹²⁹ George Gascoigne mocked the pretentious effeminacy of French and Spanish fashions:

What be they? women? masking in mens weedes?
With dutchlike dublets, and with Ierkins iaggde?
With Spanish spangs, and ruffes set out of France,
With high copt hattes, and fethers flaunt a flaunt?
They be so sure euen *Wo* to *Men* in deede.¹³⁰

Chapman’s *Blinde begger of Alexandria* invited its audiences to laugh at ‘signeor Braggadino the Martiall spaniardo’, who first appears on stage in hot pursuit of a woman, and is subsequently outraged when Irus does not appear to know who he is (‘Iesu what art thou that thou hast the guts of thy braines gript with such famine of

¹²⁸ Austin Saker, *Narbonus The laberynth of libertie* (London: Richard Jhon[es], 1580), pp. 134-5.

¹²⁹ Gentil-homme francois, *A comparison of the English and Spanish nation: composed by a French gentleman against those of the league in Fraunce, which went about to perswade the King to breake his alliance with England, and to confirme it with Spaine*, trans. by R[obert] A[shley] (London: John Wolfe, 1589), sig. A3^r.

¹³⁰ George Gascoigne, *The steele glas a satyre* (London: [Henry Binneman] for Richard Smith, [1576]), li^v.

knowledge not to know me’).¹³¹ George Whetstone’s lighthearted *Christmasse exercise* featured a character named Monsieur Bargetto - ‘a Frenchman, amorous and light headed’.¹³² Continental Catholics were evidently expected to be lecherous, foolish, aggressive, unmanly and vain. Italianate poseurs conformed to type.

The construct of the Italianate popinjay was strikingly similar to that of the courtly fop. As a result, the two caricatures were sometimes superimposed. This phenomenon can be observed in Robert Greene’s satire, *A qvip for an vpstart courtier*. Greene imagined ‘A quaint dispute’ between two pairs of trousers (‘Me thought I sawe an vncouth headlesse thing ... it wanted a body, yet seeing legges and hose I supposed it to bee some monster’). He named his protagonists Cloth-breeches (the countryman) and Velvet-breeches (the courtier). The latter was unambiguously foreign, and predominantly Italian. He was made from ‘Neapolitane stuffe ... drawne out with the best Spanish satin’. He carried a rapier and dagger decorated ‘as quayntlye as if some curious Florentine had trickte them vp to square it vp and downe the streets before his Mistresse’. He boasted that he had been ‘borne in Italy the mistresse of the world for chiuallrie, cald into England from my natiue home (wher I was famous) to honour your courtiers and yoong gentlemen’. He was extravagant, ‘maruellous curioslye’ attired, and ‘passing pompous in [his] gestures’. He was full of ‘brauado’, devoted to ‘idleness’ and ‘pufte vp with ... presuming thoughts’.¹³³ Greene finally dismissed Velvet-breeches as ‘an vpstart come out of *Italy*, begot of Pride, nursed vp by selfe-

¹³¹ George Chapman, *The blinde begger of Alexandria* (London: [J. Roberts] for William Jones, 1598), sig. B3^r.

¹³² George Whetstone, *An heptameron of ciuill discourses containing: the Christmasse exercise of sundrie well courted gentlemen and gentlewomen* (London: Richard Jones, 1582), sig. Ci^r.

¹³³ Robert Greene, *A qvip for an vpstart courtier: or, a quaint dispute between veluet breeches and clothbreeches* (London: John Wolfe, 1592; repr. Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971), sig. B3^v–C3^r.

loue, and brought into this countrie by his companion newfanglennesse'.¹³⁴ He thus identified and ridiculed the attributes of a foppish courtier, whilst making it clear that they were also, and originally, Italian characteristics.

The popinjay was one of the templates from which Elizabethans habitually conceptualised Italians in particular, and papist foreigners in general. The other (specifically Italian) stock-type was the Machiavel. Machiavelli's works had been familiar to educated Englishmen since the Henrician period. Continental books and manuscripts could easily be acquired by the cosmopolitan elite during the first half of the sixteenth century.¹³⁵ During Elizabeth's reign, Machiavelli was made accessible to vernacular readers. A translation of the *Art of war* was published in 1563. This text was reissued in 1573 and 1588. An 'Englished' *Florentine history* appeared in 1595. The *Discourses* and the *Prince* were more taboo; no vernacular translations were published in England until 1636 and 1640.¹³⁶ However, Napoleone Orsini has demonstrated that manuscript translations of the *Prince* were circulating by the mid Elizabethan era.¹³⁷ Moreover, both the *Prince* and the *Discourses* were printed illegally in their original Italian in 1584. John Wolfe, who was responsible for the publications, attributed them to 'Antoniello degli Antonielli of Palermo'.¹³⁸

It is evident that Machiavelli was well known in sixteenth century England. From the outset, he evoked mixed responses. Cardinal Pole was horrified by what he regarded as

¹³⁴ Greene, *Qvip*, sig. B3^{f-v}, B4^v, H3^v.

¹³⁵ Felix Raab, *The English face of Machiavelli: a changing interpretation 1500-1700* (London & Toronto: Routledge & Kegan Paul, University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 30.

¹³⁶ Raab, *Machiavelli*, pp. 52-53.

¹³⁷ Napoleone Orsini, 'Elizabethan manuscript translations of Machiavelli's Prince', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol. 1, no. 2 (October, 1937), 166-69.

¹³⁸ A. Gerber, 'All of the five fictitious Italian editions of writings of Machiavelli and three of those of Pietro Aretino printed by John Wolfe of London (1584-1588)', *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 22, no. 1 (January, 1907), 2-6.

the shameless irreligion of the *Prince*. Many of Pole's contemporaries, however, were prepared to give Machiavelli a sympathetic reading. In 1548, as we have seen, William Thomas instructed the young King Edward in Machiavellian 'Common places of state'.¹³⁹ In 1552, Sir Richard Morison, ambassador to Charles V, reported to William Cecil that his position and his safety had been compromised by reports that 'I was a preacher, and did use to preach every day to my household'. Morison denied the charges: 'I did read them Bernadine's Prediches for the tongue [Italian], and sometimes Machiavel'.¹⁴⁰ Clearly, he considered Machiavelli a respectable author (perfectly suitable for wives and servants!).

In the early Elizabethan era, Machiavelli still retained a corps of open admirers. Peter Whitehorne dedicated his *Arte of warre ... set forthe in Englishe* to Queen Elizabeth in 1563. He paid tribute to 'the famous and excellente Nicholas Machiuell', and asserted that nothing could be 'more profitable, necessarie, or more honourable' than the subject matter of his treatise.¹⁴¹ Yet there was a hint of defensiveness in Whitehorne's dedication. He explained that he had commended his work to the Queen 'that the discourse itself, and the woorke of a forrein auctor, vnder the passeport and safeconduite of your highnes moste noble name, might by speciall authoritie of the same, winne emongest your Maiesties subiectes, moche better credite and estimacion'.¹⁴² It was by no means unusual for authors to refer to the protection and renown that their works would derive from association with a particular patron. Robert Peterson, for example, asked the earl of Leicester to 'vouchsafe' his translation of

¹³⁹ BL, Cotton MS Vesp. MS D. XVIII, fols 1^r – 27^v.

¹⁴⁰ *CSP foreign Ed.*, p. 216.

¹⁴¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The arte of warre*, trans. by Peter Whitehorne (London: [John Kingston for] Nicolas Inghande, [April 1562]), sig. a iii^v, aii^r.

¹⁴² Machiavelli, *Arte of warre*, sig. a iii^v.

Galateo. Peterson expressed confidence that Leicester's approval would 'credit' both the text and its author.¹⁴³ However, Whitehorne's suggestion that endorsement from Elizabeth would secure 'moche better credite' for the *Arte of warre* surely implies that its credit was doubtful. His professed desire to secure a 'safeconduite' for the treatise was probably an uncomfortably accurate description of his intention.

Unambiguous evidence of resistance to the dissemination of Machiavellian literature can be found in a later dedication to Francis Russell, earl of Bedford. John Bridges' translation of Rudolph Gwalther's sermon (from Latin into English) was published in 1572. Bridges explained to Bedford that, before translating the sermons, he had been engaged on another literary enterprise: 'I could shewe you the three bookes of Machiauelles discourses translated by me out of Italian into Englishe, more than fourtene yeares past, which I thought to haue presented vnto your Honour'. However, he continued, he 'was stayed therefrom, partly because I hearde the worke inueighed against at Paules crosse, as a treatise vnworthy to come abroad into mennes handes, and partly for that I hoped still to haue some other matter more plausible and acceptable to gyue vnto the same'.¹⁴⁴ Bridges was a vicar; perhaps he thought that it behooved a clergyman to be especially scrupulous about the type of material with which he associated his name. Whatever his reasoning, the weight of opinion against the *Discourses* was evidently so great that he felt compelled to abandon what must have been a major project.

Bridges asserted that complaints about the work 'myght ... with ease ynough haue

¹⁴³ Della Casa, *Galateo*, sig. Aiii^r.

¹⁴⁴ Gwalther, *Homelyes*, sig. a2^v – a3^r.

beene answered'.¹⁴⁵ There were always individuals prepared to defend Machiavelli. Thomas Bedingfield's translation of the *Florentine historie* was published in 1595. Bedingfield invoked the conventional justification for historical works: 'as the end of all Histories ought to be to mooue men vnto vertue, and discourage them from vice, so do I thinke, there is not any that containeth more examples to this purpose, then this writer.' He argued that Machiavelli's realistic approach to political analysis rendered the Florentine 'examples' particularly valuable, as the reader could be sure that they had been fairly and accurately reported.¹⁴⁶

However, such unapologetic endorsements of Machiavelli were rare by the 1590s. Authors who engaged with his writings (as opposed to condemning them outright) normally felt obliged to attach a kind of moral health warning. An exposition of Aristotle's *Politics*, for example, referred the reader to the *Prince*, but advised that it 'must bee red with great discretion, because it is written by an Author without conscience, and without religion, respecting onely worldly power and glorie, which deceiueth many men'.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, a 1584 manuscript translation of the same work was prefaced by a cautionary verse:

To know to abhor this Politiq! maie read
th'ideal groundz of his impieties;
but not to practise his damnd policies!

¹⁴⁵ Gwalther, *Homelyes*, sig. [A3]^r.

¹⁴⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Florentine historie*, trans. by Thomas Bedingfield (London: T[homas Creede] for W[illiam] P[onsonby], 1595), sig. Aii^{r-v}.

¹⁴⁷ Loys Le Roy, *Aristotles Politiques, or discourses of gouernment. Translated out of Greeke into French, with expositions taken out of the best authors, specially out of Aristotle himselfe, and out of Plato, conferred together where occasion of matter treated of by them both doth offer it selfe: the obseruations and reasons whereof are illustrated and confirmed by innumerable examples ... concerning the beginning, proceeding, and excellencie of ciuile gouernment*, trans. by I. D. (London: Adam Islip, 1598), p. 330.

for that, to Auern, doth down the broad waie lead.¹⁴⁸

When Gabriel Harvey wrote to Richard Remington requesting the loan of ‘your Machiavell’, he explained that ‘I purpose to peruse him only, not to misuse him; and superficially to surveie his forrests of pollicie, not guilefully to conveie awaie his interest in them’.¹⁴⁹ Expressions of interest in, and citation of, the *Prince*, the *Discourses*, the *Florentine history* and the *Art of war* tended increasingly to be hedged with excuses and qualifications. Justifying Machiavelli had become a laborious business.

By contrast, the articulation of anti-Machiavellian sentiment was honed to the point of almost perfect succinctness. Hostility to Machiavelli became so prevalent that the mere mention of his name was sufficient to evoke a set of horrid associations. This, of course, accelerated the deterioration of his reputation. Because the case against him could be made in shorthand, it was disseminated far more widely and rapidly than the (comparatively) elaborate apologies on his behalf. Machiavelli’s name became an instantly recognisable synonym for a clever, unscrupulous villain. Indeed, the fact that the last three syllables of the word ‘Machiavellian’ sound like ‘villain’ almost certainly encouraged this usage. The nineteenth century literary scholar Edward Meyer identified such wordplay in Robert Greene’s *Mamillia*; when Greene described Pharicles as ‘a mutable Machiavilian’, the intended pun was ‘Match a villain’.¹⁵⁰ The *Oxford English Dictionary* records a 1566 reference to ‘a right mache villion’, and

¹⁴⁸ BL, Harl. MS 967, fol. [i]^r.

¹⁴⁹ Gabriel Harvey, *The letter-book of Gabriel Harvey*, ed. by Edward John Long Scott (Westminster: Nichols & Sons for the Camden Society, 1884), p. 174.

¹⁵⁰ Edward Meyer, *Machiavelli and the Elizabethan drama* (Weimar: Emil Felber, 1897), pp. 27-28.

notes that ‘The forms in [Machia]-vil(l)ian may well have been modelled on *villian*, a frequent 16th-18th cent. variant of VILLAIN’.¹⁵¹

Influential and manipulative courtiers could readily be characterised as Machiavels. Thomas Storer, for example, produced a dramatic monologue about *The life and death of Thomas Wolsey*. In Part I (‘Wolseius Aspirans’) the Cardinal contemplates the merits and pitfalls of a court career. ‘Each perfect sense must things repugnant do,’ he muses,

Thy eyes must watch, but neuer seeme to see;
Thy tongue must braue, but learne to flatter too;
Thy eares must heare, yet deafe and carelesse be;
Affection fast and loose, thoughts bond and free:
Vaine, yet precise; chaste, but to maidens kinde;
A Saint in sight, a Machiuel in minde.¹⁵²

This soliloquy suggests that every competent courtier is well versed in Machiavellian practice. When Wolsey eventually resolves to seek his fortune in the entourage of Henry VIII, he conforms to the popular stereotype of the court *politique*.

Michael Drayton’s *Peirs Gaveston earle of Cornwall* also interrogates the relationship between Machiavellian conduct and courtly success. The poem is introduced by the ghost of Gaveston, who provides a synopsis of his own early life. Much of this scene-setting speech is a eulogy to Edward I. The ghost describes the first Edwardian court as ‘a schoole, wher artes were daily red, / And yet a campe where armes were exercised, / Vertue and learning here were nourished’. He also lists the faults that Edward’s courtiers avoided:

¹⁵¹ *OED* [accessed 15 August 2006]

¹⁵² Thomas Storer, *The life and death of Thomas Wolsey Cardinall* (London: [Valentine Sims for] Thomas Dawson, 1599), sig. C1^r.

Then Machiauels were loth'd as filthie toades,
And good men as rare pearls were richly prized,
The learned were accounted little Gods,
The vilest Atheist as the plague despised:
Desert then gaynd, that vertues merit craues,
And artles Pesants scorn'd as basest slaues.¹⁵³

It is difficult to escape the impression that Drayton was implicitly contrasting the virtuous conduct of Edward I's courtiers with the less than satisfactory behaviour of their modern counterparts.¹⁵⁴ He certainly emerged as an acerbic critic of court manners and morals under James I.¹⁵⁵ It seems more than probable that the reference to 'Machiauels' was invested with contemporary relevance. Like many authors before him, Drayton invoked the name of Machiavelli to discredit politicians of whom he disapproved.¹⁵⁶ In the interests of discretion, he disguised his attack as a general critique of bad courtiers (those undesirable types whom '*Victorious Longshankes*' had excluded from his circle). He thus helped to cement the association of the courtly profession with Machiavellian vices.

This association was made explicit in Innocent Gentillet's discourse *contra-Machiavel*. Gentillet presented 'Machiavell the Florentine' as the deplorable idol of Italianate courtiers in France. 'I doubt not', he wrote,

but many Courtiers, which deale in matters of Estate, & others of their humor,

¹⁵³ Michael Drayton, *Peirs Gaueston earle of Cornewall: his life, death, and fortune* (London: J[ames] R[oberts] for N[icholas] L[ing] and John Busby, [1594?]), sig. B2^{r-v}.

¹⁵⁴ Bernard H. Newdigate observed that Drayton's versified history of *The barrons wars in the raigne of Edward the second* (1603) 'moralizes in a sense that seems to relate to Elizabeth and her ministers even more plainly than to Edward II and those who brought him to his fall'. Bernard H. Newdigate, *Michael Drayton and his circle* (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press for Basil Blackwell, 1941), p. 129.

¹⁵⁵ Jean R. Brink, *Michael Drayton revisited* (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1990), pp. 199-21.

¹⁵⁶ Drayton had little time for the Cecils; immediately after the Jacobean accession, he published a fable in which Robert Cecil featured as a vulture. See Brink, *Drayton revisited*, pp. 70-1.

will find it very strange, that I should speake in this sort of their great Doctor Machiavell; whose bookes rightly may be called, The French Courtiers Alcoran, they have them in so great estimation; imitating and observing his principles and Maximes, no more nor lesse than the Turkes doe the Alcoran of their great Prophet Mahomet.¹⁵⁷

He traced the ascendancy of the ‘man, whom I will plainly shew to be full of all wickednesse, impietie, and ignorance’ to the death of Henri II: ‘For during his raigne, and before the kingdome was governed after the meere French manner’. Thereafter, the French court had fallen into the thrall of another Florentine – the Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici. Since that time, declared Gentillet,

the name of Machiavell hath bene celebrated and esteemed, as of the wisest person of the world ... and his books held dearest and most precious, by our Italian and Italionized courtiers, as if they were the bookes of Sibilla, whereunto the Paynims had their recourse when they would deliberate upon any great affaire concerning the common wealth, or as the Turkes should deare their precious Mahumets Alcoran.¹⁵⁸

Gentillet’s repeated references to ‘Paynim’ beliefs and practices are telling; as a Protestant, he sought to characterise influential Catholic courtiers in the royal entourage as agents of ‘Atheisme and Impietie’. He noted sardonically ‘Machiavels books were as familiar and ordinarie in the hands of the Courtiers, as the Brevaries are in the hands of Curates of parishes’.¹⁵⁹

By the mid sixteenth century, religious dissidents in England had begun to couch their criticism of ‘evil counsellors’ in explicitly Machiavellian terms. The Jewel controversy, which developed during the opening years of Elizabeth’s reign, is instructive. On 26

¹⁵⁷ Innocent Gentillet, *A discourse vpon the meanes of wel governing and maintaining in good peace, a kingdome, or other principalitie*, trans. by Simon Patericke (London: Adam Islip, 1602), sig. Aii^v.

¹⁵⁸ Gentillet, *Discourse*, sig. Aij^v; Aiiij^v.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. Aiiij^{r-v}.

November 1559, Bishop Jewel preached a deliberately provocative sermon at Paul's Cross.¹⁶⁰ Jewel interrogated the historical antecedents of various Roman institutions and doctrines, and defied anyone to prove their legitimacy. A number of polemicists responded, and the ensuing pamphlet warfare rumbled on for a decade.¹⁶¹ Jewel's opponents accused the bishop and his co-religionists of disingenuous verbal sophistry. In his *Reioindre to M. Iewels replie against the sacrifice of the masse* (1567), Thomas Harding observed sardonically that 'If Logique can not handsomly be applied, to mainteine M. Iewels glorious Challenge, yet Rhetorique wil do good seruice'.¹⁶² In 1564, John Martiall referred to the 'malitious ... caulation' of Protestant participants in the controversy.¹⁶³ He insisted that members of the new (Protestant) establishment were maligning Catholicism deliberately and duplicitously for purely private purposes:

Be not lordes heastes, na scribes fantasies, parasites pleasures, Macheuelianes policies holden and folloed for lawes? Are not many matter huddled vp in corners? examined in chambers? and determined without ordinary processe of the lawe? haue not some bene borne with al because they were protestantes? some ouerborne because they were papists?¹⁶⁴

According to this damning indictment of Elizabethan politics, the corridors of power were infested with scheming *politiques*.

During the Jewel controversy, the Catholic dissidents' invective was largely directed against prominent churchmen. Nonetheless, polemicists like Martiall conveyed the impression that Machiavellianism was entrenched at the heart of Elizabeth's regime – in

¹⁶⁰ The sermon was preached again at court on 17 March 1560.

¹⁶¹ A. C. Southern, *Elizabethan recusant prose: 1559-1582* (London: Sands & Co., 1950), pp. 61-6.

¹⁶² Thomas Harding, *A reioindre to M. Iewels replie against the sacrifice of the Masse* (Louanii: Ioannem Foulerum, 1567), fol. 233^v.

¹⁶³ John Martiall, *A treatyse of the Crosse gathred out of the Scriptures, councelles, and auncient fathers of the primatiue Church* (Antwerp: John Latius, 1564), fol. 52^f.

¹⁶⁴ Martiall, *Treatyse of the Crosse*, fols 137^v - 138^r.

the courtier's natural habitat. Laymen at court were also charged with Machiavellian conduct. This complaint was reiterated throughout the notorious *Treatise of treasons*. The *Treatise* was published anonymously in 1572, and is sometimes attributed to the Scottish bishop John Leslie. It was written at a time of particular frustration for many Catholic exiles (including Leslie). The Northern Rebellion failed in 1569. In 1570 Pope Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth, identifying her as a legitimate target for deposition. In 1572, the conservative duke of Norfolk was tried and convicted of treason for plotting to marry the Catholic heir to the English throne, Mary Stuart. The author of the *Treatise* was deeply concerned that these events would prompt Elizabeth's ministers to divert the succession away from Mary. He consequently launched a scathing attack upon Cecil and Bacon, whom he blamed for a variety of anti-Catholic plots and initiatives. He denounced 'the secret and final purpose of these two English Machiauelles, who for their owne aduancement, intende to wreste the succession of the Crowne to a wrong family'. He declared that Elizabeth 'hath bene already deceiued ... for seruing the priuate turnes of those two Machiauellians'. He invited the reader to 'be thy selfe Iudge, whether it shalbe wisdomer or policie for your Queene, to trust these Machiauellians'.¹⁶⁵ This was typical 'evil counsellor' rhetoric, made all the more effective by the invocation of Machiavelli.

Such representations of the Elizabethan regime and those associated with its religious settlement remained commonplace throughout the tense decades following the papal deposition. In 1580, Louvanist Thomas Hide condemned the government for

¹⁶⁵ Anon, *A Treatise of treasons against Q. Elizabeth* ([Louvain]: [John Fowler, 1572]), sig. 43^f, 85^f, 103^v.

‘machiauellian policie’.¹⁶⁶ Two years later, Thomas Alfield protested that England’s Catholics were loyal to their Prince: ‘howsoever they who maligne our fayth and Priesthood, haue by these Machiauelian practises drawn al our doings, ententes, and endeauours to disloyalty and treason’.¹⁶⁷ In 1584, responding to Cecil’s defence of the ‘Justice’ meted out to proselytising Catholics in England, Cardinal William Allen alluded darkly to ‘the politiques of our country, pretending to be Protestants’. He described how they had killed as many Catholic martyrs ‘as they thought necessary for their practice’.¹⁶⁸ Both ‘politique’ and ‘practice’ were words specifically associated with Machiavelli.

The tradition of highly personalised attacks upon prominent politicians (as exemplified by the *Treatise of treasons*) arguably reached its apogee in 1584, when *Leicester’s commonwealth* was published. This work was a collaborative project, traditionally associated with Jesuit priest Robert Parsons. Recently, D. C. Peck has attributed it to a group of ‘Catholic laymen, ex-courtiers who, like Charles Arundell (1540-1587) and Lord Paget (d. 1590), had been members of or attached to the conservative Howard clan and who after two decades of setbacks and renewed hopes had finally been driven from Court by Leicester, Walsingham, and their adherents’. Peck identifies Charles Arundell as ‘the man who must be considered central to this group and to the production’.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Hide, *A consolatorie epistle to the afflicted Catholickes* (Louvaine: John Lion, 1580), fol. 28^v.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Alfield, *A true reporte of the death & martyrdome of M. Campion Iesuite and prieste, & M. Sherwin, & M. Bryan priestes, at Tiborne the first of December 1581* ([London: R. Rowlands or Verstagen, 1582]), sig. B3^r.

¹⁶⁸ William Allen, ‘A true, sincere, and modest defense of English Catholics that suffer for their faith both at home and abroad; against a false, seditious, and slanderous libel entitled: the execution of justice in England’, in *The execution of justice in England by William Cecil and A true, sincere and modest defense of English Catholics by William Allen*, ed. by Robert M. Kingdom (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1965), pp. 51-268 (pp. 79; 89).

¹⁶⁹ D. C. Peck, ‘Introduction’, in *Leicester’s commonwealth: the copy of a letter written by a Master of Art of Cambridge (1584) and related documents*, ed. by Peck (Athens, Ohio; London: Ohio University

Leicester's commonwealth was written in the period immediately following the failure of the Anjou courtship – a failure that effectively ruled out the possibility of a Catholic consort for Elizabeth. The authors blamed Leicester for the fruitlessness of the marriage negotiations. They blamed him for much else besides. Their tract was a comprehensive (catholic) indictment of its eponymous anti-hero. It asserted that ‘in outrageous ambition and desire of regime’, Leicester was ‘not inferiour to his Father’. However, the son had proved ‘far more insolent, cruell, vindicative, expert, potent, subtile, sure, and fox like then ever [Northumberland] was’.¹⁷⁰ The list of adjectives immediately conjures up the spectre of Machiavelli. The concept of a ‘fox-like’ politician had been popularised by *Il Principe*, which encouraged rulers to resemble *la volpe* as well as *il Leone*.¹⁷¹

The crimes attributed to Leicester were deemed typical, not only of Machiavels, but of Italians in general. The earl was characterised as the Catherine de Medici of the English court. He had, allegedly, ‘procured the poisoning’ of his wife’s first husband (Walter Devereux, earl of Essex) ‘with his Italian physician’. Essex ‘dyed in the way of an extreame flux, caused by an Italian Recipe, as all his friends are well assured; the maker whereof was a Chyrurgeon (as is beleevd) that then was newly come to my Lord from Italy; a cunning man, and sure in operation’. Having been informed that the husband of Leicester’s mistress Lady Sheffield was also murdered, the potentially sceptical reader was advised not to ‘marvaile though all these died in divers manners of outward diseases, for this is the excellency of the Italian art, for which ... [Leicester’s

Press, 1985), pp. 1-62 (pp. 3-4).

¹⁷⁰ Anon, *Leicester's Common-Wealth conceived, spoken and published with most earnest protestations of dutifull goodwill and affection towards this realme* (London: [s. n.], 1641), p. 13.

¹⁷¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il prencipe di Nicolo Machiauelli al Magnifio Lorenzo di Piero de Medici* (Palermo [London]: Antoniello degli Antonielli [John Wolfe], 1584), fol. 31^r.

physicians] were entertained so carefully, who can make a man dye, in what manner or shew of sicknesse you will: by whose instructions, no doubt but his lordship is now cunning'.¹⁷² The use of untraceable poisons against rival lovers was regarded as a distinctively Italianate habit. Nash warned travellers to Italy that 'If thou dost but lend halfe a looke to a Romanes or Italians wife, thy porredge shall be prepared for thee and cost thee nothing but thy life'.¹⁷³ On 25 October 1615, after the scandal of the Overbury murder, Sir John Throckmorton wrote to Viscount de L'Isle from Flushing, complaining that English courtiers were being 'brandmarke[d] ... with that hideous and foule titell of poysoning one another', as if they were 'Italians, Spanniards or of what other vilde, murtherous nation'.¹⁷⁴ When the authors of *Leicester's Commonwealth* wanted to convey the impression that their subject was lecherous, devious and murderous, the most effective way for them to do so was clearly to exploit anti-Machiavellian and xenophobic prejudices.

Allegations of Machiavellian practice did not only emanate from disgruntled Catholics. Disaffected Protestants were just as willing to attribute their lack of political clout to the manipulative wiles of devious counsellors.¹⁷⁵ In 1579, during the Anjou marriage negotiations, John Stubbes published his famous manifesto against the match.¹⁷⁶ The *Gaping gulf* argued that England would never be safe with a Catholic consort. He described those who supported the alliance as 'Politiques', and prayed that God would 'stop your maiesties eares against these sorcerers & their enchanting

¹⁷² Anon, *Leicester's Common-Wealth*, pp. 21-24.

¹⁷³ Nash, *Vnfortunate traoueller*, sig. L3^r.

¹⁷⁴ HMC *De L'Isle and Dudley*, v, 331.

¹⁷⁵ Raab, *English face*, pp. 60-1.

¹⁷⁶ See *John Stubbs's Gaping gulf: with letters and other relevant documents*, ed. by Lloyd E. Berry (Charlottesville: University of Virginia for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1968), ix-lvi.

counsails'. He accused them of disingenuous 'subtilty', and bamboozling 'Macciauelian logick'. He insisted that he could use such logic to frame a plausible argument against the marriage, 'But I loath once to take vp [Machiavelli's] best textes thoughe they were written in golden letters of the fayrest text hand'.¹⁷⁷

Other 'hot' Protestants decried the prevalence of Machiavellian thought and conduct at the top of the Elizabethan power structure. Presbyterian sympathiser John Udall condemned the government's reluctance to promote 'the honor of God in the building of his church, by the ministry of his woorde'. Udall attributed this unfortunate foot-dragging to the fact that

the most blasphemous conclusions, and pestiferous platformes of that Italian helhound Machiauell, are so reputed and esteemed, that he onely is reckoned a right politist, that frameth his course after his rules, and who so iumpe not with him, is esteemed no man of state, (as they be termed) nor worthy to rule in the lowest place of anie gouernment ...¹⁷⁸

Offensive aspects of government policy were thus identified as the products of endemic Machiavellianism at the heart of the regime.

Machiavelli's name was an effective weapon for devotional polemicists of all persuasions, because it carried the stigma of irreligion. It was routinely associated with secularism and atheism. In 1553, Roger Ascham denounced a new breed of 'discourers' who 'commonly cary with them where they be bold to speake: to like Tullies Offices, then St. Paules Epistles, and a tale in Bocace, then a story of the Bible', and were 'therefore for any religion earnest setters forth of present tyme with

¹⁷⁷ John Stubbes, *The discouerie of a gaping gulf whereinto England is like to be swallowed by another French mariage* ([London: H. Singleton for W. Page], 1579), sig. A3^r; A6^v; C8^r; C3^r.

¹⁷⁸ John Udall, *The true remedie against famine and warres fiue sermons vpon the first chapter of the prophesie of Ioel* (London: Robert Waldegrave for T. Man and T. Gubbins, 1588), sig. 65^{r-v}.

consciences confirmed in Machiauelles doctrine to thincke say and do whatsoeuer may serue best for profite or pleasure'.¹⁷⁹ Three decades later, William Burton preached that 'The Machiauel with the Atheist wil not know that there is either God or deuil'.¹⁸⁰ William Rankins, in a satire *Contra Saturnistam*, poured scorn upon the 'reaching Polliticians'

That take a pride in damned Machiaule,
And study his disciples to be thought:
Allowing all deedes be they neu'r so vile.
Such as haue hell-borne Atheisme taught ...¹⁸¹

Complaints about 'cursed Machiuillian Atheists' were commonplace throughout the second half of the Elizabethan era.¹⁸²

To describe one's doctrinal opponents as Machiavellian was thus to imply that they were either affiliated to Antichrist (disciples of Udal's 'helhound'), or at the very least that they were utterly indifferent to God and religion. The latter aspersion was made explicit in the *Treatise of treasons*, which castigated the Protestant commonwealth as 'a Machiauellian State & Regiment: where Religion is put behind in the second and last place: wher the ciuil Policie, I meane, is preferred before it, & not limited by any rules of Religion, but *the Religion* framed to serue *the time and policy*'.¹⁸³ Of course, it was easy for the author of the *Treatise* to dismiss out of hand the spiritual credentials of a

¹⁷⁹ Roger Ascham, *A report and discourse written by Roger Ascham, of the affaires and state of Germany and the Emperour Charles his court* (London: John Daye, 1570), fol. 26^v.

¹⁸⁰ William Burton, *A sermon preached in the Cathedral Church in Norwich, the xxi day of December, 1589* (London: Robert Waldegrave, 1590), sig. F4^f.

¹⁸¹ William Rankins, *Seauen satyres applyed to the weeke including the worlds ridiculous follies* (London: Edw. Allde for William Ferbrand, 1598), pp. 16-17.

¹⁸² Edward Topsell, *Times lamentation: or an exposition on the Prophet Ioel, in sundry sermons or meditations* (London: Edmund Bollifant for George Potter, 1599), p. 443.

¹⁸³ Anon, *Treatise of treasons*, sig. a5^f.

‘Regiment’ that he believed to be utterly heretical. John Stubbes was clearly exercised by the fact that many of the ‘Politiques’ who advocated the Anjou match were Protestant co-religionists. His solution was to argue that these misguided men obviously believed that religious considerations could be subordinated to worldly ones - in other words, that they were Machiavels. ‘Oh strange Christianity of some men in our age,’ he lamented,

who in their state consultations haue not so much respecte to Pietie as those first [heathen] men had to honesty ... Yea, who neglecting the holy and sure wisdom of God in his word, wherein are the onely honorable enstruptions for polytyques, and honestest rules of gouerning our houses and owne person, do beate their braines in other bookes of wicked vile Atheistes and sette before them the example of Turkish and Italian practises ...

He described such men as ‘thys kynde of protestant’ – ‘discourers that vse the word of God with as little conscience as they doe Machiauel, pycking out of both indifferently what may serue theyr turnes’. ‘[T]his is more then wonderful’, he wrote, ‘that such as pretend outward profession of religion should make so irreligious accompt of Religion ... Take not the word of God in your mouthes, you that breath such lukewarm counsayl’. Florentine pragmatism was clearly a convenient explanation for the apparent apostasy of highly placed Protestants (‘Oh the wickednes of our professors and the hypocrisie of our protestantes’).¹⁸⁴

During the first half of Elizabeth’s reign, then, religious dissidents assiduously fostered the notion that the queen was surrounded by manipulative, self-serving, ungodly *politiques*. Their strategy of blaming *familiares regis* for the government’s sins of omission and commission was hardly novel. Yet it helped to cement the

¹⁸⁴ Stubbes, *Gaping gulf*, sig. A2^r; A3^v; A6^v; A8^{r-v}.

association of Machiavellian practice with courts and their inhabitants. As Machiavellianism became an umbrella term for almost every kind of iniquity, the image of the courtier deteriorated sharply. Its deterioration was accompanied by a revival of interest in traditional literary formulae for criticizing courtiers.

CHAPTER FIVE

CRITICISM OF COURTIER IN DRAMA, ALLEGORY AND VERSE

During the second half of Elizabeth's reign, criticism of courtiers tended increasingly to address the concerns associated with Castiglionean and Machiavellian political culture. Yet earlier anti-courtier texts and tropes retained their potency. Traditional discourses were adjusted to accommodate the ideals and realities of Renaissance 'Courtiership'.¹ The bad courtiers who populated medieval histories and satires were treated to an Italian makeover. Medieval stereotypes were adapted for a generation conversant with the *Courtier*, and familiar with Gentillet's reading of the *Prince*. In particular, it was (re)affirmed that courts were dominated by minions, flatterers and favourites; that courtiers exploited the commonwealth with ruthless rapacity; that they loved outlandish manners and fashions; that they were effeminate civilians, whose selfish spinelessness could be contrasted with the masculine vigour of martial men; and that court attendance was a hellish ordeal, to which rural seclusion was preferable. The cross-fertilization of old assumptions and new political paradigms manifested itself across a wide range of literary genres. We will consider its influence within selected genres: firstly, the history play; secondly, the beast fable; and thirdly, verse satire.

¹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Mm iiiiv.

The history play

The late sixteenth century is often regarded as a golden age for English drama. London's first permanent theatre (the Theatre) was established in 1576. The Curtain followed in 1577, the Rose in 1587, the Swan in 1595 and Shakespeare's Globe in 1599.² These institutions soon acquired a regular clientèle. Londoners who patronised the theatres week after week expected to be entertained with a variety of sharp, didactic, topical dramas. The court - geographically proximate and politically preeminent - was an obvious area of interest to playwrights and their audiences. As scholars such as Peter Lake and Michael Questier have demonstrated, the theatre informed interpretations of, and responses to, court politics.³

When considering the representation of courtiers in Elizabethan drama, historians and literary scholars have tended to focus on the history play. This form of entertainment was especially popular during the 1580s and 1590s.⁴ It has often been characterised as a convenient vehicle for critical analysis of contemporary politics.⁵ An historical setting ostensibly disclaimed any suggestion that a drama might have topical relevance. It thus provided a token veil of respectability for the exploration of sensitive issues. Dramatists were especially interested in problematic periods of English history. These included the reigns of Edward II, Richard II, Richard III and even (latterly) Henry VIII.

² *The Oxford companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 468-69.

³ Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's lewd hat: protestants, papists & players in post-Reformation England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 693-96.

⁴ Martin Wiggins, *Shakespeare and the drama of his time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 22.

⁵ See, for example, Blair Worden, 'Shakespeare and politics', in *Shakespeare Survey*, no. 44 (1992), 1-15 (9-11).

The crises that punctuated these reigns were generally attributed to the alienation of the king from the wider political community. It was both conventional and expedient to blame such unnatural divorces upon the malevolent influence of the monarch's immediate associates.

This attitude was consistent with the analysis offered by most of the chroniclers and biographers whom the dramatists consulted. Marlowe's *Edward II*, Shakespeare's first and second tetralogies, and the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock* drew heavily upon Holinshed's *Chronicle*.⁶ Assessing the unhappy reigns of Edward II and Richard II, Holinshed endorsed the verdicts of contemporary malcontents, who blamed the kingdom's woes upon the presence of evil counsellors and riotous youths at court. He identified Piers Gaveston as the friend

through whose companie and societie [Edward II] was so suddenlie corrupted, that he burst out into most heinous vices; for then using the said Peers as a procurer of his disordred dooings, he began to haue his nobles in no regard, to set nothing by their instructions, and to take small heede vnto the gouernment of the commonwealth, so that within a while, he gaue himselfe to wantonnes, passing his time in voluptuous pleasure, and riotous excesse.⁷

Edward's predilection for 'the companie and counsell of euill men' was, according to Holinshed, the ultimate cause of his downfall and death.⁸ The chronicler similarly cast

⁶ See 'Introduction' in Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, ed. by H. B. Charlton and R. D. Waller, revised by F. N. Lees (London: Methuen, 1933; 2nd edn 1955), pp. 1-64 (p. 31); *Oxford companion to Shakespeare*; and 'Introduction', in Anon, *Thomas of Woodstock or Richard the second, part one*, ed. by Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 1-46 (p. 8). All subsequent references to *Woodstock* are to this edition.

⁷ Raphael Holinshed, *The third volume of chronicles, beginning at duke William the Norman, commonlie called the Conqueror; and descending by degrees of yeeres to all the kings and queenes of England in their orderlie successions* (London: Henry Denham, 1586), p. 318.

⁸ Holinshed, *Third volume of the chronicles*, p. 342.

Richard II as a young king led astray by ‘euill counsellors that were about him’.⁹ He wrote that Richard shook off his uncles’ tutelage at ‘the instigation and setting on of such as were about him, whose drift was by discountenancing others to procure preferment to themselves, abusing the kings tender years and greene wit, with ill counsell for their aduantage’.¹⁰ He recorded that the duke of York forsook the court in 1398, because ‘he considered that the glorie of the publike wealth of his countrie must needs decaie, by reason of the king his lacke of wit, and want of such as would (without flatterie) admonish him of his dutie’.¹¹ Holinshed thus validated the complaints of medieval chroniclers, barons and rebels, to the effect that the courtiers of Edward II and Richard II were self-serving flatterers.¹²

Holinshed also emphasized the wanton profligacy of these courtiers. He noted that Gaveston ‘furnished [Edward II’s] court with companies of iesters, ruffians, flattering parasites, musicians, and other vile and naughtie ribalds, that the king might spend both daies and nights in iesting, plaieng, banketing’.¹³ Richard II ‘kept the greatest port, and mainteined the most plentiful house that euer any king in England did’. In ‘gorgious and costlie apparell’, Richard’s household servants and companions ‘exceeded all measure, not one of them that kept within the bounds of his degree. Yeomen and

⁹ Holinshed, *Third volume of the chronicles*, p. 453. We should note that Holinshed considered both Edward and Richard culpable for allowing themselves to be misled.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

¹² In chapter four, we observed that Froissart claimed that Edward II ruined his kingdom by listening to ‘euyll counsell’, and that Richard II provoked the citizens of his capital to mutter that ‘Rycharde of Burdeaulx / hath belued so moche yell counsayle / that it can nat be hydden nor suffred any lengar’. Froissart, *Chronicle*, fols vi^r; CCCvi^v. Holinshed certainly referred to Froissart’s chronicle; he listed it as one of his sources, and drew the reader’s attention to it in numerous marginal citations. See Holinshed, *First and second volume of chronicles*, sig. Aiiij^r. Shakespeare and Marlowe may also have consulted the Berners translation of Froissart directly; see Muir, *Sources of Shakespeare’s plays*, p. 46.

¹³ Holinshed, *Third volume of the chronicles*, p. 318.

groomes were clothed in silkes, with cloth of graine and skarlet, ouer sumptuous ye may be sure for their estates'.¹⁴ Holinshed was keenly aware of the pernicious social impact of such ostentatious opulence. He observed that men and women of all estates aspired to emulate the glittering fashions adopted by Richard's courtiers, 'to the great hindrance and decaie of the commonwealth'.¹⁵ He also highlighted the conviction of many contemporaries that the extravagant grants made to royal favourites impoverished the king and his people: 'The common brute ran, that the king had set to farm the realme of England, vnto sir William Scroope ... sir John Bushie, sir John Bagot, and sir Henrie Greene'.¹⁶

In accordance with the anti-curial bias of their sources, history plays tended to peddle very negative stereotypes of the courtier. The favourite, the minion, the upstart, the flatterer and the evil counsellor were stock characters. These epithets had always been popular with chroniclers and commentators; during the last two decades of the sixteenth century, they assumed the status of political buzzwords. Their resonance is illustrated by marginal notes in Thomas North's personal copy of *The dial of princes* (his translation of the *Reloj de principes*, by Antonio de Guevara).¹⁷ The *Dial* was originally published in 1557, and was reissued in 1568 and 1582. North revised the 1582 edition by hand in 1591.¹⁸ He made discernible efforts to update the phraseology of his text, thereby ensuring that it echoed contemporary political discourse. On folio 356^r, for example, he substituted the term 'common weal' for the original 'wealth

¹⁴ Holinshed, *Third volume of the chronicles*, p. 508.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

¹⁷ Cambridge University Library, Rare Books, Adv.d.14.4.

¹⁸ I was made aware of these revisions by Ruth Marion Little's thesis, 'Perpetual metaphors: the configuration of the courtier as favourite in Jacobean and Caroline literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993), p. 39.

publike'. The former expression had far greater currency than the latter. In the table of contents for Book IV, he changed a reference to 'the deerlings of the court' to 'the minions of the court'. He also altered 'the faouered of the court' to 'the fauorites'.¹⁹ In Book IV itself, a piece of advice for 'those that are princes familiars' was marked down in the margin as 'A note for fauorites'.²⁰ The statement that Constantine's courtier Hortensius 'might well be counted a princes derling' elicited the comment: 'Hortensius a chiefe favorit of the Emperour Constantius that governed all vnder him'.²¹

The 'favourite' and the 'minion' were clearly familiar figures on the late Elizabethan political scene. The flatterer, or sycophant, was equally notorious. As we noted in chapter four, commentators had fretted over the malevolent influence of courtiers who studied 'the Arte of Adulation' since the classical era.²² The prevalence of flatterers was viewed as a reliable indicator of political malaise. Aristotle observed that 'tyrans take a pleasure to be flattered, which neuer would any man of free and noble heart doe'.²³ Diagnosing tyranny was a popular pastime for scholars and frustrated politicians during the so-called 'second reign' of Elizabeth I. Self-styled physicians of the commonwealth looked for (and usually found) evidence of endemic flattery at court.²⁴

¹⁹ CUL, Rare Books, Adv.d.14.4, fol. Dvi^f.

²⁰ Ibid., fol. 418^v.

²¹ Ibid., fol. 424^f. The *OED* defines the word 'favourite' in its political context as 'One who stands unduly high in the favour of a prince, etc.; one chosen as an intimate by a superior'. The earliest use of the term to be cited by the dictionary's compilers dates from 1599. North's annotations clearly suggest that the epithet acquired currency at the start of the 1590s. Derogatory allusions to 'minions', by contrast, can be found from the turn of the sixteenth century onwards. The term 'minion' tended to be loaded with more (homo)sexual innuendo than its alternative, 'favourite'. *OED* [accessed 4 March 2008]

²² 'Courtier and cuntry-gentleman', p. 86.

²³ Le Roy, *Aristotles politiques*, p. 326.

²⁴ See, for example, the second earl of Essex, whom Francis Bacon described as a self-appointed 'Phisition that desired to cure the diseases of the State'. Francis Bacon, *Sir Francis Bacon his apologie, in certaine imputations concerning the late earle of Essex* (London: [Richard Field] for Felix Norton, 1604), p. 21. Essex's contribution to anti-courtier discourse is discussed more fully in

Their writings frequently invoked the stock-type of the self-serving sycophant.²⁵

The ‘upstart’ was another traditional, and instantly recognisable, anti-hero of the court. His profile was raised by the abuse that was heaped upon Walter Raleigh during the late 1580s. Many observers derided Raleigh for his humble origins. In 1587, the earl of Essex denounced his rival as a ‘Knaue’, whom he disdained.²⁶ The Cecils were also accused of being *parvenus*. In the aftermath of Essex’s execution, an anonymous supporter of the earl poured scorn upon Cecil’s pretensions:

littel Cecill tripps up and downe
he rules boet court & croune
with his brother Burlie clowne
in his great fox-furred gowne ...²⁷

Thomas Bastard’s epigram *Ad aulicos* lamented the greed and ambition of ‘vpstart courtiers’: ‘The true gentilitie by their owne Armes, / Aduance themselues, the false by others harmes’.²⁸ The verse encapsulates Claudian’s assumption that an upstart courtier will naturally tend to behave in a self-serving manner, advancing his own agenda to the detriment of others. A nameless parvenu at court will ‘wante of prouocation [to virtue]

chapter six.

²⁵ Interest in the subject of courtiers’ flattery was particularly pronounced among supporters of the earl of Essex. Essex’s friend and client Henry Savile translated and substantiated Tacitus’s *Histories* and *Life of Agricola*, in which the relationship between flattery and tyranny is closely interrogated (see chapter six). The Essexian acolyte Sir William Cornwallis identified and described six types of flatterer (‘to make this monster more portable, it is best to cut him into seuerall peece’). Sir William Cornwallis, ‘Of flattery, dissimulation, and lying’, in his *Essayes* (London: [Simon Stafford and R. Read] for Edmund Mattes, 1600-1601), sig. Nn3^r – Nn8^r (sig. Nn5^r).

²⁶ ‘Essex to Mr. Dior, 28 July 1587’, Bod. Tanner MS 76, fol. 29^{r-v}, continued in Bod. Tanner MS 77, fol. 178^r. Essex’s disparaging comments about Raleigh can be found in Tanner MS 76, at fol. 29^{r-v}. See also Walter Bourchier Devereux, *Lives and letters of the Devereux, earls of Essex: in the reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I, 1540-1646*, 2 vols (London: J. Murray, 1853), I, 187-8.

²⁷ Reproduced in Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, *The life of Henry, third earl of Southampton, Shakespeare’s patron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 235-37 (p. 236).

²⁸ Thomas Bastard, *Chrestoleros: seuen bookes of epigrames* (London: Richard Bradocke for J[ohn] B[roome], 1598), p. 37.

and of feare of slauder'.²⁹ He is consequently likely to be cruel and acquisitive. Moreover, without independent status and family connections, he will be dependent upon the favour of the prince. The temptation to flatter and fawn will be strong. Such logic ensured that the epithets 'favourite', 'flatterer', 'minion' and 'upstart' were often used interchangeably in play scripts.

In *Thomas of Woodstock* (c. 1591-5), for example, the uncles of Richard II describe their wayward nephew's companions as 'flattering minions' (I. 1. 48; v. 3. 28); 'flattering sycophants' (I. 1.145; I. 3. 211); 'pernicious flatterers' (v. 3. 116); and 'upstarts' (I. 3. 118; II. 2. 46). Shakespeare's *Richard II* (c. 1595) is also filled with complaints about the 'flatterers' who surround the king (II. 1. 242). The barons use similar vocabulary to excoriate Piers Gaveston in Marlowe's *Edward II*: 'Base flatterer' (II. 5. 11); 'base minion' (I. 1. 130); 'base peasant' (I. 4.14); 'favourite' (II. 5. 27).³⁰ All three plays endorse the conventional stereotype of the lowly but ambitious courtier as a agent of injustice, oppression and, ultimately, anarchy.

The damage done by 'caterpillars of the commonwealth' was usually contrasted with the solid achievements of the true nobility. In Act II, Scene 2 of *Woodstock*, King Richard taunts his uncles, and forces them to relinquish the symbols of their office. Woodstock responds by invoking his record of service:

My staff, King Richard? See, coz, here it is;
Full ten years' space within a prince's hand,
A soldier and a faithful councillor,
This staff hath always been discreetly kept ... (II. 2. 155)

²⁹ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Cii^v.

³⁰ Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, in *Doctor Faustus and other plays*, ed. by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), II. 5. 11. All subsequent references to this edition.

The fact that Woodstock (unlike Bagot, Bushy, Scroop and Greene) has fought for his country is clearly significant. In *Richard II*, the old duke of York's selfless willingness to take up arms on behalf of the commonwealth is emphasized when he returns, exhausted, from Ireland, 'with signs of war about his aged neck' (II. 2. 72). The barons in *Edward II* remind us of their military function, even whilst they are threatening to renege on their obligations:

This sword of mine that should offend your foes
Shall sleep within the scabbard at thy need,
And underneath thy banners march who will,
For Mortimer will hang his armour up. (I. 1. 85)

Piers Gaveston, we should note, has no aptitude for warfare or sympathy for soldiers. Approached by an impoverished veteran of Bannockburn, he is contemptuously dismissive: 'Why, there are hospitals for such as you. / I have no war, and therefore, sir, begone' (I. 1. 34). The indolent selfishness of the favourite is contrasted with the vigorous militancy of his aristocratic opponents.³¹

When ordered to surrender his staff of office, Woodstock describes himself as both a soldier and a councillor. His readiness to offer honest, if unpalatable, advice is evident in Act I, Scene 3, when he chooses the occasion of Richard's wedding feast to expound upon the young king's faults before the assembled company (I. 3. 14-32). Richard reacts with sullen sarcasm ('I thank ye for your double praise, good uncle'), but Woodstock is unmoved: 'Ay, ay, good coz, I'm Plain Thomas, by th'rood, / I'll speak

³¹ Like moralistic chroniclers such as Orderic Vitalis, Marlowe and Shakespeare thus establish a dichotomy between the unproductive courtly fop and the active warrior.

the truth' (i. 3. 33-5). In Act V, Scene 1, just before he is murdered, 'Plain Thomas' admonishes Richard to 'Call home his wise and reverend counsellors', and 'Thrust from his court those cursèd flatterers' (v. 1. 188). On his deathbed in *Richard II*, John of Gaunt resolves to 'breathe my last / In wholesome counsel' (II. 1. 1): 'Though Richard my life's counsel would not hear, / My death's sad tale may yet undeaf his ear' (II. 1. 15). York, however, doubts that Richard will listen; '[his ear] is stopped with other, flatt'ring sounds' (II, 1, 17). The minions are presented as evil councillors, who usurp the proper function of able, experienced noblemen.

Complaints about self-serving civilians at court were frequently voiced during the 1590s. They were especially associated with the earl of Essex and his followers. Paul Hammer has observed that Essex 'built his career on war', and 'had a distinctly elevated view of the importance of soldiers for the military and moral well-being of England'.³² In his 'apologie ... against those *which* falsely, and malitiously tax him to be *the* only hinderer of *the* peace, and quiet of his cuntry', Essex wrote of martial men: 'I doe entirely loue them ... for selfe loueing men, loue ease, pleasure & profite; but those *that* loue paines, daunger, & fame show *they* loue *the* publique [profit] more then themselues'.³³ He was infuriated by his conviction that 'selfe loueing men' at court were discrediting his military strategies, and disparaging his friends. Subsequently, in a printed edition of the 'apologie', Essex's sister accused his detractors of having 'their owne particular mallice and counsels'.³⁴ 'Particular', in this case, can be read as

³² Paul E. J. Hammer, *The polarisation of Elizabethan politics: the political career of Robert Devereux, 2nd earl of Essex, 1585-1597* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 404; 225.

³³ Bod. MS e Mus. 55, fols 75^v – 76^f. This is by no means the only surviving manuscript copy of the 'apologie'; the manifesto was first circulated in 1598, and transcriptions have been preserved in many libraries and archives.

³⁴ Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, *An apologie of the earl of Essex* ([London?: For J. Smethwick?],

‘private’; those who undermine Essex from the safety of the court and the council table represent the antithesis of the public-spirited earl and his selfless followers.

The timorous, ignoble mediocrities who infest Richard II’s court in *Woodstock* are laughably effete. They conform perfectly to the medieval clerical caricature of the court dandy. In Act II Scene 3, Cheney reports to Queen Anne that her husband and his minions are holding a council meeting ‘to devise strange fashions’ for themselves:

French hose, Italian cloaks and Spanish hats,
Polonian shoes with peaks a handful long,
Tied to their knees with chains of pearl and gold.
Their plumèd tops fly waving in the air
A cubit high above their wanton heads. (I. 3. 88)

The dramatist obviously attached special significance to the ‘Polonian shoes’, as Nimble (a servant) later skips onstage ‘in peaked shoes with knee-chains’ – ‘to show myself a courtier’ (III. 1. 120). The emphasis on fantastic footwear recalls the fulminations of William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis, and the scathing satire of ‘Syng I wolde, but alas’. The eclectic outlandishness of the minions’ attire is also noteworthy. Cheney’s inventory of ‘French hose, Italian cloaks and Spanish hats’ recalls other contemporary portraits of the foppish courtier. We have already noted George Gascoigne and Robert Greene’s lampoons of the courtly coxcomb as a creature compounded of effete foreign fashions.³⁵ The ‘spruce Courtier’ sent by Richard II to recall Woodstock from Plashy has a similarly exotic appearance, eliciting the exclamation: ‘O strange metamorphosis! Is’t possible that this fellow that’s all made of

1600?]), sig. A2^r. The passage quoted above, describing Essex’s love for martial men, occurs at sig. B2^v – B3^r.

³⁵ Gascoigne, *Steele glas*, sig. Ii^v; Greene, *Qvip for an vpstart courtier*, sig. B3^v.

fashions should be an Englishman?’ (III. 2. 156).³⁶ The vain and vacuous follower of continental fashions is thus offered up as a figure of fun.

The narcissism of Richard’s courtiers provides the audience with moments of light relief; but it is, on balance, no laughing matter. As in Holinshed, the social consequences of court extravagance are spelled out on several occasions. Forced to abandon his simple attire for Richard’s wedding, Woodstock grumbles that

Should this fashion last I must raise new rents,
Undo my poor tenants, turn away my servants
And guard myself with lace; nay, sell more land
And lordships too, by th’rood. (I. 3. 104)³⁷

When the minions mock his austerity, he retorts that, if they themselves dressed more conservatively, ‘They would not tax and pill the commons so’ (I. 3. 112). In Act II, Scene 3, Queen Anne is informed that the king has held a council meeting to design new clothes, and has rebuilt the great hall at Westminster as a banqueting house. She despairs:

O certain ruin of this famous kingdom!
Fond Richard, thou buildst a hall to feast in
And starvest thy wretched subjects to erect it. (II. 3. 101)

In *Edward II*, Mortimer is incensed ‘that one so basely born’ as Gaveston ‘Should by his sovereign’s favour grow so pert / and riot it with treasure of the realm’:

While soldiers mutiny for want of pay
He wears a lord's revenue upon his back,

³⁶ Anon, *Woodstock*.

³⁷ We are reminded of Archbishop Anselm’s reluctance to ‘despoil his tenants’ for the sake of giving King Henry a present at Christmas time.

And Midas-like he jets it in the court
With base outlandish cullions at his heels,
Whose proud fantastic liveries make such show
As if that Proteus, god of shapes, appeared.
I have not seen a dapper jack so brisk.
He wears a short Italian hooded cloak,
Larded with pearl, and in his Tuscan cap
A jewel of more value than the crown.

(I. 4. 404)

We are left in no doubt that the riotous excesses of courtiers can bring a commonwealth to its knees, and reduce a king to moral, political and financial bankruptcy.

We also recognise the well-established rhetorical device of linking the courtier's consumption directly to the resources that pay for it, and the people who suffer from it.³⁸ The *Woodstock* dramatist, in particular, places great emphasis upon land, and the social obligations that accompany the ownership of land. The paternalistic strand of English anti-courtier discourse can be dated back to the early medieval period. It finds expression in the dialogue *Of cyuile and vncyuile life*; the countryman Vincent voices the age-old concern of social conservatives about the damage done by landlords who abandon the localities to galavant at court:

You know the vse and auncient custome of this Realme of England was, that all Noble men and Gentlemen, ... did continually inhabite the countryes, continuing there, from age to age, and from Auncester, to auncester, a continuall house, and hospitallitie, which got them great loue amonge their Neighbours, releued many poore wretches, and wrought also diuerse other good effects ...³⁹

A gentleman's duty, according to Vincent, is to manage his estate, to take care of his dependents and to maintain the cohesion of his local community. By contrast, as

³⁸ See, for example, Agrippa, *Vanitie*, fol. 112^r.

³⁹ Anon, 'Courtier and cuntrey-gentleman', p. 12.

Thomas of Woodstock bitterly observes, the absentee courtier-landlord will destroy the very fabric of rural society. Processing to King Richard's wedding, Woodstock lectures the groom about the cost of the sumptuous apparel that he has been obliged to don:

A hundred oaks upon these shoulders hang
To make me brave upon your wedding day,
And more than that, to make my horse more tire,
Ten acres of good land are stitched upon here. (I. 3. 95-8)

The image of a forest being felled for the sake of a suit makes us uncomfortably aware of the devastation wrought by rootless, locust-like court spendthrifts.⁴⁰

The campaign to transform profligate courtiers into parochial patriarchs gathered momentum during the first half of the seventeenth century, with James I and Charles I repeatedly attempting to engineer the exodus of superfluous gentlemen and women from London.⁴¹ Complaints about the social irresponsibility of Elizabethan courtiers remained relatively muted until the 1590s, when (as we shall see in chapter six) resentment over the issue of monopolies created a political storm. *Woodstock*, which was probably composed during the first half of the 1590s, dates from the period when the medieval image of the courtier as a selfish consumer was coming into vogue again. Chronicle caricatures of court wastrels, especially the much-maligned *familiars* of Richard II, were resurrected for the public stage. Criticism of such exploitative urbanites posed a challenge to the Castiglionean model of politics, which was based upon the premise that a gentleman's place is at court, in the company of his prince and

⁴⁰ For an interesting discussion of changing attitudes towards parochial responsibilities among the socio-political elite, see Felicity Heal, 'The idea of hospitality in early modern England', *Past and Present*, vol. 102 (February 1984), 66-93.

⁴¹ J. F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes, eds, *Stuart royal proclamations*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973-1983). For Jacobean proclamations see I (1973), 186-8; 323-4; 369-71; 563-5; 572-4; 608-9. For Caroline proclamations, see II (1983), 112-3; 170-2; 350-3.

peers. We do not know how the Urbino Courtier funds his permanent residence in the palaces of potentates.⁴² If he does have an estate from which he derives revenues, there is certainly no suggestion that he ought to spend time there. If he has any dependents, his duty of care to them is never discussed.⁴³ His total immersion in the world of the court is (to a certain extent) reminiscent of the selfish myopia attributed to feckless Ricardian courtiers.⁴⁴

Margaret Aston has noted that, throughout the early modern period, Richard II was usually portrayed as a boy king surrounded by wilful, extravagant youths.⁴⁵ This impression is certainly cultivated in *Woodstock*. In Act I, Scene 2, Greene reminds Tresilian that ‘The King is young, / Ay, and a little wanton – so perhaps are we’ (I. 2. 39-40). In Act II, Scene 2, after Richard’s uncles have been dismissed from office, Scroop mocks them as ‘Old doting greybeards’. Greene agrees that their presence at court is intolerable: ‘We’ll have an act for this: it shall be henceforth / counted high treason for any fellow with a grey beard to come within forty foot of the court gates’ (II. 2. 171-6). The puerility of the king and his friends is thereby emphasized. In fact, as

⁴² We have no reason to suppose he ever leaves the court, except when he accompanies his master on military campaigns.

⁴³ It is not even clear whether he has a wife and offspring (‘How many children had *il Cortegiano*?’). The discussion of how he should conduct his courtships suggests that he does not. Castiglione certainly specifies that the waiting gentlewoman described in Book III is unmarried.

⁴⁴ The backlash against professional, London-based courtiers also implicitly contested the Ciceronian thesis that life in the city and at court was inherently more virtuous than life in the country. Yet neither Cicero nor his political philosophy suffered any loss of credibility. Instead, as Richard Cust has demonstrated, the vocabulary of *De officiis* was appropriated by ‘simple men of the country’, who presented themselves as the natural advocates of the common weal. Richard Cust, ‘The ‘public man’ in late Tudor and early Stuart England’, in *The politics of the public sphere in early modern England*, ed. by Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 116-43 (p. 116). It seems likely that a similar process prevented Castiglione from being discredited when the reputation of courtiers became severely tarnished; see the concluding remarks of this thesis.

⁴⁵ Margaret Aston, ‘Richard II and the Wars of the Roses’, in *The reign of Richard II: essays in honour of May McKisack*, ed. by F. R. H. Du Boulay and Caroline M. Barron (London: Athlone Press, University of London, 1971), pp. 280-317 (306-11).

Aston points out, Richard reigned until the age of 33.⁴⁶ His ‘minions’ were scarcely juvenile; William Scrope, for example, was approximately 48 at the time of his execution. The identification of Scrope and his colleagues with the Rehoboam stereotype of the youthful courtier is inaccurate. It highlights the power of the stereotype, which insisted that feckless *familiares regis* really ought to be young!

The antics of favourites and minions take on a sinister complexion when we detect an element of calculation behind them. In the opening scene of *Edward II*, Gaveston outlines his strategy with unsettling frankness:

I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,
Musicians that with touching of a string
May draw the pliant king which way I please. (I. 1. 50)

Knowing that ‘Music and poetry is [Edward’s] delight’, he resolves to ‘have Italian masques by night, / Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows’ (I. 1. 53-5). He notes complacently that ‘Such things as these best please his majesty’, before breaking off upon the entrance of the king and his noblemen (I. 1. 70). Marlowe presumably based this speech upon the passage from Holinshed quoted above, in which the chronicler lists all the wanton entertainments that Gaveston provided to distract his old friend from the serious business of kingship. Yet, according to Holinshed, the historical Gaveston’s agenda was simply that: to divert Edward from his regal responsibilities with fun and games. Holinshed portrayed Gaveston as Edward’s ‘old mate’,⁴⁷ and the instigator of hair-raising japes that brought the wrath of Edward I down on both

⁴⁶ Aston, ‘Richard II’, p. 306.

⁴⁷ Holinshed, *Third volume of the chronicles*, p. 318.

youths.⁴⁸ When his friend ascended to the throne, Gaveston was eager to maintain their camaraderie, and deeply resentful of the barons who suggested that he was an unfit companion for the king. He consequently fed and cultivated Edward's appetite for frivolous pleasure. His policy was selfish, because it placed the perpetuation of his influence over Edward before all other considerations. It was dangerous, because it disregarded the interests of the young king and his commonwealth. It was the strategy of an arrogant, immature egotist.

Marlowe's Gaveston is a rather more unnerving creature. His behaviour is explicitly guileful and manipulative. Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he presumes to play upon his prince like a pipe.⁴⁹ His determination to please Edward, and to use courtly accomplishments as a means of controlling him, is quintessentially Castiglionean. His assertion that music can help him to manage the king, for example, recalls the discussion in Book I of the *Courtier*, in which Count Lewis insists that music is an essential weapon in the courtier's arsenal: 'Do ye not then deprive our Courtyer of musicke, which doth not onely make swete the mindes of men, but also many times wilde beastes tame'.⁵⁰ Marlowe presents such tricks and tactics as the explanation for Gaveston's ascendancy. Rosemary Horrox, however, has noted that references to music, masques, 'sweet speeches' and 'pleasing shows' are conspicuously absent from the bulk of fourteenth century baronial complaints about Edwardian court politics.

⁴⁸ Holinshed, *Third volume of the chronicles*, p. 313:

In the three and thirtieth yeare of his reigne, king Edward [I] put his sonne prince Edward in prison, because that he had riotously broken the parke of Walter Langton bishop of Chester; and because the prince had doone this deed by the procurement of a lewd and wanton person, one Peers Gauaston, an esquire of Gascoine, the king banished him the realme, least the prince, who delighted much in his companie, might by his euill and wanton counsell fall to euill and naughtie rule.

⁴⁹ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III. 2. 347.

⁵⁰ Hoby, *Courtyer*, sig. Jii^v.

Most critics of Edward II did not claim that the king allowed himself to be seduced by courtly arts: 'What contemporaries grumbled about were Edward's 'rustic' pursuits. He was criticised, in fact, for not being courtly enough'.⁵¹ Gaveston owed his reinvention as a Castiglionean courtier to Marlowe.

The implications of this insight are highly significant. Elizabethan playwrights ascribed more agency to royal acolytes than their sources often warranted. In the *Vita Edwardii Secundi*, Gaveston is censured as an arrogant parvenu, who compounded his obnoxiousness by being 'an alien of Gascon birth'.⁵² We are told that he antagonized the barons with his haughty presumption ('a prime cause of hatred and rancour'). The fact that 'Piers alone received a gracious welcome from the king' is cited as a 'secondary cause' of baronial animosity.⁵³ At no point, however, does the chronicler suggest that the favourite exercised serious political leverage. Gaveston's death provides a brutal illustration of his helplessness: 'See how Piers who had lately been more notable than the rest in the King's hall, now for his insolent behaviour lies beheaded by the order of the Earl of Lancaster. Let English courtiers beware lest, trusting in the royal favour, they look down upon the barons'.⁵⁴ Unlike his enemies, the minion has no independent power base. He is absolutely and entirely the creature of Edward II. Marlowe's interpretation of Gaveston, however, requires us to recalibrate the balance of power. Edward is cast as the 'pliant king', whom Gaveston can 'draw ... which way I please'. Gaveston's skills as a courtier inflate his importance, and allow him to dominate the action. His metamorphosis from medieval minion to Renaissance

⁵¹ Horrox, 'Caterpillars of the commonwealth?', pp. 4-5.

⁵² Denholm Young, *Vita Edwardi Secundi: the life of Edward the second*, pp. 1-3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

cortegiano reflects the extent to which the courtier's political stature had been magnified during the course of the sixteenth century. Plays such as *Edward II* contributed to this magnification, intensifying the aura of power and possibility that clung to the courtly profession.

Influential and manipulative courtiers could readily be characterised as Machiavels. At the turn of the seventeenth century, the association of courtiers with Machiavellian vices encouraged a trend for extravagantly sinister Italianate court tragedies. The genre flourished after the Jacobean accession, when plays such as Webster's *White devil* (c. 1612) and *Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1614) were enormously popular. However, several late Elizabethan works anticipated the murder and mayhem of these dramas. Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris* (c. 1592) was based upon the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Catherine de Medici - predictably - featured as the archetypal Machiavillain. English audiences would have expected the dowager Queen of France to be presented as a fiendish Jezebel, and Marlowe's character stoops to the occasion. Like Shakespeare's Richard, duke of Gloucester (who boasted that he could 'set the murderous Machiavel to school'),⁵⁵ she reveals her devious and deadly plots in chilling asides: 'CHARLES: ... Come Mother let us go to honor this solemnitie / [QUEEN MOTHER]: Which Ile desolve with bloud and crueltie'.⁵⁶ She rejoices when she has ensnared the trusting Protestants: 'Now have we got the fatal stragling deere: / Within the compasse of a deadly toyle'.⁵⁷ The duke of Guise is similarly determined to wreak

⁵⁵ William Shakespeare, *The third part of King Henry the sixth*, ed. by Norman Sanders, The New Penguin Shakespeare (Penguin: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1981), III. 2. 193.

⁵⁶ Christopher Marlowe, *The massacre at Paris* (London: E[dward] A[l]lde for Edward White, [1594?]), sig. A3^v. In this edition, the Queen Mother's line is confusingly attributed to 'Old Q.'. However, the line clearly belongs to Catherine de Medici, not the old Queen of Navarre.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, sig. A7^r. John Foxe described the 'Gospellers' at the late Henrician court as 'Deare', at whom

bloody havoc. In the second scene, he visits an apothecary to collect a pair of poisoned gloves ('Will euery sauour breed a pangue of death?').⁵⁸ These are later presented to the old Queen of Navarre, with predictable results.

As we noted in chapter four, the use of poison was widely regarded as a typically continental, and particularly Italianate, method of conducting court politics. It was associated with perfidy, intrigue and the realization of illicit desires. The fact that *Woodstock* begins with an attempted poisoning is therefore significant. The opening scene is designed to foreshadow the darkness and deviousness of ensuing events. York, Lancaster, Arundel and Surrey tumble onto the stage in a panic: 'Call for our coaches! Let's away, good brother. / Now by th'blest saints, I fear we are poisoned all' (I. 1. 3). Cheney establishes that the poison

... was a liquid bane dissolved in wine,
Which after supper should have been caroused
To young King Richard's health. (I. 1. 15)

The barons are profoundly shocked by this treachery: 'Are his uncles' deaths become / Health to King Richard?' (I. 1. 18). Blame for the heinous conspiracy is soon shifted onto the shoulders of the 'flattering minions' (I. 1. 46-65). Interestingly, the whole episode appears to be unhistorical. According to some contemporary sources, it was actually the noble uncles of the king who were believed to be dabbling in poison plots.⁵⁹ The opening scene of *Woodstock* was simply intended to introduce Richard's courtiers as murderous 'machiavel[s]' (I. 1. 63).

Stephen Gardiner 'bent his bowe to shoote'. Foxe, *Actes and monuments*, II, 1218.

⁵⁸ Marlowe, *Massacre at Paris*, sig. A7^r.

⁵⁹ The *Chronicon Angliae* suggests that John of Gaunt conspired to poison his nephew. [Thomas Walsingham], *Chronicon Angliae ab anno domini 1328 usque ad annum 1388*, ed. by Edward Maunde Thompson (London: Longman, 1874), p. 92.

English history plays tended to concentrate upon the reigns of controversial, incompetent and unpopular kings. The courtiers who attended such monarchs arguably received more than their fair share of censure from chroniclers. Their representation on the late Elizabeth stage was correspondingly unflattering. A number of negative stereotypes were gleefully resurrected. The dramatists' interest in problematic reigns encouraged them to turn to that traditional scapegoat for misgovernment, the flattering favourite. The visual nature of the stage-play also made it an ideal medium for mocking the sartorial pretensions of the courtly fop. The author of *Woodstock*, with his elaborate instructions for costuming, certainly seems to have appreciated this possibility. The old complaint that courtiers were obsessed with bizarre foreign fashions, which flaunted their effeminate nature, was thus endorsed. Like medieval historians and satirists, late sixteenth century dramatists also stressed the social cost of courtiers' extravagance, invoking the stock-type of the rapacious consumer-courtier. The households of feckless kings were represented as isolated bubbles, in which callous hedonists dreamed up increasingly preposterous ways to waste resources and revenues extracted from the groaning populace.

Such emphasis upon the detachment of the court from the community of the realm implicitly undermined Castiglione's characterisation of the Courtier as the best placed person to promote the common weal.⁶⁰ Certainly, as far as their ambitions and interests are concerned, the minions of Edward II and Richard II appear to have little in common with the Urbino Courtier. Yet when we consider the methods whereby the minions consolidate their hegemony at court, they do seem to have taken a leaf out of

⁶⁰ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Mm iiiiv – Nn i^r.

Castiglione's book. They engage the king's attention by entertaining him with delightful diversions, and interacting empathetically with him, having carefully studied his moods and inclinations. They subsequently use his regard for them to influence his decision making. Unfortunately for the king and his people, their agenda is purely selfish. The history play thus demonstrated how Castiglionean tricks and tactics could be abused by evil counsellors. Such behaviour was highly manipulative, which encouraged dramatists to cast the characters who engaged in it as scheming Machiavels.

The beast fable

The beast fable provided an alternative medium through which court manners and mores could be interrogated. Its value as a vehicle for controversial political discourse, like that of the history play, was derived from the obvious 'otherness' of its setting and protagonists. By allegorizing complaints about the court and its inhabitants, satirists were able to avoid making offensively explicit allusions to particular events and individuals (although this strategy was by no means fail-safe). From ancient times onwards, the beast fable had served as a memorable means of imparting observations about human nature and society. Aesop remained a popular, and prolifically cited, literary figure throughout the medieval and early modern periods.⁶¹ As Mark Kishlansky observes, 'from the 1550s not a decade passed without the publication of

⁶¹ As Thomas Elyot observed, 'I suppose no man thynketh, that Esope wrate gospels: yet who doubteth, but that in his fables, the foxe, the hare, & the wolf, though they neuer spake, do teache many good wysedomes?'. Elyot, *Gouernour*, fol. 230^r.

another English edition of Aesop.⁶² In his *Foundacion of rhetorike*, Richard Rainolde claimed that ‘*Esope ... hath chief fame of all learned aucthours, for his learned Philosophie, and giuyng wisdom in preceptes: his Fables dooe shewe vnto all states moste wholsome doctrine of vertuous life.*’⁶³ Bestial allegory also played an important part in oral and visual culture before the invention of the printing press. It was imbued with didactic resonance – not least because it was often displayed, through illustrations and carvings, in an ecclesiastical context.⁶⁴ It fulfilled the same function that Fulke Greville ascribed to Philip Sidney’s poetry: ‘to turn the barren philosophy precepts into pregnant images of life’.⁶⁵ Its satirizing, sermonizing, moralizing treatment of human behaviour made it an ideal medium in which to expose the flaws and foibles of courtiers.

In chapter four, we briefly considered Caxton’s 1481 translation of *Reynard the Fox*. Stories about Reynard had circulated in western Europe for hundreds of years. The Caxton translation was based upon a Dutch text, *Die hystorie van Reynaert die Vos*.⁶⁶ It introduced Reynard as a vicious bandit, who robs and slays the beasts of the countryside. Determined to restore order, the royal Lion summons Reynard to his court to face justice. After two unsuccessful attempts to fetch him (foiled by Reynard’s

⁶² Mark A. Kishlansky, ‘Turning frogs into princes: Aesop’s *Fables* and the political culture of Renaissance England’, in *Political culture and cultural politics in early modern England: essays presented to David Underdown*, ed. by Susan D. Amunssen and Kishlansky (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 338-60.

⁶³ Richard Rainolde, *A booke called the foundacion of rhetorike* (London: John Kingston, 1563), fol. xi^v.

⁶⁴ Kenneth Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinaert and other foxes in medieval England: the iconographic evidence* (Amsterdam: Amstrdam University Press, 1999), pp. 289-322.

⁶⁵ Fulke Greville, ‘A dedication to Sir Philip Sidney’, in Gouws, *Prose works of Greville*, p. 10. Sidney cited the example of Aesop in his *Apologie for poetrie*, refuting the proposition that poets were liars: ‘none so simple would say, that *Esope* lyed in the tales of his beasts: for who thinks that *Esope* writ it for actually true, were well worthy to haue his name cronicled among the beastes hee writeth of’. Philip Sidney, *An apologie for poetrie* (London: [James Roberts] for Henry Olney, 1595), sig. H^r.

⁶⁶ Blake, ‘Introduction’, in Caxton, *Reynard*, xi-lxvi (xvii-xxi).

trickery of the Lion's envoys), Reynard accepts that he will have to confront his accusers. He comes to court, and is sentenced to death. He escapes the gallows by claiming to know of an assassination plot against the king, and, for good measure, the location of a treasure trove. He denounces Bruyn the bear, Ysegrym the wolf and Tybert the cat as traitors. A combination of greed and fear persuades the king to spare Reynard's life. He is allowed to depart, ostensibly on a pilgrimage, accompanied by Kywart the hare and Bellyn the ram. He quickly murders Kywart, frames Bellyn for the crime, and flees to the forest. Soon, the king receives more complaints about atrocities perpetrated by Reynard. Reynard is forced out of his castle, and agrees to fight Ysegrym before the court to prove his worthiness. He wins the contest through cunning, underhand tactics, leaving Ysegrym horribly maimed. The king makes him a leading courtier, counsellor and justiciar. We have every reason to suppose that Reynard lives happily for the rest of his days.⁶⁷

Despite his long literary pedigree, Caxton's Reynard must have struck late fifteenth and early sixteenth century readers as a thoroughly modern politician. He is a disingenuous strategist, adept at 'subtyl false shrewis'.⁶⁸ He 'knoweth so many wyles that he shal lye and flatre / and shal thynke how he may begyle and deceyue and brynge yow to some mockerye'.⁶⁹ He understands the importance of appearances; when he first arrives at court to answer for his misdemeanours, he swaggers in 'as he had not ben aferd / and held hym better / than he was for he wente forth proudly ... right as he had

⁶⁷ Caxton, *Reynard*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

ben the kynges sone and as he had not trespased to ony man the value of an heer'.⁷⁰ He exploits his monarch's baser qualities – avarice, credulity and a strong instinct for self-preservation – to serve his own agenda. Somewhat disturbingly, the king himself seems to collude in this exploitation. At the end of the story, he justifies Reynard's meteoric promotion: 'whan ye sette your wytte and counseyl to vertue and goodnesse thenne may not our court be wythout your aduysse and counseyl. For here is non that is lyke to yow in sharp and hye counseyll ne subtyller in fyndyng a remedye for a meschief'.⁷¹ The Lion, we infer, accepts that Reynard is indifferent to 'vertue and goodnesse', but regards his cunning 'wytte' as a political asset, and is consequently prepared to overlook his depravity. Reynard replies that he shall repay his master with 'holsom counsel as shall be expedient to your good grace', and promises that he will always be ready to serve the Lion: 'ye haue hyely deseruyd it'.⁷² We are tempted to conclude that the Lion does, indeed, deserve a servant like Reynard. Both characters are selfish proto-Machiavels, interested primarily in preserving their own power at the expense of justice, compassion and honour. Caxton assures us that their behaviour is typical of modern kings and courtiers: 'In this historye ben wretton the parables / goode lernynge / and dyuerse poyntes to be merkyd / by whiche poyntes men maye lerne to come to subtyl knoweleche of suche thynges as dayly ben vsed and had in the counseylls of lordes and prelates gostly and worldly'.⁷³ The moral of *Reynard* is bleak and subversive: at court, and in the world at large, only the unrighteous prosper.

Caxton's suggestion that a story about animals might serve as in education in court

⁷⁰ Caxton, *Reynard*, p. 29.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

politics was echoed by Thomas North, whose translation of Anton Francesco Doni's *Morall philosophie* was published in 1570. Like the *History of Reynard*, the *Morall philosophie* was based upon a collection of fables that had circulated for hundreds of years. Known as the *Panchatantra* in Sanskrit, and the *Fables of Bidpai* in Europe, these tales were of Indian origin. North's translation was a complicated text. It began with a collection of parables in which the characters were predominantly human. Then the central narrative, concerning a mule and a bull who attended the court of a lion, was introduced. The main story was interspersed with beast fables related by various protagonists. North wrote that, whilst perusing the text, the reader might

see into the Court, looke into the commonwealth, beholde the more part of all estates and degrees: and the inferior and common sort also maye learne, discerne, and iudge what waye is to be taken in the trade of their life: but Courtyers about all others attending on the Princes presence. A Glaße it is for them to looke into, and also a meete schoole to reforme such schollers as by any maner of deuise, practise, or subiltie, vniustlye seeke to aspire, or otherwise abuse the Prince.⁷⁴

North is remembered today as the Elizabethan translator of Plutarch. We have already noted that he published a translation of Guevara's *Diall of princes* in 1557. He was, however, dissatisfied with the fruits of this endeavour, which failed to bring him substantial patronage.⁷⁵ His brother, Roger North, was very friendly with the earl of Leicester, and this circumstance presumably 'imbolddened' Thomas to dedicate the *Morall philosophie* to Leicester in 1570.⁷⁶ North's insistence that his latest translation

⁷⁴ Anton Francesco Doni, *The morall philosophie of Doni drawne out of the auncient writers*, trans. by Thomas North (London: Henry Denham, 1570), sig. A4^r.

⁷⁵ Tom Lockwood, 'North, Sir Thomas (1535-1603?)', in *DNB*, xli, 119-22.

⁷⁶ North, *Morall philosophie*, sig. A3^v. *Leicester's commonwealth* mentions Roger North's friendship with Leicester on three separate occasions. The authors claim that the earl was persuaded to court Puritan support 'by his friends ... and chiefly by the Lord North'; they point out that North was present

contained material particularly relevant to courtiers may well have been intended to engage the interest of his courtly (prospective) patron. It may also, as Richard Dutton has suggested, have been designed to highlight parallels between the central fiction and contemporary court politics.⁷⁷ Dutton contends that North sought to identify himself as Leicester's man by subtly promoting a topical, partisan reading of the fable. This reading was based upon the premise that William Cecil had inveigled himself into Elizabeth's favour, and was seeking to monopolize influence over the queen to the exclusion of her aristocratic counsellors, including Leicester.⁷⁸ Reports that Leicester took active steps to undermine Cecil's relationship with Elizabeth in 1569, a year before North's translation appeared in print, have circulated ever since that date. The French ambassador, Fénelon, claimed that Leicester attempted to remonstrate with Elizabeth over her reliance upon Cecil on 22 February 1569.⁷⁹ In his *Annales* (first published in 1625), Camden corroborated the gist, if not the details, of Fénelon's story.⁸⁰ Simon Adams has argued that rumours of a rift between Leicester and Cecil in the late 1560s

at Leicester's secret marriage to the Countess of Essex; and they describe North as Leicester's 'special counsellor'. Peck, *Leicester's commonwealth*, pp. 73; 95; 127.

⁷⁷ Annabel Patterson suggests that, as a literary genre, the beast fable became more pointedly political and topical during the sixteenth century. Annabel Patterson, *Fables of power: Aesopian writing and political history* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 45-80.

⁷⁸ Richard Dutton, 'Volpone and beast fable: early modern analogic reading', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 3, 347-70 (362-6).

⁷⁹ Bertrand de Salignac Fénelon, *Correspondence diplomatique*, 7 vols (Paris and London: [s. n.], 1838-40), I, 233. See also Read, *Mr. Secretary Cecil*, pp. 442-3.

⁸⁰ Camden wrote that, early in 1569, 'Some great men of *England*, among whom was the Marquis of *Winchester*, the duke of *Norfolke*, and the Earles of *Arundell*, *Northumberland*, *Westmerland*, *Pembroke*, *Leycester*, and others' attempted to 'lay the blame' for an escalating quarrel with Spain upon Cecil. According to Camden, 'they did so: for they could not digest the great power and authority he had about the Queene: they suspected he fauoured the house of *Suffolke* for the succession to the Crowne, and feared hee would oppose himself to their designes [for a Stuart succession]. Wherefore, they consulted with one another to imprison him'. William Camden, *Annales of the true and royall history of the famous emperesse Elizabeth* (London: [George Purslowe, Humphrey Lownes, and Miles Flesher] for Benjamin Fisher, 1625), p. 199.

have been greatly exaggerated.⁸¹ Yet, in 1569, the two men clearly espoused divergent policies – most notably over the problem of how Elizabeth should deal with Mary Stuart, and the possibility of a match between the queen of Scots and the duke of Norfolk.⁸² We need not insist upon a full blown factional struggle to suggest that, as a would-be Dudley client, North found it expedient to imply that the *Morall philosophie* shed unflattering light upon Cecil's career at court.

The main protagonist in the *Philosophie's* central fable is the Moyle (or mule). Against the advice of his brother, the Ass, the Moyle resolves to seek his fortune at court. With his glosing tongue and cunning counsel, he quickly becomes the favoured confidante of the princely Lion. However, his ascendancy is threatened when Chiarino the Bull arrives at court. Chiarino is a magnificent creature, with a powerful physique, a statesman-like brain and an honourable character. The Moyle is desperately jealous, and plots to destroy his rival. Firstly, he plays upon the Lion's fear of the Bull's commanding strength and abilities. The Lion values Chiarino's loyal service, but cannot free himself of the suspicion that his faithful lieutenant would like to rule in his stead - and, moreover, that he would make a more impressive king than the Lion himself. The Moyle inflames this suspicion. At the same time, he warns Chiarino that the Lion is nursing a secret hatred of him, and (like a tyrant) will suddenly strike out against him ('Beholde the wicked practises and deuilish inuentions of a false trayterous Courtier').⁸³ When the Lion and the Bull next encounter each other, they fight. The Lion is sorely wounded, but slays Chiarino. He later regrets this impetuous killing, and

⁸¹ Simon Adams, *Leicester and the court: essays on Elizabethan politics* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 58-9.

⁸² Adams makes this point in *Leicester and the court*, p. 18.

⁸³ North, *Morall philosophie*, fol. 54^r.

mourns the loss of ‘so wyse a subiect, and so graue a counsellor’.⁸⁴ The Moyle is imprisoned, and arraigned by Parliament for encompassing the death of Chiarino and endangering the life of the king. He is visited in prison by the Ass, who reproaches him bitterly and subsequently dies. Stricken with grief at his brother’s death, the Moyle confesses his conspiracy to the Fox, and makes the latter his heir. The Fox promptly discloses the Moyle’s revelations to Parliament, securing the conviction of his benefactor and assuming immediate possession of the condemned beast’s goods. ‘So the traytor by another traytor was betrayed’.⁸⁵

Making the case for the identification of Cecil with the Moyle, Dutton points out that ‘Cecil was well-known to have a pet mule’, and had his portrait painted with the animal in the mid 1570s. Furthermore, he observes that the Moyle describes himself as ‘Secretarie to the king of all vs vnreasonable beasts’.⁸⁶ We might also mention that the Moyle is depicted as an upstart courtier, whose relationship with the Lion excludes and frustrates the nobility. At the start of the tale, the Moyle announces his intention of ‘reputing my selfe of noble bloud’, to ‘obtaine happie state in Court’.⁸⁷ Anticipating the Ass’s objection to this scheme, he demands: ‘are there not in the kings Court many meaner in all conditions than I? if Fortune haue fauoured them, why the goodyere should she not also fauour mee?’ After admitting the Moyle to his entourage, we are told that the Lion

tooke his leaue of his Lordes, and withdrue himselfe into his withdrawing Chamber ... calling the Moyle to him, and secretly they commoned [sic]. Who

⁸⁴ North, *Morall philosophie*, fol. 94^v.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 108^v.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 38^v.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 28^r.

when he saw the king make of him, and that he layde his fauourable hande vppon the croope of his malice, hee wagged his tayle, aduancing himselfe in his Asselike maner, and finely couched in Rethoricke his cloked flatterie ...⁸⁸

Cecil's use of 'finely couched' rhetoric as a political tool is well documented, and would clearly have been known to his colleagues.⁸⁹ The Moyle subsequently makes an interesting pledge to the Lion:

If you be troubled for any matter concerning the state or any other thing of importaunce: your highnesse muste impart it with a fewe of your faythfull seruants, and such as you trust best. And although they be of the meaner sort, yet they maye serue your Maiestie with hartie looue and good will, and do ther best indeuour ... I reckon my selfe to be one of the faythfullest seruants your Maiestie hath euer had, or now retayneth.⁹⁰

This speech obviously seeks to validate the political pre-eminence of a commoner. Moreover, its emphasis on personal service – its invocation of a special bond between the monarch and his trusted, handpicked counsellor – is reminiscent of the language in which Cecil and Elizabeth defined their relationship.⁹¹ It is worth noting that North was apparently concerned that the *Morall philosophie* would cause offence. Towards the end of his dedication to Leicester, he stated that he produced the translation 'knowing my little labour herein to be subiect to the censures and reproofe of many, that are readie to carpe at euery little fault, or finding themselues touched anye waye, will

⁸⁸ North, *Morall philosophie*, fol. 35^v.

⁸⁹ Alford, *Early Elizabethan polity*, pp. 14-24.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 36^v.

⁹¹ Consider, for example, Elizabeth's famous speech to Cecil at Hatfield on 20 November 1558:

I give you this charge that you shall be of my Privy Council and content to take pains for me and my realm. This judgment I have of you that you will not be corrupted by any manner of gift and that you will be faithful to the state; and that without respect of my private will, you will give me that counsel which you think best and if you shall know anything necessary to be declared to me of secrecy you shall show it to myself only.

Read, *Mr Secretary Cecil*, p. 119.

mislike a troth'.⁹² However, if North thought that he would make a lifelong enemy of Cecil, he need not have worried. In a letter to Leicester dated 24 August 1580, the now ennobled Burghley described North as a gentleman 'whom I thynk truly well of for many good parts in hym'.⁹³

North's Moyle is clearly cast in the role of the *politique* courtier. The counsel he offers the Lion is unmistakably Machiavellian. For example, when the Lion and the Moyle are discussing what to do about the supposedly traitorous Bull, the Lion suggests that Chiarino be examined: 'if I finde him any thing at all blotted with this humor, I will chastise him with banishment, but neuer imbrue my handes in his blood'. The Moyle responds with advice that could have come straight from the pages of the *Prince*:

Your Maiestie hath euen lighted right on the most stranglingst morsell, and the hardest Nutte to cracke: if you meane to follow that you haue propounded. For he careth not to throwe at his enimie, that beleueeth he is not seene: but standeth to beholde if it light right. But if he beware once he is seene: then for shame he sticketh to his tackle, and followeth on his blowe, least he shoulde be counted a foole and a Coward both in his doings ... he that fayneth he hath not bene offended, maye at his ease and leysure be reuenged.⁹⁴

⁹² North, *Morall philosophie*, sig. a1^r. Another reference to the possibility of offence being taken at the fables occurs on sig. 31^v – 32^r. The Ass is attempting to dissuade the Moyle from going to court, and tells a cautionary tale designed to highlight the ingratitude of some masters. He says that a man once had a sow, whom he fed by hand, and frequently petted. She thrived, and produced many piglets. However, when she grew older he killed her for her meat.

There are such like Maisters that clawe thee with one hande, that is, they giue thee faire wordes: with the other they feede thee, to weete, they giue thee drafte. And when thou hast serued them (which is vnderstanded by the bringing forth of Piggess) a time, and spent thy youth ... some blast of displeasure may call thee to Coram. So art thou chopt vp, the lawe proceedeth on thee, and shortly all the fatte and grease thou hast gotten before melteth into the Princes Cofers. Howbeit, I may tell it to thee (*be it spoken without offence of beastes of vnderstanding*) there is good prouision made to the contrarie now adayes. For whatsoeuer becometh of themselues they make all sure that they can: let the carkas go where it will, the fatte and grease they haue gathered is betimes disposed to others for feare of that they looked for. And thus all things are preuented by polycie. *I say no more. This is the worlde, and so it goeth* [my italics].

⁹³ NA, SP 12/141/39.

⁹⁴ North, *Morall philosophie*, fol. 60^r.

Similarly, when the Lion is lamenting the death of the Bull, the Moyle attempts to reassure him:

Your Lordshippe ... shoulde not thus sorow and bewayle the losse of him, which make thee lyue in continuall feare and torment. For wyse Princes oft times doe both punishe and cut off many worthee persones, and those whom they dearely loue and esteame and why? all for their owne safetie, and the preseruacion their Realme. And Sir, of two euils they choose the least: to kill one, rather than to make a thousand die.⁹⁵

The *Morall philosophie* thus warns us that corrupt courtiers manipulate Machiavellian arguments to implement and justify their devious schemes. We will recall that the same charge was levelled at Cecil in the *Treatise of treasons*, published two years after North's translation. If the 'subtill Moyle' was indeed meant to remind readers of Cecil, the coincidence would testify to the broad-based appeal of the complaint that Elizabeth's court was dominated by over-ambitious, unscrupulous disciples of *realpolitik*.⁹⁶

The way in which the Moyle subverts the discourse of statecraft, purporting to offer objective and pragmatic counsel whilst pursuing a private agenda, is mirrored in his misuse of fables. Literary convention dictates that a parable should tell the truth – or, at least, a truth. It dresses up its moral in a pleasing fiction, but we are entitled to expect that the fictitious edifice is built around a valid observation. The assumption that a fable is fundamentally truthful creates an inverse expectation: that counsel presented as, or supported by, a fable will be wise and legitimate. The Moyle exploits this paradigm

⁹⁵ North, *Morall philosophie*, fol. 95^r.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 54^v.

with all the cunning of ‘a wise Courtier ... & a double man’.⁹⁷ His most heinous treacheries are fluently expounded and defended with sage apologues. When he is urging the Lion to move swiftly against the Bull, he tells the story of three fish who inhabit the same lake. Having been warned that the fishermen are dragging their nets across the lake, one fish swims into a backwater, out of reach of the nets. Another floats on the surface, belly up; the fishermen assume that he is dead and throw him back into the water. The third fish refuses to heed any warnings because he is drowsy, and does not wish to be disturbed. Predictably, he is caught. At the heart of this story is a perfectly reasonable lesson about the dangers of inaction in the face of an impending threat. Yet, as the Moyle intends, the Lion misapplies the lesson with fatal consequences. An honest fable is used to incite unlawfully killing. Similarly, when the Moyle is on trial for his life, his defence constitutes a string of parables warning the assembled beasts to ‘take no fantasie in your heades that is not honest, for yll woulde come of it: and take not vpon you any thing that you are not well informed off, least yours bee the shame and lose’.⁹⁸ A number of his peers are impressed by his elegant illustration of these salient truisms. It is only at the end of his trial, after the Fox’s testimony has damned him irrevocably, that the Moyle’s story-telling abilities (literally) fail to save his skin.

The *Morall philosophie* thus addresses one of the fundamental problems with Castiglionean courtiership. To borrow a metaphor frequently used by Renaissance authors, the political function of the fable is to sugarcoat wise counsel, making it easier to swallow. Unfortunately, the strategy is open to abuse. Corrupt courtiers are perfectly

⁹⁷ North, *Morall philosophie*, fol. 54^r.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, fols 104^v – 106^r.

capable of telling edifying tales that seem to vindicate a particular course of action – even though that course of action may be ruinous to the prince and his people. Castiglione’s defence of the courtier’s art rests on the premise that the plausible, clever and calculating court acolyte is inherently virtuous, and sincerely desires to promote the common weal. However, as North repeatedly reminds us, ‘men raised to high degree, commonly practise things hurtfull to the Prince and state’.⁹⁹ The court, like the world, retains its complement of ‘enuious and spitefull persons’, who ‘delyght ... to commit so detestable treasons’.¹⁰⁰ The good and the bad coexist cheek by jowl; why should the former be more skilful than the latter at the showmanship that constitutes Renaissance court politics? This question lies at the heart of the Moyle’s tale, and it is never satisfactorily answered. During the course of the narrative, the truly good courtier, Chiarino, is destroyed. The wicked Moyle is finally brought to justice – but his conviction is only secured through the perfidy of the greedy, deceitful Fox. The narrator’s parting shot – ‘so the traytor by another traytor was betrayed’ – strongly suggests that the cycle of trickery, bloodshed and shameless self-advancement will continue.¹⁰¹ The story exposes the unresolved issues that surround the optimistic ideal of benevolent courtliness. This may help to explain North’s insistence that the *Morall philosophie* should be read with particular care by courtiers.

The *Morall philosophie* was published in 1570, when the cultural credit of the English courtier was historically good. If we accept Dutton’s thesis that one of North’s objectives was to court favour with Leicester by challenging Cecil’s ascendancy, the

⁹⁹ North, *Morall philosophie*, fol. 46^v.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 54^r.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 108^v.

project demonstrates how disagreements with and among leading associates of the monarch encouraged recourse to anti-courtier rhetoric. It suited North – just as it suited the author of the *Treatise of treasons* – to attribute the success enjoyed by Cecil to strategic courtiership. Whilst targeting particular individuals, however, such authors effectively revived the ancient stereotype of the devious, back-stabbing creature of the court. They also called into question the viability of Castiglione’s attempt to reinvent the courtier as an agent of good government. They did not argue that all curialists were irredeemably corrupt; but they certainly suggested that the altruism of the men and women whom Elizabeth trusted could not be taken for granted.

The most famous Elizabethan beast fable is undoubtedly *Mother Hubberds tale*, by Edmund Spenser. Spenser enjoys the dubious distinction of being almost as famous for what he did not achieve as for what he actually accomplished. He is universally acknowledged as a great poet. His epic masterpiece, the *Faerie Queene*, has enchanted generations. It has also immortalized Elizabeth Tudor as the beautiful, mysterious virgin queen, Gloriana. Yet its author was apparently disappointed by the contemporary response to his poem; it failed to secure him court office. Innumerable scholars have clucked over the fact that Elizabeth (too mean) and Burghley (too unappreciative of literary genius) declined to reward Spenser’s achievement appropriately. As a result of this shortsightedness, the great man was embittered. He publicly articulated his disaffection with Elizabeth’s court and its inhabitants. His disgruntlement has been treated as a symptom and indictment of the malaise that afflicted court politics during the 1590s.¹⁰²

¹⁰² See Alistair Fox, ‘The decline of literary patronage in the 1590s’, in *Last decade*, ed. by Guy, pp. 229-

Spenser's career certainly followed the typical trajectory of a promising, ambitious but ultimately disappointed courtier. He was probably born in 1552. His father was a clothmaker. He was educated by Richard Mulcaster at the Merchant Taylors' School in London. He went to Cambridge in 1569, and graduated in 1573. In 1578, he procured employment as secretary to the bishop of Rochester. The following year, he transferred his services to the earl of Leicester. He published *The shepheardes calendar* in 1579, dedicating the work to Leicester's nephew Philip Sidney. His *Three proper, wittie and familiar letters*, co-authored with Gabriel Harvey, was printed in 1580. Spenser then apparently fell out of favour with Leicester. He left the earl's service, and took up a new post as secretary to Lord Grey of Wilton. Grey had just been appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland. Spenser accompanied his master across the Irish Sea, and settled in the province. He prospered, augmenting his fortune and status through a series of bureaucratic offices. The first three books of the *Faerie Queene* were published in 1590. At this juncture, Spenser returned to London and presented himself at court. He obviously hoped for preferment. Elizabeth awarded him a pension of £50, but no position was forthcoming. He went back to Ireland, and in 1591 produced a volume of *Complaints*, in which he indicated that he was dissatisfied with his treatment at court. His sense of grievance was further expounded in *Colin Clovts come home againe*, published in 1595. The second installment of the *Faerie Queene* appeared in 1596. Spenser also composed an evaluation of *The present state of Ireland* in the mid 1590s. He died in 1599.¹⁰³

57 (pp. 235-41).

¹⁰³ There have been numerous biographies of Spenser. For an excellent summary of his career, see Andrew Hadfield, 'Spenser, Edmund (1552?-1599)', *DNB*, LI, 918-29. The reader should note that

Mother Hubberds tale was first published in 1591, as part of the *Complaints*. Spenser acknowledges his debt to Caxton's *History of Reynard* by naming his vulpine anti-hero 'Sir Reynold' (line 114).¹⁰⁴ The fable describes the process whereby two unsavoury characters, the Fox and the Ape, cheat, lie and scheme their way to the apex of the political pyramid. Penniless, unemployed and frustrated by the lack of opportunities open to them, the pair resolve to 'disguize' themselves, and seek their fortune in the world (83). First, the Ape pretends to be a wounded war veteran, with the Fox playing the part of his 'Curdog' (294). A charitable husbandman takes pity on the Ape, and offers to employ him as a shepherd. The Ape and the Fox live off their benefactor's livestock for half a year, then flee before their theft can be discovered. Having 'wandered long while, / Abusing manie through their cloaked guile', they reinvent themselves as clerks. They obtain a benefice; 'craftie Reynold' becomes a parish priest, with the Ape as his clerk (556). However, they abuse their offices so shamefully that they are threatened with a visitation. They run away again, and resolve to try their luck at court. The Ape plays the part of a gallant. He 'stalketh stately' into court, 'As if he were some great *Magnifico* / And boldlie doth among the boldest go'.¹⁰⁵ The Fox accompanies him in the guise of a groom. The Ape's wardrobe makes an instant impression:

For he was clad in strange accoustraments,

my list of Spenser's publications is by no means exhaustive; the texts referred to are those that seem most relevant to this analysis.

¹⁰⁴ Edmund Spenser, *Prosopopeia: or Mother Hubberds tale*, in *Edmund Spenser: the shorter poems*, ed. by Richard A. McCabe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999). All subsequent references to this edition.

¹⁰⁵ Compare these lines with Caxton's description of Reynard's arrival at court to face his accusers: 'reynart loked as he had not ben aferd / and helde hym better / than he was for he wente forth proudly with his neuue thurgh the hiest strete of the courte / right as he had ben the kynges sone'. Caxton, *Reynard*, p. 29.

Fashion'd with queint deuises neuer seene
In Court before, yet there all fashions beene

(672-4)

He also wins plaudits for his courtly accomplishments (being an ape, his supple joints make him particularly adept at dancing, vaulting and leaping). He lives a life of profligate degeneracy, funded by the 'coosinage and cleanly knauerie' of the Fox. One of Reynold's tricks is to extract bribes from hopeful suitors, 'To buy his Master's friuolous good will, / That had not power to do him good or ill' (889-90). Eventually, the Fox's 'craftie feates' are denounced, and he is banished from court (920). The Ape, 'wanting his huckster man', runs out of money and is unable to 'vpholde / His countenance' among his prodigal friends (925; 927-8). He leaves the court, and joins the Fox in miserable exile. One day, wandering aimlessly in the forest, they find the Lion asleep, 'His Crowne and Scepter lying him beside, / And hauing doft for heate his dreadfull hide' (953). The Fox persuades the Ape to steal the sceptre, crown and hide, and to impersonate the Lion. The pair install themselves in the palace, and the Fox misgoverns the realm as chief counsellor to his puppet, the 'mock-King' (1091). Finally, when everyone is groaning under the Fox's tyranny, Mercury descends from heaven to awaken the true king. The miscreants are punished, and order is restored.¹⁰⁶

Elements of *Mother Hubberds tale* invoke the *De curialium miseris* literary tradition. Like Peter of Blois, Aeneas Sylvius and Antonio de Guevara, Spenser dwells extensively upon the unrelenting grimness of life in the royal entourage. It seems reasonable to conclude that his rather savage satire was partially inspired by a personal sense of grievance. The Fox and the Ape embark upon their criminal careers when they

¹⁰⁶ The Ape has his tail cut off and his ears cropped. The Lion 'vncases' - skins - the Fox, then lets him go (1379-1384).

abandon hope of obtaining preferment legitimately. 'Thus manie yeares I now haue spent and worne', complains the Fox,

Dooing my Countrey seruice as I might,
No lesse I dare saie than the prowdest wight;
And still I hoped to be vp aduanced,
For my good parts; but still it hath mischaunced. (59; 61-4)

The Ape feels similarly overlooked:

For I likewise haue wasted much good time,
Still wayting to preferment vp to clime,
Whilst others alwayes haue before me stept,
And from my beard the fat away haue swept (75-8)

This sounds like the authentic voice of a disappointed place-seeker, who has recently made the painful discovery that there is (in Muriel Bradbrook's words) 'no room at the top'.¹⁰⁷ Later on in the poem, the revelation that the Fox and the Ape support themselves at court by persuading naïve suitors to part with their money prompts a seemingly heartfelt disquisition on 'What hell it is, in suing long to bide':

To loose good dayes, that might be better spent;
To wast long nights in pensieue discontent;
To speed to day, to be put back to morrow,
To feed on hope, to pine with feare and sorrow;
To haue thy Princes grace, yet want her Peeres;
To haue thy asking yet waite manie yeares;
To fret thy soule with crosses and with cares;
To eat thy heart through comfortlesse dispaire;
To fawne, to crowche, to waite, to ride, to ronne,
To spend, to giue, to want, to be vndonne. (896-206)

¹⁰⁷ Muriel Bradbrook, 'No room at the top: Spenser's pursuit of fame', in *Elizabethan poetry*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 2 (London: Edward Arnold, 1960), pp. 91-109.

We recognise a number of traditional tropes: the allusion to hell; the images of starvation; the description of frenetic yet futile exertion; and the reference to crucifixion ('crosses').¹⁰⁸ Yet Spenser identifies these formulaic torments with his own experiences in line 901: 'To haue thy Princes grace, yet want her Peeres'. The court that the Fox and the Ape grace with their graceless presence is presided over by a king – the unambiguously masculine Lion.¹⁰⁹ Spenser's use of the feminine pronoun clearly indicates that he is describing conditions at Elizabeth's court. In *Colin Clovts come home again*, he certainly suggested that his visit to the court of 'Cynthia' had been an education in demoralization.¹¹⁰

Spenser apparently blamed the lack of honest opportunities for able men at court upon the selfish ambition of Lord Burghley and his son, Robert Cecil. The Fox in *Mother Hubberds tale* craves power and status. When he and the Ape steal the trappings of royalty from the sleeping Lion, he is initially reluctant to cede the sceptre and crown to his accomplice. However, the Ape points out that

... I am in person, and in stature
 Most like a man, the Lord of euerie creature,
 So that it seemeth that I was made to raigne,
 And borne to be a Kingly soueraigne. (1029-32)

Accepting that his birth precludes him from reigning *de jure*, the Fox allows the Ape to 'haue both crowne and gouernment'

Vpon condition, that ye ruled bee

¹⁰⁸ C. Stephen Jaeger highlights Peter of Blois's alliterative reference to courtiers 'crucifying themselves with care' ('cruciant curis'). Jaeger, *Origins of courtliness*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁹ Between lines 950 and 1388, the Lion is invariably referred to as 'he' or 'him'.

¹¹⁰ Edmund Spenser, *Colin Clovts come home againe*, in *Shorter poems*, ed. by McCabe, lines 652-894. All subsequent references to this edition.

In all affaires, and counselled by mee;
And that ye let none other euer drawe
Your minde from me, but keepe this as a lawe ... (1050-4)

The Fox thus establishes himself as chief counsellor, with exclusive access to, and influence over, the so-called king. He amasses a fortune ‘vnder colour of the confidence / The which the Ape repos’d in him alone’ (1164-5). He justifies his exploitation of others in the name of prudence:

The cloke was care of thrift, and husbandry,
For to encrease the common treasures store;
But his owne treasure he encreased more (1170-2)

He builds a grand house for himself (1173-4). He alone presides over the distribution of privileges and commissions:

Nought suffered he the Ape to giue or graunt,
But through his hand must passe the Fiaunt.
All offices, all leases by him lept,
And of them all whatso he likte, he kept.
Iustice he solde iniustice for to buy,
And for to purchase for his progeny. (1143-8)

Claims that patronage was being monopolized, offices hoarded and justice bought and sold (particularly at the Court of Wards) were repeated *ad nauseum* by critics of the Cecils in the 1590s.¹¹¹ So were allegations of Cecilian nepotism. Spenser’s rehearsal of the latter complaint became offensively explicit when he wrote that Reynold

... loded [his children] with lordships and with might,
So much as they were able well to beare,

¹¹¹ See Joel Hurstfield, *Freedom, corruption and government in Elizabethan England* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), pp. 137-62.

That with the weight their backs nigh broken were ... (1154-6)

This was clearly a jibe at the physical deformity of Robert Cecil. As Gabriel Harvey remarked, Spenser 'ouer-shott' himself with such pointed satire.¹¹² Unlike the *Morall philosophie*, *Mother Hubberds tale* was scorched by what Thomas Nashe described as 'the sparkes of displeasure'.¹¹³ It was deemed sufficiently impertinent to warrant suppression, and, despite its popularity, was not reprinted until 1612.

It is widely accepted that Spenser composed the original version of *Mother Hubberds tale* in 1579-80. Dedicating the 1591 publication to Lady Compton, he described the fable as 'my idle labours; which hauing long sithens composed in the raw conceipt of my youth, I lately amongst other papers lighted vpon'.¹¹⁴ In 1910, Edwin Greenlaw argued persuasively that the poem was conceived as an attack upon the Anjou marriage negotiations.¹¹⁵ Greenlaw considered the final episode of *Mother Hubberds tale*, in which the Fox and the Ape usurp the kingly Lion. He submitted that the Fox was meant to represent Burghley, who was, at least, receptive to the idea of a match between Elizabeth and Anjou. The Fox's accomplice, the Ape, was a caricature of Anjou's servant Jean de Simier, who came to England to broker the terms of the proposed alliance, and whom Elizabeth nicknamed her Ape. Alternatively, Greenlaw suggested, the Ape might have been an anthropomorphic conflation of Simier and his master.¹¹⁶ According to this analysis,

¹¹² Gabriel Harvey, *Four letters, and certaine sonnets especially touching Robert Greene, and other parties, by him abused* (London: John Wolfe, 1592), p. 7.

¹¹³ Nashe, *Strange newes*, sig. E^r.

¹¹⁴ McCabe, *Spenser: shorter poems*, p. 234.

¹¹⁵ Edwin A. Greenlaw, 'Spenser and the Earl of Leicester', *PMLA*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1910), 535-61 (545-61).

¹¹⁶ Greenlaw, 'Spenser and Leicester', 548.

The purpose of the allegory is to show how a combination between Burghley and the French favorites threaten the Queen, who is unconscious of her peril. If the combination succeeds, Burghley, the fox, will really rule the weak king-consort who has no right to the throne ... while he and the fox plunder the country, subvert religion, virtually depose the rightful sovereign, and despoil the native beasts.¹¹⁷

Greenlaw's dating of the poem is convincing, not least because Spenser was part of the Dudley circle when Anjou's servant Jean de Simier (and subsequently the duke himself) arrived in England to broker the terms of the proposed alliance. Leicester had made his opposition to the marriage of Elizabeth and Anjou abundantly clear in 1578, when he wrote that the prospect 'maketh me afrayd'.¹¹⁸ Spenser may have contributed to a concerted literary campaign against the match. It is well known that Leicester encouraged Sidney, his nephew, to write a letter exhorting Elizabeth to reject the suit of a Catholic foreigner ('let those in whom you find trust, and to whom you have committed your trust, in your weighty affairs, be held up in the eyes of your subject').¹¹⁹ It seems unlikely that Spenser was explicitly commissioned to produce *Mother Hubberds tale*. However, at the time of the crisis he was eager to publicize his association with, and devotion to the interests of, Leicester. In a letter to Gabriel Harvey (dated 1579 and printed the following year) he boasted of being called upon 'to employ my time, my body, my minde, to his Honours service'.¹²⁰ It is perfectly plausible that he decided to circulate the fable to ingratiate himself with Leicester, and to advertise his affiliation to the earl. He was generally quite willing engage in

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 548-9.

¹¹⁸ NA, SP 83/7/73.

¹¹⁹ Philip Sidney, 'A letter to Queen Elizabeth anno 1580, dissuading her from marrying the duke of Anjou', in *The miscellaneous works of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. by William Grey (Boston: T. O. H. P. Burnham, 1809), pp. 287-303 (p. 303).

¹²⁰ Spenser and Harvey, *Three letters*, p. 60.

polemical warfare on behalf of his patrons. *A view of the present state of Ireland* defended Grey's militant colonial policy in the face of highly influential opposition. According to Conyers Read, Burghley 'observed that the Flemings had no such cause to protest against Spanish oppression as the Irish against the tyranny of England'.¹²¹ Spenser retorted that Ireland 'might haue bene brought to what her maiestie would' by Grey – but 'complainte was made against him, that he was a bloodye man, and regarded not the lyfe of her subiectes no more then dogges ... [T]he noble Lord estesoones was blamed, the wretched people pittied, and newe Counsells plotted ... vpon which all former purposes were blancked'.¹²² Similarly, in *Colin Clovts come home againe*, Spenser urged Elizabeth to restore his disgraced patron Raleigh to her favour:

[Raleigh's] song was all a lamentable lay,
 Of great vnkindnesse, and of vsage hard,
 Of *Cynthia* the Ladie of the sea,
 Which from her presence faultlesse him debard.¹²³

He evidently did not lack the self-assurance to champion the cause of a controversial sponsor. His allegory of the Fox and the Ape – a double portrait of the calculating upstart and the impressionable braggart – was probably planned as a partisan, strategic response to a particular set of political circumstances.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Conyers Read, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), p. 9.

¹²² Edmund Spenser, *A view of the present state of Ireland*, ed. by W. L. Renwick (London: Eric Partridge, 1934), p. 137.

¹²³ Spenser, *Colin Clovts come home againe*, lines 164-67.

¹²⁴ Quite apart from his desire to please Leicester, it seems likely that Spenser objected to the Anjou marriage proposal on the grounds of Anjou's Catholicism. The match was perhaps most notoriously opposed by John Stubbs in the *Gaping gulf* (1579). Spenser subsequently alluded to this infamous tract. In Book V of the *Faerie Queene*, the ogre Grantorto (usurper of legitimate authority in Ireland), is described as having a face that 'gaped like a gulfe, when he did gerne'. The reference is too specific to be coincidental. Spenser clearly intended to remind readers of Stubbs's opposition to the accommodation of popery in the British Isles. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton, rev. by Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow: Pearson Education and

Mother Hubberds tale engages directly with the ideals of the *Courtier*. Having described the Ape's arrival and reception at court, Spenser itemizes the attributes of the 'rightfull Courtier' (of which the Ape is emphatically not a specimen).¹²⁵ His inventory essentially summarizes Castiglione's dialogue. He observes that a good courtier is capable of 'knightly feates' (738-52). When not occupied athletically, he delights in music, love and 'Ladies gentle sports' (753-8). He improves himself with 'wise discourse' on all manner of subjects (759-67). He devotes himself to 'his Princes service':

Not so much for to gaine, or to raise
Himselfe to high degree, as for his grace,
And in his liking to winne worthie place ... (773-6)

He is a versatile, politically astute commonwealthsman:

For he is fit to vse in all assayes,
Whether for Armes and warlike amenaunce,
Or else for wise and ciuill gouernaunce.
For he is practiz'd well in policie,
And thereto doth his Courting most applie ... (780-4)

The approbative reference to the courtier's *practice of policy* (words that often carried censorious overtones) reflects Castiglione's belief that political acumen should be celebrated, not condemned. More significantly, the assertion that 'Courting' can be 'applied' to public service affirms the central thesis of the *Courtier*.

The Ape is cast as the antonym of the Urbino prototype. Whereas the latter abhors 'lothefull idlenes', the former wastes his time with 'thrifles games' and 'costly riotize'

Longman, 2001; rev. edn 2007), v. xii. 15. 8. All subsequent references to this edition.
¹²⁵ Spenser, *Mother Hubberds tale*, line 793.

(735; 801-5). The latter is a courtly lover; the former seeks only to seduce women with filthy, lascivious verses (757; 807-20). The latter is studious and devout; the former mocks the learned and the godly (832-43). The latter strives constantly to promote the common weal, to which the former is utterly indifferent: 'All his care was himselfe how to aduance / And to vphold his courtly countenance' (845-6). In Book II of the *Courtier*, Bibbiena considers 'What kinde of wayes ... those be that the Courtier ought to vse in causing laughter'. He warns that

to make men laugh alwayes is not comelie for the Courtier, nor yet in suche wise as frantike, dronken, foolishe and fonde men and in like maner commune iesters do: And though to a mans thinkinge Courtes cannot be without suche kinde of persons, yet deserue they not the name of a Courtier ... The scope and measure to make men laugh in tauntinge must also be diligently considered who he is that is taunted, for it prouoketh no laughter to mocke and skorne a seelye soule in miserie and calamitie, nor yet a naughtie knaue and commune ribaulde ...¹²⁶

Bibbiena concedes that laughter may be provoked 'whan a man repeteth with a good grace certein defaultes of other men, so they be meane and not worthy greater correction: as foolishe matters sometime symplye of themselues alone, sometime annexed with a litle readie nippinge fondnesse'.¹²⁷ However, he insists that 'the Courtier must be circumspect that he appeere not malitious and venimous and speake tauntes and quippies only for spite and to touch the quick'.¹²⁸ Spenser, who was surely familiar with Bibbiena's advice, presented the Ape as an incurable scoffer:

For he therein had great felicitie;
And with sharp quips ioy'd others to deface,

¹²⁶ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Si^r-v.

¹²⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Siii^v.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. Tiii^r.

Thinking that their disgracing did him grace:
So whilst that other like vaine wits he pleased,
And made to laugh, his heart was greatly eased.
But the right gentle minde would bite his lip,
To heare the Iauell so good men to nip ...

(704-12)¹²⁹

The description of the Ape at court is so uncomfortably evocative of conventional conduct manuals that Richard Rambus has referred to *Mother Hubberd's tale* as 'a kind of demonic *Il Cortegiano*'.¹³⁰ Throughout Spenser's work, we encounter heavenly types and their diabolical anti-types.¹³¹ Stuart Clark has highlighted the dualistic instincts of many early modern theologians, who imagined Satan's kingdom to be an inversion of God's natural order.¹³² The juxtaposition of the Ape and the 'rightfull courtier' exemplify this propensity for mirror-image dualism.

Like the *Reynard the fox* and the *Morall philosophie*, *Mother Hubberds tale* presents us with an image of the court in which the good and the bad coexist. Spenser endorses Castiglione's concept of a 'perfect Courtier', and takes the trouble to provide a detailed description of how such a paragon would think and act.¹³³ Nonetheless, he recognises that the court acts as a magnet for the baser sort - the covetous, the idle, the dishonest, the riotous and the personally ambitious. The most alarming inference we draw from the fable is that corrupt courtiers are often strikingly successful. Direct divine

¹²⁹ In Book III of the *Covrtyer*, Lord Caesar Gonzaga also observes that 'to report yll and to studie for inuentions how to bringe vp sclauderous tales of some woorthie gentilwoman, is a kinde of Courtiers.' Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Gg ii^v.

¹³⁰ Richard Rambus, *Spenser's secret career* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 89.

¹³¹ In Book I of the *Faerie Queene*, for example, the Redcrosse Knight divides his time between the faithful holy maiden, Una, and the irreligious whore, Duessa. The antithetical dissimilarity of the two women is not immediately apparent to the knight. Indeed, they initially appear interchangeable, and Redcrosse temporarily substitutes Duessa for Una as his travelling companion. Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, I. iv. 2. 1-4. It is only when Duessa has literally been stripped of her disguise that he can appreciate what a 'fowle deformed wight' she really is. Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, I. viii. 49. 2.

¹³² Stuart Clark, 'Inversion, misrule and the meaning of witchcraft', *Past and Present*, vol. 87 (May, 1980), 98-127.

¹³³ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ciii^r.

intervention is required before the Fox and the Ape receive what might be considered their comeuppance. Furthermore, Spenser's description of the Fox's punishment is rather ambiguous. We are told that the Lion 'did vncase' the Fox - 'and then away let flie' (1380). The 'first Author of that treacherie' is thus released into the world, to continue wreaking mayhem and mischief (1379). All the courtly beast fables that we have considered lack morally satisfying endings. Reynard is subjected to trial by combat; the Moyle is condemned for his treason; and the Fox and the Ape are punished with judicial mutilation. Justice is ostentatiously administered. Yet Reynard wins his duel, and is richly rewarded thereafter. The Moyle's conviction enriches and empowers the perfidious Fox. Spenser's Fox is allowed to escape after his 'uncasing'. We are left with a nagging sensation that the wicked will always be able to flourish at court.

In the anti-courtier literary tradition, the beast fable was strongly associated with the caricature of the rapacious and exploitative courtier. For centuries, animal imagery had been used to describe the predatory greed of court acolytes. We recall the reference to a 'cat of the court' in *Piers Plowman*, and Agrippa's comparison of courtiers with birds of prey.¹³⁴ The beast fable represented a logical extension of such analogies. By casting bad courtiers as animals, the authors of such fables could imply that their protagonists lacked the compassion and charity that constitute basic humanity. Beast fables were also well adapted to promulgate the Machiavellian image of the courtier. Machiavelli's advocacy of vulpine politics dovetailed (so to speak) with medieval narratives featuring devious foxes. Reynard stepped readily into the role of a Florentine politique. His representation in this capacity exemplifies the meshing of old and new devices in

¹³⁴ See chapter four.

Elizabethan anti-courtier discourse.

Verse satire

The axiom that palaces are packed with fools and knaves defined the image of the courtier in Elizabethan verse satire. Folly and knavery are, of course, the raw ingredients for satire. Following the example of the Roman poets Horace, Persius and Juvenal, Renaissance satirists aspired to make the former risible, and the latter contemptible.¹³⁵ These two objectives – to prompt laughter, and to evoke revulsion – were usually distinguished. Like Bibbiena in the *Courtier*, authors accepted that laughter was not an appropriate response to gross wickedness. Polydore Vergil wrote that

A Satyre is a poesy rebuking vyces sharply not regardyng any persons. There be two kyndes of Satyres, the one is bothe among the Grekes and Romanes of auncient tyme vsed, for the diuersytie of Meters much like a Comodye, sauynge that it is more wanton ... The seconde maner of Satyres is verye railynge, onely ordeyned to rebuke vyce, and deuysed of the Romaynes vpon this occasion.¹³⁶

The didactic agenda of satire (theoretically) justified its abuses and obscenities. Yet, whereas the authors of fables tended to represent their stories as pleasant confections of truth sweetened by fiction, satirists emphasized the sharply corrective nature of their work. Thomas Drant, the Elizabethan translator of Horace, defined a satire as ‘a tarte,

¹³⁵ For a succinct discussion of classical influences in Elizabethan verse satire, see K. W. Gransden, ‘Introduction’, in *Tudor verse satire*, ed. by Gransden (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 1-29 (esp. pp. 1-17).

¹³⁶ Polydore Vergil, *An abridgement of the notable woorke of Polidore Vergile conteignyng the deuisers and firste finders out as well of artes, ministeries, feactes & ciuill ordinaunces, as of rites, and ceremonies, commonly vsed in the churche*, ed. by Thomas Langley (London: Richard Grafton, 1546), sig. xviii^v.

and carping kinde of verse, / An instrument to pynche the pranke of men'. Drant added that

The Satyryst must be a waspe in moode,
Testie, and wrothe with vice and hers, to see both blamde,
But courteous and frendly to the good ...¹³⁷

Alongside analogies of nipping and stinging, satirical writing was often likened to a lash. John Marston, for example, named his collection of satires *The scourge of villanie*. Nicholas Breton also claimed that 'the Satyre bites at imperfections', in his wonderfully entitled *No whippinge, nor trippinge: but a kinde friendly snippinge*.¹³⁸

Breton and other satirists found plenty to 'snip' at in courtiers. The lunacy of going to court at all, when one was so unlikely to prosper there, inspired many satirical verses.

Thomas Churchyard purported to have done the maths:

Who spends his time, in Court God knowse,
Maie happ to winne, and sure to lose:
For losse is liker there to fall,
Then any happie chaunce at all ...
A thousand gapes for one mans gaine,
And fifteene hundreth lose their paine.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Thomas Drant, 'Priscus Grammaticus de Satyra', in *Horace, his arte of poetrie, pistle, and satyrs Englished*, trans. by Drant (London: Thomas Marshe 1567), sig. Hviii^v.

¹³⁸ Nicholas Breton, *No whippinge, nor trippinge: but a kinde friendly snippinge* (London: [R. Bradocke?] for John Browne and John Deane, 1601), sig. A4^v.

¹³⁹ Thomas Churchyard, 'Written from the country twentie yere agoe, to one that poorely remaines at the Courte yet', in *A pleasaunte laborinth called Churchyardes chance framed on fancies* (London: John Kingston, 1580), fols 19^v - 20^r. In truncating Churchyard's verses, I am following the format of Bod. MS Douce 363, fol. 144^v:

He that doth dwell at Cowrte, God knowes
Maye hap to winne, but shure to lose
For losse is liker there to fall
Then any happi chance at all
Two thowsand gape, for one mans gaine
And xix hundred lost their payne

In the manuscript, the name 'M. Rogers' is inscribed beside these lines.

Only an idiot, we infer, would accept those odds. Thomas Palmer also pondered the great uncertainty of a courtier's fortune:

The kinge in courte, as cause requires
& as desert doth grow,
Some settes alofte in highe estate:
and some he bringeth lowe.
Today a man that rules the roste:
Tomorrow but an ace:
Today a man of small accompte:
to morrowe chiefe in place.¹⁴⁰

Palmer's reflections were probably prompted by personal experience. His promising career at the University of Oxford was cut short in 1564, when he resigned as principal of Gloucester Hall only a year after taking up the appointment. His Catholicism proved to be an insuperable obstacle to further advancement, and he retreated to his family home in Essex.¹⁴¹ According to Anthony a Wood, he 'suffered much in his Person and Estate for Religion sake'.¹⁴² Contemplating the wreckage of his career, this former Ciceronian scholar may have consoled himself with the thought that public life was, after all, little more than a wretched form of servitude.¹⁴³ His poem assessing *The courtier's state* used the traditional device of contrasting the luxuries available to courtiers with the constraints that prevented them from enjoying those luxuries.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ BL, Sloane MS 3794, fol. 13^v.

¹⁴¹ Percy Simpson, 'Two emblem books: Thomas Palmer's emblems in Ashmole MS. 767', *Bodleian Quarterly Record*, vol. 6, no. 67 (third quarter, 1930), 172-3.

¹⁴² Anthony à Wood, *Athenæ Oxonienses: an exact history of all the writers and bishops who have had their education in the most ancient and famous University of Oxford, from the fifteenth year of King Henry the seventh, Dom. 1500, to the end of the year 1690*, 2 vols (London: Tho. Bennet, 1691-2), I (1691), 713.

¹⁴³ Wood, *Athenæ Oxonienses*, I, 713: '[Palmer] was an excellent Orator, and the best of his time for a Ciceronian Stile. He collected several matters from *Cicero*, which coming to the view of the *learned Camden*, he judged them very fit to be printed.'

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Chartier, *Lettre*, sig. iii^v.

He that in princes courte abydes,
his fare is of the beste:
He clothed is in riche attyre,
his lyfe seemes to be bleste.
Yet is he not his owne free man,
the bounde must nedes obaye:
ffast tyed by the legge he is,
he cannot start away.¹⁴⁵

Palmer concluded that the emblem of a courtier should be ‘A goodly golden payre of stockes, / declaringe his estate’.¹⁴⁶

Other satirists likened the courtier’s self-inflicted misery to hunger and thirst. Ulpian Fulwell warned of the endless, aching want that awaited the place-seekers who flocked to court:

When first I came to Fortunes Court, with hope of happy speede,
I sawe the fruite like *Tantalus*, but might not thereon feede.
I smeld the rost, but felt no taste, my hunger to augment:
I might behold the fragrant Wines, and follow by the sent ...¹⁴⁷

These lines are taken from Fulwell’s *Ars adulandi, or, the art of flattery*, a collection of eight dialogues excoriating the sycophancy and venality of clergymen and courtiers.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ BL, Sloane MS 3794, fol. 34^r.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ulpian Fulwell, *The firste parte, of the eygth liberall Science: entituled, ars adulandi, the arte of flatterie with the confutation therof* (London: [William How for] Richard Jones, 1579), sig. Fiiii^v.

¹⁴⁸ *Ars adulandi* was first published in 1576, and was dedicated to Burghley’s wife Mildred. Fulwell was a clergyman, and one of his primary objectives in producing the dialogues was to discomfort his ecclesiastical enemies. He succeeded in doing so, to the extent that the court of high commission in London forced him to apologise to those whom he had offended. A revised version of Fulwell’s satire was published in 1579. Roberta Buchanan, ‘Introduction’, in Ulpian Fulwell, *Ars adulandi, or, the art of flattery*, ed. by Buchanan (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1984) iv-lxx (xx-xxiii). In the ‘corrected’ edition of 1579, Fulwell backtracked on some of his criticism of the court. Like the Elizabethan publishers of David Lindsay’s *Dialogue betweene experience and a courtier*, he sought to pass off his anti-courtier satire as an indictment of ‘the wide world’. Fulwell, *Ars adulandi*, sig. Aiiii^v – B^r. He also left out an approving allusion to Agrippa’s ‘displaynge of courtiers in his booke de vanitate scienciarum’. See Ulpian Fulwell, *T[h]e first part of the eight liberall science: entituled, ars adulandi, the art of flattery with the confutation thereof* (London: William Hoskins, 1576), fol. 42^r. Fulwell’s citation of Agrippa’s *Vanitie* identified the 1576

The reference to Tantalus evokes the old adage that the court is Hell, and its inhabitants the damned. Images of starvation could also be coupled with zoological metaphors. In a widely transcribed verse by the earl of Essex, the narrator adopts the persona of a 'seely bee', who delights in the presence of his Queen and is devoted to her service. However, he can obtain no nourishment:

I suckt the wedes, when moone was in *the* wane,
Whilst all the rest in sonneshyne tasted rose,
On black fearne rootes I seke to suck my bane,
When on the Eglentyne the rest repose.
Having to much they still repine for more,
And cloyed with swetenes surffitt in their store ...¹⁴⁹

We are surely invited to ask ourselves whether the bee is a fool to continue paying court to the Queen, when his only reward is 'To see some caterpillars vpstart of late / Cropping the flowers that should sustayn *the* bee'.¹⁵⁰ If we conclude that he is a fool, we acknowledge that honest, disinterested service accomplishes nothing at the court of Elizabeth.¹⁵¹ This admission casts a nihilistic question mark over the feasibility of Castiglionean courtiership.

The courtier was thus derided for being a willing drudge, lured into the prince's orbit by the promise of honour or wealth, but unable to find sustenance. Court service was presented as a young man's game, to be abandoned when the disillusioned prospector

text unambiguously with the anti-courtier literary tradition. Roberta Buchanan suggests that Fulwell sought to downplay this association in 1579 because he was 'relying on his court connections ... to protect him from the ecclesiastical establishment'. Buchanan, 'Introduction', lxviii-lxix.

¹⁴⁹ Bod. MS Rawl. Poet 112, fol. 9^r.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., fol. 9^v.

¹⁵¹ The Queen Bee is undoubtedly Elizabeth; the poet's reference to the fortunate insects who 'on the Eglentyne repose' is unambiguous. Elizabeth was often associated with eglantine: see Roy Strong, *The cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan portraiture and pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977; repr. 1987), pp. 68-73.

was older and wiser. ‘Fare well thou courte the house of care & greeffe’, exclaimed an anonymous poet, writing around 1590, ‘steppdame to youth a flatterer of tyme’.¹⁵² A number of authors urged embattled courtiers to retire to the country, contrasting the purity and peace of the provinces with the hateful grind of life in the metropolis.¹⁵³ Churchyard sought to lure a courtly friend aware from London:

It is as vaine in Court to hope,
As seeke a blessing of the Pope.
Come let vs ride abrode this Spryng,
As mery a harte as any kyng ...¹⁵⁴

In 1589, the acerbic social commentator Thomas Lodge published a poem ‘In commendation of a solitarie life’.¹⁵⁵ Lodge confessed that he aspired to ‘liue contented wise’:

But gentle Muse, where boadeth this content?
The Princes Court is fraught with endlesse woes,
Corruptions flocke where honors doo frequent,
The Cities swarme with plagues, with sutes, with foes:
High climbing wits doo catch a sodein fall,

¹⁵² BL, Add. MS 15232, fol. 13^v. For the dating of this and other poems, I have followed Steven W. May and W. A. Ringler, *Elizabethan poetry: a bibliography and first-line index of English verse, 1559-1603*, 3 vols (London and New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004).

¹⁵³ Anti-courtier satire was closely allied to the pastoral genre. After all, the common denominator of satirical writing was criticism of the World, by which was meant human society. The city and the court epitomized the World; they were man-made environments, packed with fallen men and women. The countryside, by contrast, was God’s creation, and could be represented as a prelapsarian paradise. Satirists pointedly praised its perfection, throwing the city and court into unflattering relief. Indeed, early modern poets often conflated the Latin word ‘satire’ with the Greek word ‘satyr’, which refers to an untamed, unschooled creature of the woods. The satyr-ist could thus present himself as a rude critic of civilization, uncorrupted by its values and norms. See Alvin Kernan, *The cankered muse: satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 81-140.

¹⁵⁴ Churchyard, *Churchyardes chance*, fol. 20^v.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Lodge, ‘In commendation of a solitarie life’, in *Scillaes metamorphosis: enterlaced with the vnfortunate loue of Glaucus. Whereunto is annexed the delectable discourse of the discontented satyre: with sundrie other most absolute poems and sonnets* (London: Richard Jones, 1589), sig. E^f – E2^f. *Scillaes metamorphosis* was advertised on the title page as ‘verie fit for young courtiers to peruse’.

With none of these Content list dwell withall.¹⁵⁶

The solution, according to Lodge, is to follow the example of Virgil and seek inspiration and solace in rural seclusion:¹⁵⁷

Sweete solitarie life thou true repose,
Wherein the wise contemplate heauen aright:
In thee no dread of warre or worldly foes,
In thee no pompe seduceth mortall sight,
In thee no wanton eares to win with words,
Nor lurking toyes, which Citie life affords.¹⁵⁸

Other poets adopted the persona of a rustic innocent who ventures into the court and beats a hasty retreat, shocked by the misery and vice he encounters there. Spenser famously employed this device in *Colin Clout's come home againe*. The gentle swain Colin Clout, having recently returned from a sojourn in Cynthia's entourage, discusses his amazing impressions of court life with his stay-at-home friends. The latter are curious:

...Why, *Colin*, since thou foundst such grace
With Cynthia and all her noble crew:
Why didst thou euer leaue that happie place,
In which such wealth might vnto thee accrew?
And back returnedst to this barrein soyle,
Where cold and care and penury do dwell:
Here to keep sheepe, with hunger and with toyle,
Most wretched he, that is and cannot tell. (652-659)

We should note that the speaker, Thestylis, emphatically does *not* depict the countryside

¹⁵⁶ Lodge, *Scillaes metamorphosis*, sig. E^r.

¹⁵⁷ Lodge paid tribute to Virgil when he praised the 'wondrous beauties [that] blesse my drooping eine': 'Euen such as earst the shepherd in the shade / Beheld, when he a Poet once was made'. Lodge, *Scillaes metamorphosis*, sig. E^r.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, sig. E^v.

as Elysium; he rather suggests that it is a grim and inhospitable environment in which impoverished labourers eke out a miserable existence. The sense of lowering oppression is accentuated by the closing lines of the poem, in which Spenser states that the shepherds dispersed under ‘glooming skies’ that ‘Warnd them to draw their bleating flocks to rest’ (995-6). Yet Colin makes it clear that even this dour and dangerous life is preferable to royal service. No-one is safe, and there is no repose, at court, ‘Where each one seeks with malice and with strife, / To thrust downe other into foule disgrace’ (690-1). Success depends upon ‘deceitfull wit’, ‘subtil shifts’ and ‘finest sleights’ (693). The honest man is helpless, surrounded by enemies whose ill intentions are ‘Masked with faire dissembling curtesie (700). Erudition is held in contempt (702). Appearances count for everything, ‘For each mans worth is measured by his weed’. Lovers are ignorant of courtship’s ‘mightie mysteries’, aspiring only to ‘lewd speeches and licentious deeds’ (787-8). Cynthia’s acolytes thus debase, or misapply, every positive quality that Castiglione attributes to the Courtier. Their ‘wit’ is malevolent cunning; their ‘curtesie’ a smokescreen; their learning mere ‘Courtiers schoolery’ (702); and their wooing an excuse for debauchery. To live among such degenerates is ‘no sort of life / For shepheard fit to lead’, and rural poverty is the better of two unappealing alternatives (688-9).

A comparable satire by the poet and playwright Anthony Munday, ‘The wood-man’s walke’, was published in *Englands Helicon* in 1600.¹⁵⁹ Munday’s woodman describes how he lived alone in the forest, ‘till wearie of my weale: / Abroade in walkes I would

¹⁵⁹ Anthony Munday, ‘The wood-mans walke’, in John Bodenham, *Englands Helicon Casta placent superis, pura cum veste ventie, et manibus puris sumite fontis aquam* (London: J. R[oberts] for John Flasket, 1600), sig. A2 3^v- A2 4^v.

repaire'. His first 'walk' took him to the court, 'where Beautie fed mine eyes'. However, he 'found no ioy' there. He was plagued by liars and back-stabbers, and learned that 'Desert went naked in the cold, / when crouching craft was s[p]ed'.¹⁶⁰ After trying a number of other unsatisfactory lifestyles, he returned to his solitary existence in the woods, 'Where I found ease of all this paine / and meane to stray no more'.¹⁶¹

The verses that we have considered thus far depict the courtier as a victim of his own stupidity. He embraces his miserable bondage, and clamours for admission at the gates of Hell. His predicament is rather pitiful. However, many satirists sought to demonstrate that courtiers were guilty of far more than folly. At some point before 1585, Sir Thomas Heneage composed a sonnet that itemized the transgressions habitually committed by courtiers (their name was legion).¹⁶² Heneage himself, we should note, was a remarkably successful courtier, who enjoyed the favour of Elizabeth and the patronage of Leicester over a period of decades.¹⁶³ His sonnet, *Idle or els but seldom busied best*, did not serve any obvious political purpose. It was simply an exercise in anti-courtier satire, and was probably designed to show off Heneage's literary talents to a select circle of court associates.¹⁶⁴ It condemned 'Courtiership' as a 'vayne'

¹⁶⁰ Munday, 'Wood-mans walke', sig. A2 3^v.

¹⁶¹ Interestingly, the woodman rejects the company of country people, finding them sly and money-grubbing (sig. A2 4^{r-v}). His extreme misanthropy – he is unable to tolerate any form of human society – highlights the flippancy of Munday's satire. Nonetheless, the poem is illustrative of the way in which courtiers were deemed to embody and exemplify the vices that plagued other sections of the body politic.

¹⁶² Thomas Heneage, 'Idle or els but seldome busied best', reproduced in Steven W. May, *The Elizabethan courtier poets: the poems and their contexts* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1991), p. 341. For May's dating of the poem, see p. 60.

¹⁶³ Michael Hicks, 'Heneage, Sir Thomas (b. in or before 1532, d. 1595)', *DNB*.

¹⁶⁴ *Idle or els but seldom busied best* was never widely circulated. Steven May observes that 'All six of Sir Thomas's known poems exist in unique copies which saw little or no manuscript circulation, nor was he referred to as a poet by contemporaries'. May, *Elizabethan courtier poets*, p. 61.

endeavour, prosecuted in a place where 'faith is rare, thoe fayrest wordes be rife':

Heare learne we vice, and looke one vertue's bookes;
Heare, fine deceit, we hould for courtly skill,
Our care is hear, to waite one wordes and lookes
And greatest worke to follow others' will.

The notion that the court served as a school of sin was well established. A late fifteenth century satire - *Le doctrinal du temps présent*, by Pierre Michault - imagined aspiring courtiers being sent to learn their trade at the Faculty of Vice.¹⁶⁵ Heneage proceeded to rehearse a familiar medley of indictments:

Heare, scorne, a grace, and pride, is present thoughte,
Mallice, but mighte, and fowlest shiftes, no shame;
Lust, but delighte, and playnest dealing noughte,
Whear flattery lykes, and trothe, beares oftest blame ...

The suggestion that courtiers habitually re-branded vice as virtue (or at least as innocent pleasure) recalls Roger Ascham's invective against 'graceless' gallants.¹⁶⁶ Like Ascham, Heneage represents the courtier's code of conduct as a wilful travesty of conventional morality. The reader is almost nudged to the conclusion that this topsyturvy world is irredeemably corrupt, and will inevitably blight the soul of anyone who comes within its orbit. However, any inclination to blame the system is emphatically disallowed by the final couplet: 'Yet is the cause, not in the place I finde / But all the fault is in the faulty mynde'. Heneage thus constructs an elegant denunciation of the 'faulty' courtier's manners and values. He follows the example of medieval moralists by characterizing the corrupt court acolyte through reference to the seven deadly sins.

¹⁶⁵ Anglo, 'Courtier: changing ideals', p. 34.

¹⁶⁶ Ascham, *Scholemaster*, fol. 14^v.

Traditional, homiletic anti-courtier satire appealed to men and women within and without the court throughout the sixteenth century. Its popularity was not seriously dented by the deferential reception of the *Courtier* in England, because Castiglione had sought to define the ‘perfect Courtier’.¹⁶⁷ His dialogue established a model of excellence to which Elizabethan courtiers could, and often did, aspire. Satirists, by contrast, were not concerned with paragons, but with their anti-types. They could deride and deplore the ‘bad’ courtier without impinging upon the ideal of the ‘good’ courtier. In the 1590s, however, a group of London-based ‘wits’ began to challenge the *Courtier* directly. They did so in the context of sweeping Juvenalian satires that identified a number of social and professional ‘characters’, and demolished each in turn.¹⁶⁸ The poet and playwright John Marston’s archetypal courtier was ‘the absolute *Castilio* / He that can all the points of courtship show’:

He that can trot a Courser, break a rush,
 And arm’d in prooffe, dare dure a strawes strong push.
 He, who on his glorious scutchion
 Can quaintly show wits *newe* inuention,
 Aduancing forth some, thirstie *Tantalus*,
 Or els the Vulture on Promethius,
 With some short motto of a dozen lines,
 He that can purpose it in dainty rimes ...¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ciii^r.

¹⁶⁸ John Marston, for example, lambasted ‘mechanick slaue[s]’, ‘quaint fashion-monger[s]’ and members of ‘the Lawyers Inne’ with the same (apparent) fervour that breathed through every word of his attack upon the courtier. John Marston, *The scourge of villanie: three bookes of satyres* (London: J[ames] R[oberts] for Iohn Buzbie, 1598), sig. B[1]^r; John Marston, *The metamorphosis of Pigmaliions image and certaine satyres* (London: [James Robert] for Edmond Matts, 1598), pp. 29-30. Everard Guilpin was indiscriminately scathing about courtiers, poets, vain women and the general populace. See Everard Guilpin, *Skialetheia: or, a shadowe of truth, in certaine epigrams and satyres*, ed. by D. Allen Carroll (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974).

¹⁶⁹ Marston, *Pigmaliions image*, p. 29.

This was clearly an attack upon Castiglione's concept of the chivalrous courtier. At the Accession Day tilts, the participating luminaries of Elizabeth's court carried *impreses*, which were presented to the queen and subsequently displayed at Whitehall.¹⁷⁰ Camden defined an *impresa* as 'a device with his Motte, or Word, borne by noble and learned personages, to notifie some particular conceit of their owne'.¹⁷¹ It demonstrated that a courtier's martial prowess, soon to be proved in the lists, was complemented by his learning and mental agility.¹⁷² This combination of athleticism, erudition and wit was widely associated with the *Book of the Courtier*. Hence, Marston's scutcheon-carrying courtier is an 'absolute *Castilio*'. However, his shield is embellished with images that have been used for centuries to illustrate the depravity and misery of court acolytes. Tantalus and the scavenger bird were familiar emblems of anti-courtier discourse. We can, if we choose, deconstruct the devices suggested by Marston a little further. The images of Tantalus reaching for sustenance that always eludes him, and of the vulture ripping out Prometheus's liver over and over again, suggest voracious appetite and unending torture – both of which were deemed intrinsic to the courtier's condition. We might also like to consider the crimes that brought Prometheus and Tantalus to their respective predicaments; both were arrogant and ambitious, overreaching themselves in attempts to undermine the edicts and authority of the gods.¹⁷³ Again, critics of the court

¹⁷⁰ Strong, *Cult of Elizabeth*, pp. 144-6.

¹⁷¹ William Camden, *Remaines of a greater worke, concerning Britaine* (London: G[eorge] E[ld] for Simon Waterson, 1605), p. [158].

¹⁷² See Crane, *Framing authority*, pp. 130-3.

¹⁷³ Prometheus gave fire to mankind, against the wishes of Zeus. Tantalus 'bid the Gods to a banquet, and he being desyrus to make a triall of their deitie, when they appeared at his house in mennes likenes, did slea his own sonne *Pelops* and set him before them to be eaten'. Sebastian Münster, *A briefe collection and compendious extract of the straunge and memorable things, gathered oute of the*

had long argued that such tragic flaws were typical of its inhabitants. Through his *impresa*, Castilio thus reveals his unreconstructed viciousness. Marston subverts the new ideal of a courtier by saddling it, so to speak, with the iconography of medieval anti-courialism.

The satire proceeds with a swipe at the Urbinese model of the courtier-lover. Castilio, claims Marston, can only woo with hackney gestures and banal platitudes. He can ‘dally with his Mistres dangling seake, / And wish that he were it, to kisse her eye / And flare about her beauties deitie’.¹⁷⁴ That is about his limit. In the *Scourge of villanie*, Marston dismissed ‘perfum’d Castilio’ as an idiot

Who nere read farther then his Mistris lips,
Nere practiz’d ought, but som spruce capring skips
Nere in his life did other language vse,
But, Sweete Lady, faire Mistres, kind hart, deare couse ...¹⁷⁵

He was similarly scathing about the Courtier’s proficiency as a lover in his Italianate tragedy, *Antonio and Mellida* (c. 1600). The play features a popinjay named Signor Castilio Balthazar, who boasts of the love letters he has received from the besotted ladies of Piero’s court. Challenged to produce one such epistle, he shows his companion a ‘seeming letter’, which turns out to be an unpaid tailor’s bill (III. 2. 91-106).¹⁷⁶ He thus has the props of a lover; but on closer inspection they prove inauthentic. His financial insolvency, highlighted by the unpaid bill, reflects a general

cosmographie of Sebastian Munster, trans. by [Richard Eden?] (London: Thomas Marshe, 1572), fol. 53^v.

¹⁷⁴ Marston, *Pigmaliions image*, p. 29.

¹⁷⁵ Marston, *Scourge of villanie*, sig. B^r-^v.

¹⁷⁶ John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida*, ed. by W. Reavley Gair, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991; repr. 2004).

lack of resources.

Having damned the Urbino Courtier with sarcastic praise, Marston switched brutally to a full frontal assault:

Tut, he is famous for his reuling,
For fine sette speeches, and for sonnetting,
He scornes the viol and the scraping sticke,
And yet's but Broker of anothers wit.
Certes if all things were well knowne and view'd
He doth but champe that which another chew'd.¹⁷⁷

The allusion to regurgitation recalls some of the more revolting imagery of the *De curialium miseriis* literary tradition.¹⁷⁸ Marston completed his exposé of Castilio's inadequacy with an annihilating exhortation:

Come come Castilion, skim thy posset curd,
Shew thy queere substance, worthlesse, most absurd.
Take ceremonious complement from thee,
Alas, I see Castilio's beggary.¹⁷⁹

Marston thus claimed to have dispelled the smoke and shattered the mirrors surrounding the Courtier, to unmask him for the beggar he was.

Everard Guilpin was equally brutal in his treatment of the Urbino prototype. He railed against the disingenuous politics practised by modern, Italianate courtiers. Guilpin described 'curtesie' as a 'mumming device, taught by Signior Machiauell'. He then

¹⁷⁷ Marston, *Pigmaliions image*, p. 30.

¹⁷⁸ See chapter four.

¹⁷⁹ Marston, *Pigmaliions image*, p. 30.

turned his attention to Castiglione: ‘Come to the Court, and Balthazar affords / Fountains of holy and rose-water words’.¹⁸⁰ The reference to ‘holy and rose-water words’ was confessionally loaded, recalling what Guilpin, and many of his readers, would have regarded as Catholic superstition. It also hints at Balthazar’s lack of substance; holy water was a metaphor for something that promised much, but delivered no results. In 1600, John Chamberlain reported that supporters of the disgraced earl of Essex were hopeful that their patron would soon be restored to royal favour. However, until Elizabeth graced Essex with a meaningful boon (such as the renewal of his patent for sweet wines), Chamberlain resolved to ‘esteem words as winde and holy water of court’.¹⁸¹ Guilpin’s satire thus associated Castiglionean court culture with popery, pretence and *politique* practice:

...all our actions in a simpathy
 Doe daunce an anticke with hypocrisie,
 And motley fac’d Dissimulation,
 Is crept into our euey fashion ...¹⁸²

Machiavelli and Castiglione stood jointly accused (and convicted) of ‘hypocrisie’ and ‘Dissimulation’.

Much Elizabethan anti-courtier satire can be identified with the *De curialium miseriis* and *exeat aula* schools of literature. One of the primary functions of satire is to expose human folly. Under the auspices of this remit, numerous satirists sought to highlight the folly of courtiers by insisting that the lifestyle they freely embraced was

¹⁸⁰ In Marston’s *Antonio and Mellida*, Signor Castilio Balthazar enters ‘with a casting bottle of sweet water in his hand, sprinkling himself’. *Antonio and Mellida*, s.d. III. 2. 24.

¹⁸¹ *The letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. by N. E. McClure, 2 vols (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1939), I, 107.

¹⁸² Guilpin, *Skialetheia*, pp. [65]-[66].

unremittingly wretched. Moreover, it was liable to suck all but the most resolute souls into a vortex of wickedness and dissipation. Yet most courtiers were too idiotic, or blind, to appreciate that they would be physically, financially and morally better off in the countryside. The latter location was invoked to illuminate the crass stupidity of those who rejected it. The satirists' interest in folly and moral degeneracy also encouraged them to construct traditional caricatures of the court popinjay. This perfumed, plumed, luxurious, lascivious fop was ridiculous and repugnant in equal measure. Significantly, by the end of the sixteenth century, he was associated with Castiglione's Courtier.

Throughout the Elizabethan era, anti-courtier literature was written, read and enjoyed by court veterans and laymen alike. Its prevalence initially did little or nothing to undermine the credibility of the *Courtier*. After all, Castiglione himself acknowledged that virtue and vice flourished side by side in the households of the great. He wrote that critics of the court

woulde haue all goodnesse in the worlde withoute any yll, which ys vnpossible. For synce yll is contrarie to good, and good to yll, it is (in a maner) necessarie by contrarietye and a certayne counterpese the one should vnderprompe and strengthen the other, and where the one wanteth or encreaseth, the one to want or encrease also: because no contrarye is wythoute hys other contraye.¹⁸³

Castiglione's thesis was simply that a courtier need not be vicious – that he could, in fact, serve the commonwealth as truly and honestly as anyone, and perhaps more effectively than most. In the 1580s and 90s, however, dramatists and satirists began to

¹⁸³ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Li^v.

interrogate this thesis. They became increasingly critical of the performance based politics advocated by Castiglione and Machiavelli. The association of these two figures was hardly likely to improve Castiglione's reputation. Perhaps Castiglione was also, to a certain extent, a victim of his own success. His dialogue was so widely renowned and respected that authors such as Marston, Guilpin and Spenser felt the need to address it when censuring courtiers. Conventional complaints about the court, couched in formulaic language and following ancient or medieval blueprints, were therefore directed at Castiglione. The esteem in which the *Courtier* was held posed a difficult question: why, after its teachings had been read, learned and inwardly digested, was there still so much to criticize at court? John Donne highlighted this problem with characteristic wit and perspicacity in his *Satyres*. Castiglione's rules, he mused, 'May make good Courtiers'. Regrettably, no-one seemed able to make courtiers good.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ John Donne, 'Satyre V', in *The satires, epigrams and verse letters*, ed. by W. Milgate, Oxford English Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), lines 2-4.

CHAPTER SIX

THE 'LAST DECADE'

The 1590s are widely regarded as Elizabeth I's *annī horribiles*. They have gone down in recent historiography as the 'nasty nineties'.¹ The 'nastiness' attributed to this period encompasses a very wide range of circumstances and developments. It manifested itself in the fear-fuelled paranoia of a government waging an ideological war. It was intensified by the crippling uncertainty arising from two succession crises – one for Elizabeth's crown, and the other for Lord Burghley's political mantle. It poisoned court politics, which were polarized by factional fighting and corrupted by the clamorous competition for profit, preferment and place. It infected the aging queen, whose authority and competence diminished as she struggled to retain the respect and devotion of her younger courtiers. Even the weather was 'nasty'. Between 1596 and 1598, heavy rains caused a series of abysmal harvests, increasing the misery of a people already oppressed by high taxation.² As a contemporary commentator hinted, the late Elizabethan political scene seems to showcase 'all the miseries of a torne and declining state'.³

Many of Elizabeth's courtiers had a nasty time in the nineties, too. Collectively, their reputation deteriorated; and anti-courtier discourse experienced a vigorous renaissance.

¹ John Guy wrote that 'Professor Collinson has spoken of the 'nasty nineties', and I shall not quarrel with that'. Guy, '1590s', p. 19.

² Guy, *Tudor England*, p. 30.

³ Cornelius Tacitus, *The ende of Nero and the beginning of Galba: fower bookes of the histories of Cornelius Tacitus. The life of Agricola*, trans. by Henry Savile (Oxford: R. Wright, 1591), sig. ¶3^r. The description of a 'torne and declining state' ostensibly applied to imperial Rome, during a tumultuous period of its history. However, it is certainly possible to conjecture that the reader was being invited to draw parallels with late Elizabethan England. This text will be discussed later.

The reaction against the late Elizabethan court and its inhabitants has often been treated as part of a fin-de-siècle phenomenon. Recently, scholars have evaluated it within the chronological and conceptual framework of Elizabeth's 'second reign'. They have argued that the distinctive political pressures of the period between 1585 and 1603 provoked a backlash against the royal entourage. Alistair Fox, for example, attributes the late sixteenth century proliferation of complaints about the court and its inhabitants to a breakdown of centralised literary patronage networks. Fox suggests that the deaths of great courtier patrons, such as Sidney and Leicester, in the mid 1580s created a vacuum; hence, 'it appears that by the 1590s, very few [writers] were getting the rewards from patronage that they thought they deserved, and once would have had a right to expect'.⁴ It would hardly be surprising if, under such circumstances, disappointed authors bit the hands that failed to feed them.

Other manifestations of late sixteenth century political malaise have been blamed for the rise of anti-courtier sentiment. Associated with the dearth of court patronage were the problems of corruption and factionalism. The former infuriated observers; the latter provoked interminable rounds of mudslinging which left everyone looking grubby. As J. E. Neale remarked, the 'downward trend in public morality was noted' – and deplored.⁵ John Guy similarly highlights the ubiquity of themes inspired by 'second reign' issues in contemporary literature: 'the endemic problems of corruption and dissimulation ... were put under the lens. The aim was to explain how 'vice', 'flattery' and 'ambition' had come to supersede the traditional values of 'wisdom', 'service' and

⁴ Fox, 'Complaint of poetry', p. 240.

⁵ J. E. Neale, 'The Elizabethan political scene', in *The age of Catherine de Medici and essays in Elizabethan history* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943; repr. 1965), pp. 145-70 (p. 164).

respublica'.⁶ Clearly, many of the values and practices that were prevalent at court invited hostile commentary.

Historians such as Guy and Fox have provided a range of explanations for the ill-tempered cynicism with which courtiers were treated in late sixteenth century England. All are structural, and rooted chronologically in the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign. They shed valuable light upon the short-term causes of the fin-de-siècle reaction against court culture. However, if we accept that they provide us with a complete history of that reaction, we must characterise it as a knee-jerk response to a series of immediate political pressures. Such a characterisation would ignore elements of continuity that link invective from the 1590s with earlier discourses.

Late Elizabethan courtiers were frequently accused of extortion and peculation. Their rapacity was arguably the daughter of necessity. Despite their desirability, many offices at court were not remunerative. The queen became increasingly unwilling to make financial grants to servants; Thomas Wilson observed in 1600 that when she was 'yong and liberall' she had 'liberally bestowed' such presents, 'but her yeers hath nowe brought with it (the inescapable quality thereof) Neerness'.⁷ The cost of regular attendance at the court was substantial, and public servants were often expected to expend their own resources in the fulfilment of their duties. It is alleged that the result of this financial pressure was widespread corruption. Courtiers competed for economic privileges such as monopolies (one of the few forms of fiscal reward that Elizabeth was happy to distribute, owing to the fact that it cost the Crown nothing). They also

⁶ John Guy, '1590s', p. 15.

⁷ Thomas Wilson, 'The state of England anno dom. 1600', in *Camden Miscellany*, XVI (London: Camden Society, 1936), 2-43 (28).

accepted presents from suitors, who hoped that an influential patron's assistance would secure them prizes. Relationships at court assumed the nature of blatant commercial transactions. Moreover, the capacity of great courtiers to recruit followers, and thereby to bolster their influence, became dependent upon their ability to deliver rewards. The earl of Essex acknowledged this fact whilst campaigning to procure the Attorney Generalship for Bacon: 'Upon me the labour must lie of his establishment, and upon me the disgrace will light of his being refused'.⁸ Essex's failure to obtain perks and preferment for his friends has been identified as a cause of his progressive marginalization at court in the years immediately preceding his desperate rebellion.⁹ Historians have consequently validated the complaints of late Elizabethan moralists and satirists, who condemned the acquisitive instincts of royal acolytes.

Joel Hurstfield (quite rightly) warned us not to interpret contemporary denunciations of corruption as positive proof that the phenomenon was actually endemic. Hurstfield pointed out that twentieth century notions of integrity and propriety were simply inapplicable to the early modern period. Moreover, accusations of scandalous venality at court were made before, and after, the 1590s. Almost every generation claimed to be living through a uniquely dishonest and mercenary era; hence, their grumbles should be taken with a large pinch of (taxed and monopolized?) salt.¹⁰ However, if 'literary evidence is clearly not enough' to prove that irregularities occurred, it surely suggests

⁸ Essex to Puckering, in *The letters and life of Francis Bacon*, ed. by James Spedding, 7 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861-74), I (1861), 354.

⁹ Neale, 'Elizabethan political scene', pp. 169-70.

¹⁰ Hurstfield believed that late Elizabethan politics were 'corrupt'; he merely argued that contemporary assertions to that effect should be cross-examined and verified. Hurstfield, *Freedom, corruption and government*, pp. 137-62.

that they were perceived to occur.¹¹ At the very least, it demonstrates that contemporaries were happy to propagate the idea that their courtiers were corrupt. The sincerity or originality of their allegations probably matters less than the fact that such allegations were being articulated and assimilated.

The granting of monopolies to courtiers became a highly controversial topic from 1597 onwards. Acrimonious discussions in the parliament of 1597-8 prompted Elizabeth to order an investigation into the abuse of the financial privileges that the crown had conferred. The issue erupted again in the parliament of 1601; this time, the queen (rather disingenuously) thanked the members for preserving her ‘from the lapse of error, in which, by ignorance, and not by intent [she] might haue fallen’. ‘What an undeserued doubt might we haue incurred, if the abusers of our liberality, the thrallers of our people, the wringers of the poore, had not bene tolde vs?’, she asked, with wide-eyed innocence. She was sure that her subjects ‘doubt not it is lawfull for our kingly state to grant gifts of sundry sorts of whom we make election, either for seruice done, or merit to be deserued’. Moreover, they would appreciate that she was in no way complicit or culpable if the recipients of her generosity ‘abuse their charge, annoy whom they should helpe, and dishonour their king, whom they should serue’.¹² Her speech, delivered before the court at Whitehall, was promptly published and circulated in the city.

Concern about the social and economic impact of monopolies had been voiced before

¹¹ Hurstfield, *Freedom, corruption and government*, p.162.

¹² Elizabeth I, *Her Maiesties most princelie answere, deliuered by her selfe at the court at White-hall, on the last day of Nouember 1601: when the Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament (assisted with the greatest part of the knights, and burgesses) had presented their humble thanks for her free and gracious fauour, in preuenting and reforming of sundry grieuances, by abuse of many grants, commonly called monopolies*, transcribed by A. B. (London: [R. Barker], 1601), pp. 2-6.

the 1590s. Yet previously, this form of exploitation was more often associated with greedy merchants. George Gascoigne's *Steele glas* deplored the fact that

... master Merchant, he whose trauaile ought
Commodiously, to doe his countrie good,
And by his toyle, the same for to enriche,
Can finde the meane, to make Monopolyes
Of euery ware, that is accompted strange.¹³

Richard Mulcaster, headmaster of the Merchant Taylors' School in London, identified the creation of monopolies as a commercial practice, undertaken by businessmen: 'In matters of engrosing, and monopolies, in all matters of forestauling and intercepting there is dealing by conference among the dealers, which we all crie out of, bycause it makes vs crie, in our purses'.¹⁴ John Dee similarly represented 'Monopolie' as an exploitative business venture, comparable to hoarding.¹⁵ Of course, neither Mulcaster nor Dee suggested that courtiers could not, or did not, engage in such activities. However, they apparently saw no reason to single out court acolytes for particular opprobrium.

By the late 1590s, criticism of monopolies tended increasingly to be targeted at courtiers. Some of this criticism was anticipated in the censure incurred by Sir Walter Raleigh during the 1580s. In 1584, Elizabeth granted her favourite control over the

¹³ Gascoigne, *Steele glas*, sig. Fij^r-v. Gascoigne added that Master Merchant 'feeds the vaine, of courtiers vaine desires'. However, his description of these courtiers as 'painted fooles' with 'harebrainde heads' suggests that they can be seen as victims (albeit deserving ones) of mercantile price-fixing.

¹⁴ Richard Mulcaster, *Positions wherein those primitiue circumstances be examined, which are necessarie for the training vp of children, either for skill in their booke, or health in their bodie* (London: Thomas Vautrollier for Thomas Chare, 1581), p. 290.

¹⁵ John Dee, *General and rare memorials pertayning to the perfect arte of nauigation annexed to the paradoxical cumpas* (London: John Daye, 1577), pp. 32-3.

licensing fees from woollen cloth exports, and from the sale of imported wines.¹⁶ Raleigh's vigorous exploitation of these privileges caused widespread popular resentment. According to one of Burghley's correspondents, nobody at court was 'more hated' than Raleigh, 'none cursed more daily by the poor of whom infinite numbers are brought to extreme poverty by the gift of cloth to him'.¹⁷ Ten years later, however, such callous rapacity was commonly and casually attributed to courtiers in general. In a memorable epigram, Thomas Bastard referred to 'vpstart courtiers' whose fortunes were built upon 'courtier leather, courtier pinne, and sope, / And courtier vinegeer, and starch and carde, / And courtier cups, such as were neuer heard'. Bastard contrasted these upstarts with 'old Courtiers', who still practised 'manners old' – implying that the avaricious entrepreneur was a new breed of courtier.¹⁸ Marston's *Scourge of villanie* excoriated the courtly gallant 'that doth snort in fat-fed luxury, / And gapes for some grinding Monopoly'.¹⁹ The adjective 'grinding' is striking; it evokes a sense of bitterness reminiscent of popular satires against the legal profession. By the end of the sixteenth century, the grasping selfishness associated with the exploitation of monopolies was specifically, and angrily, imputed to money-grabbing courtiers.

Literary evidence suggests that the pressures of court politics in the 1590s did, indeed, inspire complaints about corruption and greed among Elizabeth's attendants. Yet it is noteworthy that traditional literary tropes were used to frame such complaints. Bastard's epigram deploys the old device of linking grasping royal servants directly to

¹⁶ Stephen Coote, *A play of passion: the life of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 71-2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁸ Bastard, *Epigrammes*, p. 37.

¹⁹ Marston, *Scourge of villanie*, sig. F2^f. The *Scourge of Villanie* was included in the so-called Bishops' Ban of 1599; it was ordered to be burnt, along with other offensive works. See John Huntington, *Ambition, rank, and poetry in 1590s England* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 21-5.

the goods and resources they consume, tax or appropriate. Marston's image of a 'gaping' courtier recalls Agrippa's description of rapacious court minions: 'they alwaies stande gaping like Rauins, for giftes of the Courte'.²⁰ The medieval construct of the exploitative curialist needed little renovation to suit the purposes of late Elizabethan malcontents.

Another plague that historians have ascribed to the 'nasty nineties' is that of factionalism.²¹ As Paul Hammer has noted, 'The word faction is an awkward term', and comes saddled with a lot of historiographical baggage. Like Simon Adams, who challenged Sir John Neale's association of faction with normal and ubiquitous patronage networks, Hammer is disinclined to treat it as an omnipresent feature of the Elizabeth political landscape. Instead, he presents it as an occasional phenomenon, symptomatic of crisis.²² He associates it particularly with the rivalry that erupted between Essex and the Cecils during the latter half of the 1590s. In his biography of Essex, he highlights the extent to which the earl cooperated with Burghley and Robert Cecil between 1585 and 1597, despite their conflicting ambitions and differences of

²⁰ Agrippa, *Vanitie*, sig. 114^v.

²¹ 'Faction' was a versatile term of abuse; it could, but did not necessarily, denote a court cabal. It was used to describe groups of people who shared, and promoted, a national or devotional agenda. The archetypal 'faction' was undoubtedly the Jesuits. In his *Anatomie of popish tyrannie* (1603), Thomas Bell warned readers earnestly and repeatedly against 'that seditious Iesuiticall and Spanish faction'; 'the Iesuiticall hispanized faction'; 'the Iesuiticall profession, now become a most seditious faction'; 'the Pope and his Iesuiticall faction'; and 'cursed Iesuitisme and all popish Iesuited faction'. Thomas Bell, *The anatomie of popish tyrannie* (London: John Harison, for Richard Bankworth, 1603), sig. B2^v; pp. 14; 2; 17; sig. ¶4^v. During the 1590s, the 'hotter sort of Protestant' was similarly branded inherently factious. Bishop Bancroft, for example, condemned believers in 'the presbiteriall discipline' as a 'factious crew' and a 'factious sorte'. Richard Bancroft, *Daungerous positions and proceedings published and practised within the iland of Brytaine, vnder pretence of reformation, and for the presbiteriall discipline* (London: [J. Windet for] John Wolfe, 1593), p. 7; Richard Bancroft, *A suruay of the pretended holy discipline* (London: John Wolfe [Thomas Scarlet and Richard Field], 1593), p. 19. Agents or partisans of particular nations were also deemed factious.

²² Paul E. J. Hammer, 'Patronage at court, faction and the earl of Essex', in *Last decade*, ed. by Guy, pp. 65-86 (pp. 65-8). Hammer provides an excellent survey of the relevant historiography.

opinion.²³ Hammer observes that ‘Where faction once seemed to be a creature abundant in Elizabethan politics ... it now seems to be becoming something of an endangered species’. However, he insists that ‘there is no dispute that faction did dominate high politics in the later 1590s’.²⁴

Francis Bacon considered the issue of faction sufficiently important to devote an essay to it in his 1597 collection. He wrote that ‘Manie have a new wisdom, indeed, a fond opinion; That for a Prince to governe his estate, or for a great person to governe his proceedings according to the respects of Factions, is the principal part of pollicie’.²⁵ This idea became more widely accepted in the seventeenth century, when Elizabeth I was praised for her shrewd manipulation of the parties that vied for her favour. Having experienced the turbulent tribalism of Stuart court politics, Robert Naunton concluded that ‘The principall note of [Elizabeth’s] reign, will be, that she ruled much by faction and parties, which her self, both made, upheld, and weakened, as her own great judgement advised’.²⁶ In 1597, Bacon doubted the ‘wisdom’ of playing puppeteer to a host of competitive lobby groups. However, he felt that ‘the consideration of Faction’ should not be neglected by governors or great men at court. He analysed the phenomenon with studied, Machiavellian neutrality.²⁷ Elsewhere, the word ‘faction’ was invested with more negative connotations. In a letter of advice to the Queen, Bacon identified the factionalism of her Catholic subjects as a symptom of their frustration:

²³ Hammer, *Polarisation*, esp. pp. 87-8; 396.

²⁴ Hammer, ‘Patronage at court’, p. 66. Janet Dickinson has recently contested the notion that the 1590s were inherently more faction-ridden than the middle years of Elizabeth’s reign. Dickinson, ‘The Essex rebellion’, pp. 91-112.

²⁵ Francis Bacon, ‘Of faction’, in *The collected works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath, 7 vols (London: Longman, 1875-9), vol. VI, part II, 532-3 (532).

²⁶ Naunton, *Fragmenta regalia*, p.6.

²⁷ Bacon, ‘Of faction’, in *Works*, ed. by Spedding, vol VI, part II, 532-3.

‘factious I call them, because they are discontented’.²⁸ The idea that faction is a product of disaffection also surfaced in his essay *Of followers and friends* (1597): ‘Factious followers are worse to be liked, which follow not vpon affection to him with whom they raunge themselues, but vpon discontentment conceiued against some other, wherevpon commonly insueth that ill intelligence that wee many times see between great personages.’²⁹ Sir William Cornwallis depicted faction as the ugly sister, or bastard child, of friendship. He argued that the latter derived from ‘Vertue’, whilst the former was based solely upon ‘power’. Like Bacon, Cornwallis believed that the art of party politics ought to be mastered for pragmatic purposes. However, he asserted that factionalism was a ‘curse’, symptomatic of the fact that human nature ‘cannot enjoy a peacefull amitie’.³⁰

Complaints about the factionalism of courtiers in the 1590s tended to emanate most persistently from the Essex circle. Yet such complaints were couched in the traditional vocabulary of envy, backstabbing, vindictiveness and carping contention. They invoked one of the central tenets of the *De curialium miseriis* and *exeat aula* schools of thought: namely, that it was impossible for an honourable man to live peacefully and prosper at court, because he would always be tormented by jealous detractors and scheming, lying enemies.³¹ In November 1597, Essex’s anonymous well-wisher referred to the ‘crosses,

²⁸ Bacon, ‘To the Queen’, in Spedding, *Letters*, I, 47-56 (47).

²⁹ Bacon, ‘Of followers and friends’, in Spedding, *Works*, VI, part II, 528.

³⁰ Cornwallis, *Essayes*, sig. E2^{r-v}.

³¹ See *Reynard*, trans. by Caxton, p. 110: ‘The rightwys peple [at court] ben al loste / trouthe and rightwysnes ben exyled and fordriuen / And for then ben abyden wyth vs couetyse / falskede / hate and enuye’. See also Agrippa, *Vanitie*, fol. 111^r: ‘None but flatterers doo prosper [at court], and whisperers, sclauderers, talebearers, false accusers, complainers, abusers, venemous tongues, supplanters, inventors of mischiefes’.

practised by a dubble faction verie stronge against thee'.³² Essex himself muttered darkly about the machinations of 'myne eniemies' and 'myne accusers'.³³ In 1596, the earl blamed unsavoury rumours about his relationship with the countess of Derby upon malevolent persons who 'hourly conspired against' him. 'Yea the very oracles (I mean those, that are accounted to be plain and sincere) ... do speak the largest language of the strongest faction', he wrote to a censorious Lady Bacon. 'Plutarch taught me long since to make profit of my enemies; but God teacheth it me much better now'.³⁴ Plutarch's essay *De capienda ex inimicis utilitate* (how to profit by one's enemies) took as its starting point the premise that 'there was neuer any Common-wealth heard of, which was cleane destitute of enuie, emulation, and contention, three fruit full nursing mothers of emnitie'.³⁵ Constant vigilance was necessary,

For thine enimie carefully watching, dooth narrowly obserue all thy actions, and on euery side dooth curiously prie into thy life, gaping after euery occasion of harming, and dooth ... search out thine actions, and vndermine thine enterprises ... as for thy sicknesse, debts, or domesticall iarres with thy wife, they will be sooner concealed from thy selfe, then from thine ennemie, yea about all, hee will pursue thy faultes, and trace after them most daungerously. And euen as vultures doe followe the smell of dead carkasses, as not able for to take the sent of pure and wholesome bodies, in like manner, the woundes and distempered affections incident in our life, doe waken our enemies. And to these come rushing our ill-willers, and violently take holde of them, and rip them vp.³⁶

A wise man could benefit from this malicious surveillance, by reminding himself that

³² NA, SP 12/265/10.

³³ Bod. MS e Museo fol. 7^r; 73^r;

³⁴ Thomas Birch, *Memoirs of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, from the year 1581 till her death*, 2 vols (London: A. Millar, 1754), II, 220.

³⁵ Plutarch, *Inimicus amicus an excellent treatise, shewing, how a man may reape profit by his enemy* (London: V[alentine] S[immes] for Thomas Bushel, 1601), sig. A4^v.

³⁶ Plutarch, *Inimicus amicus*, sig. A7^{r-v}.

it is most expedient for thee to liue very circumspectly, to take heede to thy selfe, and neyther say, nor doe, any thing rashly, or vnadvisedly: but rather, to leade thy life, as it were keeping an exact diet, without blame, or reprehension whatsoeuer: for this heedefulnesse so repressing the passion of oure mindes, and keeping Reason within her boundes of duetie, dooth frame a carefull desire, and settled purpose, to liue vprightly and blamelessly ...³⁷

Such emphasis upon the ceaseless activity and unrelenting scrutiny of ‘enemies’ is consistent with Essex’s attitude towards the court during his latter years.³⁸

Essex’s friends and followers were also inclined to deplore the tendentiousness of many contemporary courtiers. According the Captain Francis Allen, in the aftermath of Essex’s tussle for favour with Raleigh in 1589, ‘There was never in court such emulation, such envy, such back-biting, as is now at this time’.³⁹ In a letter to Anthony Bacon, dated 21 November 1593, Anthony Standen alluded darkly to ‘mine enemies and enuiers’, and suggested that his correspondent’s gout and renal colic provided a merciful reprieve from the miseries of court life:

³⁷ Plutarch, *Inimicus amicus*, sig. A7^v – A8^r.

³⁸ Hugh Gazzard observes that Essex’s ‘well-documented enthusiasm for Tacitus ... was supplemented by a keen appreciation of the political import of Plutarch’s work’. Hugh Gazzard, ‘“Those Graue Presentments of Antiquitie”: Samuel Daniel’s *Philotas* and the earl of Essex’, *Review of English Studies*, new series, vol. 51, no. 203 (August 2000), 423-50 (429). It is worth noting that Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s *Lives of the noble Grecians and Romanes* is riddled with references to factional politics. To cite but a few examples: Theseus was ‘forced by the faction and contention of his enemies’ to defer to the stubborn pride of the Athenians (p. 19). Pericles ‘rooted out all factions [in Athens], and brought the cittie againe to vnitie and concorde’ (p. 177). Theramenes was ‘inconstant & inresolute in matters of state and gouernment: and inclining sometimes to one faction, sometime to an other’ (p. 580). The Persian king Ataxerxes feared that the issue of the succession would meane that ‘his Realme should growe into faction and ciuill warres’ (p. 1026). Dionysius II of Syracuse, overthrown and besieged in a citadel, ‘had no other hope nor meanes to escape, but by stirring vp faction and sedition’ among the Syracusans, ‘to make one of them fall out with another’ (p. 1044). Particularly relevant to Essex, perhaps, was a story about the philosopher Dion, who rose up in arms to defeat the tyrant Dionysius. Dion lost a battle against the Spartan Pharax ‘because his men were at a iarre among them selues, by reason of their faction and diuision’. The specific problem was that some of the men accused him of seeking to prolong the war ‘because he would be still generall’ (p. 1050). All references from Plutarch, *The lives of the noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. by Thomas North (London: Thomas Vautroullier and John Wright, 1579).

³⁹ Birch, *Memoirs*, I, 57. Allen appears to have been a client of Anthony Bacon. He was subsequently knighted at Rouen.

I do begin truly to bless and commend your infirmity, which if you might receive without pain or torment, I would think you in the superlative degree beholding to it, as a cause to retain you from a place, from whence all charity is exiled, and all envy and treachery doth prevail, and where a prince of the most rare virtues and divine parts is assieged with persons so infected with malice
...⁴⁰

In 1595, Anthony Bacon referred to ‘those, who upon envy towards my special good lord the earl of Essex ... sought to decry his most secret and true intelligences’ from Spain.⁴¹ In 1596, Bacon wrote to Lady Rich describing Essex’s triumph at Cadiz, ‘which malicious envy may shadow for a time in his absence’.⁴² In November 1597, he professed himself optimistic that Essex would soon be rehabilitated after his inglorious return from the Azores expedition, and subsequent self-seclusion: ‘the beams of his lordship’s virtue, fame and merit can no longer be shadowed by malice and envy, which, you know, reign in courts’.⁴³ Antonio Perez laid some of the blame for his unfortunate experience in the service of Philip II upon the machinations of jealous detractors at court: ‘For there is no poyson that causeth suche noysome belckinges in the stomach as envye especially at the favour of princes’.⁴⁴ Of course, the same vocabulary was used to describe the court and its inhabitants before the 1590s.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, a number of Essexians deployed such rhetoric vociferously and relentlessly during the last years of Elizabeth’s reign.

⁴⁰ Birch, *Memoirs*, I, 133-4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁴² *Ibid.*, II, 89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁴⁴ ‘A summary Relacion made by Raphael Peregrino, of the discourse of the imprisonments and adventures of Antonio Perez’, Bod. MS Eng. Hist. c. 239, fol. 14^v.

⁴⁵ Writing to Sir Christopher Hatton in the late 1570s, Sir Francis Walsingham expressed his concern about the prevalence of jealousy and detraction at court (‘envy oftentimes doth work most malicious effects’). *Memoirs of the life and times of Sir Christopher Hatton*, ed. by Sir Harris Nicolas (London: Richard Bentley, 1847), p. 97. Nicolas dates the letter to September 1578.

Essex's assiduous gathering of foreign intelligence may also have (over)sensitized his political antennae to factionalism in the royal entourage. In Elizabethan England, a comparative, internationalist approach to political analysis was strongly encouraged. Philip Sidney reminded his brother Robert that the purpose of continental travel was 'to furnish *your* self with the knowledg of such thinges as may be serviceable to *your* Countrie ... For hard it is to know England without you know it by comparing it with others'.⁴⁶ Essex himself endorsed this advice in a letter to the young earl of Rutland.⁴⁷ In 1592, Francis Bacon contrasted the 'peace, plenty and health' enjoyed by England with the turbulent state of many other European powers and principalities.⁴⁸ English travellers and commentators often highlighted the extent to which foreign courts were riven by partisan conflict.

The problem was deemed particularly severe in Scotland, which Bacon described as 'full of boiling and swelling humours'.⁴⁹ Like other prominent English politicians, Essex was keenly interested in Scottish affairs.⁵⁰ The intelligence that he received presented factional fighting as the locomotive of court politics under James VI. In 1593, Essex wrote to Anthony Bacon, who coordinated much his reconnaissance work, with 'news of Scotland': 'Sir James Stuart is chancellor, and all those, that are not of

⁴⁶ CUL, Add. MS 7958, fol. 13^r.

⁴⁷ Spedding, *Letters*, II, 13. See Paul Hammer, 'Essex and Europe: evidence from confidential instructions by the earl of Essex, 1595-6', *English Historical Review* (1996), 357-381 (367).

⁴⁸ Bacon attributed England's prosperity to the 'singular providence' of a God who had given the kingdom such a virtuous and wise ruler. However, it is notable that many of the 'continental' problems that Bacon described - war, religious division, economic dislocation, domination by a hated foreign power, instability and uncertain successions - were either experienced or seriously anticipated in England during the 1590s. Bacon, 'Certain Observations Made Upon a Libel Published this Present Year, 1592', in Spedding, *Letters*, I, 146-208 (153-63).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵⁰ Hammer, *Polarisation*, pp. 163-73.

this faction, shall be chased from the court'.⁵¹ In another letter, he referred to the manoeuvres of 'the earl of Huntley and that party'.⁵² An undated intelligence brief, preserved among the papers of Anthony Bacon, requests particulars of the Scottish king's circumstances, including 'what faction there is among his subjects with relation to religion, the state, or private causes of contest: who are the chief heads or partisans, and who among them are most favour'd and discountenanc'd by him'.⁵³ On 12 February 1595, Anthony Rolston notified Bacon that, in Scotland, 'earl Bothwell, Huntley, with the rest of that faction, have taken arms'.⁵⁴ Such communications testified to the potency of factionalism, both at court and in the wider political community.

The factiousness of Essex himself attracted contemporary comment. Immediately after the 1601 rebellion, Robert Cecil accused the earl of seeking to nurture a 'traitorous faction' in the royal household over a period of years.⁵⁵ In his sermon preached at Paul's Cross on 1 March 1601, William Barlow asserted that Essex had been guilty 'of Abimelechs faction, and banding his familie and allyes'.⁵⁶ We should note, however, that many complaints about Essex's factionalism – including Barlow's indictment -

⁵¹ Birch, *Memoirs*, I, 111.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵³ The brief was apparently prepared for Essex's agent in Scotland, Thomas Morison. Birch points out that Essex referred to Morison's request for instructions in a letter to Bacon, dated 14 December 1593. The instructions are in French; the extract quoted above is from Birch's description of its contents. Birch, *Memoirs*, I, 138-9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁵⁵ NA, SP 12/278/55.

⁵⁶ William Barlow, *A sermon preached at Paules Crosse, on the first Sunday in Lent: Martij 1. 1600* (London: [John Windet for] John Wolfe, 1601), D5^f -^v. The story of Abimelech can be found in the book of Judges. He aspired to personal domination over Israel, asking his kinsmen 'Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you?'. His kinsmen give him money 'wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him'. He was made king. Judges 9. 1-6.

referred to his conduct during the final years of his life.⁵⁷ After 1599, Essex was barred from the royal presence, and effectively lost all influence at court. Indeed, his complete lack of allies in Elizabeth's immediate circle was one of the reasons he gave for attempting to make the queen grant an audience to him and his friends on 8 February 1601.⁵⁸ At this juncture Essex's practice of partisan politics was not a court-based problem. His treason was, in fact, to seek support for his campaign against his 'enemies' beyond the walls of Whitehall.⁵⁹ His efforts to cultivate a popular following were deemed unforgivable. A powerful malcontent, willing and able to exploit strife and sectarianism within the body politic, could easily let slip the dogs of civil war. As Jean Bodin observed, when 'the most factious and ambitious flieth vnto the multitude', the ruin of the state ensues.⁶⁰ Essex was condemned for extra-curial factiousness, rather than for anything he said or did whilst still a courtier.⁶¹

The polarisation of late Elizabethan court politics has often been regarded as a product of the Cecils' progressive monopolization of power. Of course, Burghley himself hotly contested the notion that there was, or could be, a *regnum Cecilianum*:

⁵⁷ In 1596, Barlow defended the earl from the Paul's Cross pulpit against the 'malice and envy' of his detractors. At this stage, he clearly considered Essex an innocent victim, not a perpetrator, of factionalism. Birch, *Memoirs*, II, 97.

⁵⁸ William Camden, *The historie of the life and Reigne of that famous princesse Elizabeth* (London: William Webbe, 1634), p. 316; Samuel March Phillips, *State trials: or, a collection of the most interesting trials, prior to the revolution of 1688*, 2 vols (London: W. Walker, 1826), I, 48.

⁵⁹ At Essex's trial, Sir Ferdinando Gorges attested that the earl expected support for his rising from 'a hundred and twenty earls, barons and gentlemen who participate in my discontented humour, and will join with me'. Phillips, *State trials*, I, 46.

⁶⁰ Jean Bodin, *The six bookes of a common-weale*, trans. by Richard Knowles (London: [Adam Islip] impensis G. Bishop, 1606), p. 711.

⁶¹ Essex only seems to have considered himself a courtier when he was personally attending the queen. In a letter to Lord Keeper Egerton, dated 18 October 1598, he disavowed the label: 'Do I leave my friends? When I was a courtier, I could yield them no fruits of my love unto them. Now I am become an hermit, they shall bear no envy for their love towards me.' Birch, II, 387. In November 1597, an anonymous client of Essex referred to the earl's habit of flouncing away from the court, and then returning 'to become a courtier againe'. NA, SP 12/265/10.

They that say in a rash and malicious mockry, that England is become regnum Cecilianum may please their own cankred humour with such a device; but if any actions be considered, if there be any cause given by me of such a nickname, there may be found out in many other juster causes to attribute other names than mine⁶²

He regarded himself absolutely and entirely as Elizabeth's creature (saving only the honour of God).⁶³ Yet historians have conventionally pointed to the Great Dying of 1588-92, when Leicester, Walsingham and Hatton all succumbed to age and illness. Only the Lord Treasurer was (just about) left standing. As senior statesman, and the queen's oldest advisor, he bestrode the late Elizabethan political scene like a gouty Colossus.⁶⁴ In January 1593, an anxious observer wrote that Burghley's recent recovery from sickness was indeed a God-given blessing, 'for the whole state of the realm depends on him. If he go, there is not one about the Queen able to wield this state as it stands'.⁶⁵ Burghley, however, did not intend to 'wield the state' alone. He enlisted the help of his second son, Sir Robert Cecil, whom he had designated his political heir. In the years immediately preceding his death, he advanced Cecil's career as much as possible. Essex regarded the manoeuvres of his erstwhile guardian as a threat to his own future and an obstacle to the fulfilment of his military and political ambitions.⁶⁶

⁶² John Strype, *Annals of the reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), vol. III, part II, 380. See Natalie Mears, 'Regnum Cecilianum? A Cecilian perspective of the Court', in *Last decade*, ed. by Guy, pp. 46-64. Hammer, whilst finding Mears' article 'unconvincing', agrees that 'Despite Burghley's monopolistic leanings', claims of a *regnum Cecilianum* 'can be dismissed as wild exaggeration'. Hammer emphasizes the willingness of both Cecils to work with Essex (despite their disagreements) until 1597. He blames 'Essex's heavy-handed behaviour' upon the breakdown of the relationships. Hammer, *Polarisation*, pp. 392-6.

⁶³ CUL MS Ee. iii. 56, no. 85.

⁶⁴ The epithet 'The gouty Colossus' was originally used to describe Pitt the Elder in 1766. However, it seems singularly appropriate for the aging Burghley. John Timbs, *Anecdote biography: William Pitt, earl of Chatham and Edmund Burke* (London: Richard Bentley, 1860), p. 117.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Read, *Burghley and Queen Elizabeth*, p. 480.

⁶⁶ Hammer observes that 'For Essex and many others who shared his views, the war against Spain was a crusade which involved religion and a sense of national destiny. For Burghley, as for Elizabeth, it

Hence, he attempted to build a support base with which he could oppose Cecilian influence.

In the aftermath of Essex's decline and fall, it was easy to suggest that he had been somewhat delusional about the nature and extent of his rivals' power. William Camden represented the earl as a hyper-sensitive individual, who was unnecessarily 'grieved' by the advancement of Robert Cecil, and who misconstrued any appointment in which he had no hand 'as done in disgrace to him'.⁶⁷ Camden had in fact been a protégé of Burghley's, and thus had a vested interest in ascribing concerns about Cecilian aggrandizement to the overactive imagination of one, slightly hysterical, man.⁶⁸ Yet the concentration of power and office in the hands of over-mighty courtiers was a topic that interested others besides Essex. Just as Richard II was apparently treated as a study in weak and irresolute kingship, so attention was drawn to the careers of court acolytes who might be said to have established their own *regna*. For example, Samuel Daniel, a client of Lord Mountjoy and a probable supporter of Essex, examined the decline and fall of William de la Pole, first duke of Suffolk (1396-1450).⁶⁹ Daniel's *Poeticall essayes* described how Suffolk exploited his position as Queen Margaret's favourite:

And as he deales abroad, so likewise here
He robs at home, the treasure no lesse
Here, where he all authorities doth beare

was a necessary evil ... His son Cecil probably shared very similar views'. Hammer, *Polarisation*, p. 393.

⁶⁷ William Camden, *The historie of the life and reigne of that famous princesse Elizabeth* (London: William Webbe, 1634), pp. 168; 186-7.

⁶⁸ Camden's concern to promote the posthumous reputation of his erstwhile patron is highlighted in Patrick Collinson, 'One of us? William Camden and the making of history', *TRHS*, 6th ser., vol. 8 (1998), 139-63 (158).

⁶⁹ In 1605, Daniel was brought before the Privy Council because his *Tragedy of Philotas* was interpreted as a subversively sympathetic account of Essex's downfall. See F. J. Levy, 'Haywood, Daniel, and the beginnings of politic history in England', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 1 (Winter, 1987), 1-34 (2).

And makes a Monopoly of offices:
He is inricht, h'is raisd, and placed neere
And only he giues counsaile to oppresse ...⁷⁰

There is no reason to suppose that Daniel was inviting direct comparisons between Suffolk and the Cecils. The amorous nature of the duke's association with Queen Margaret, as dramatized by Shakespeare in *Henry VI Part II*, made him an improbable archetype of William or Robert Cecil. Nonetheless, the agglomeration of court offices by a single individual or family network was a scenario repeatedly postulated by historians, satirists and dramatists in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign.⁷¹ This reinforced the commonplace notion that high-ranking courtiers tended to be acquisitive and monstrously ambitious.

The myth of a *regnum Cecilianum* was not, of course, invented in the 1590s. As early as 1572, the *Treatise of treasons* had claimed that Burghley and his brother-in-law, Sir Nicholas Bacon, were attempting to divert the succession 'for their owne aduancement' to a monarch who, to all intents and purposes, would be their client.⁷² Burghley's exasperated denial 'that England is become a *regnum Cecilianum*' dates from 1585, when the Lord Treasurer was accused of poisoning Elizabeth's mind against the earl of Leicester whilst the latter was campaigning in the Netherlands.⁷³ Leicester smoothly denied that he was propagating rumours about Burghley's ambition: 'your owen wysedom wyll easily dischargd me, beinge so well acquainted *with the divyces* and

⁷⁰ Samuel Daniel, *The poeticall essayes of Sam. Danyel* (London: P. Short for Simon Waterson, 1599), p. 85.

⁷¹ We have already discussed the exploration of these issues in *Mother Hubberds tale*. For an interesting analysis of Spenser's attitude towards the concept of a 'regnum Cecilianum', see Brice Harris, 'The Ape in "Mother Hubberds tale"', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 2 (January 1941), 191-203.

⁷² Anon, *Treatise of treasons*, fol. 43^r.

⁷³ See Mears, 'Regnum Cecilianum?', p. 47.

practyses of these days, when men goe about rather to sow all discord betwene such, as we are, than to doe good offices'.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, such rumours continued to circulate throughout the 1590s (and as Robert Cecil's career blossomed, they inevitably acquired dynastic overtones). In 1592, Burghley's nephew Francis Bacon responded to Richard Verstegan's *A declaration of the true causes of the great troubles, presupposed to be intended against the realme of England*. Verstegan asserted that Burghley, 'by birth but of meane degree', had long been possessed with an 'insatiable desire of greatnesse'. Even since 1558, he had 'shadowed his sinister practises vnder [Elizabeth's] authoritie'.⁷⁵ Refuting these slurs, Bacon was eager to emphasize the fact that dire warnings about the pretensions of power-hungry counsellors were scarcely novel. He reminded the reader that Catholic polemicists 'have altered their tune twice or thrice. When the match was in treating with the Duke of Anjou ... all the gall was uttered against the earl of Leicester'.⁷⁶ Bacon thus attempted to dismiss the attack upon Burghley as a shopworn conspiracy theory, invoking the tired old stereotype of the over-mighty courtier.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ BL, Lansdowne MS 45, fols 79^r – 81^r (fol. 79^r).

⁷⁵ Richard Verstegan, *A declaration of the true causes of the great troubles, presupposed to be intended against the realme of England* ([Antwerp: J. Trognesium?], 1592), p. 9.

⁷⁶ Bacon, 'Certain observations made upon a libel published this present year, 1592', in Spedding, *Letters*, I, 146-208 (198).

⁷⁷ Bacon pointed out that Burghley was obviously not the real target of the libel. The libeller, he wrote, was well aware 'that it hath been the usual and ready practice of seditious subjects to plant and bend their invectives not against the sovereigns themselves, but against some such as had grace with them'. However, in this instance he had badly misapplied the device:

For this hath some appearance to cover undutiful invectives, when it is used against favourites or new upstarts and sudden risen counsellors. But when it shall be practised against one that hath been counsellor before her Majesty's time, and hath continued longer counsellor than any other counsellor in Europe ... then it appeareth manifestly to be but a brick wall at tennis to make the defamation and hatred rebound from the counsellor upon the prince.

Malicious malcontents were 'very simple to think to abuse the world with those shifts; since every child can tell the fable, that the wolves' malice was not to the shepherd but to his dog'. Bacon, 'Certain observations', in Spedding, *Letters*, I, 197-8. This was a startlingly frank deconstruction of

Claims that the Cecils monopolized power and office in late Elizabethan England were exaggerated. However, it is certainly true that, when it came to the distribution of positions at court, demand outstripped supply by a considerable margin. Rowland Whyte's correspondence with Sir Robert Sidney repeatedly refers to the competitive self-promotion of his colleagues. On 19 October 1595, he noted that 'The assured death of Mr Vice Chamberlain is come to the Court this day. The places that live are many, and many great sutors for them'. Lord Cobham's demise in 1597 apparently triggered a similar frenzy of acquisitive ambition: 'About midnight my Lord Chamberlain died ... The Court is full of who shall have this and that office'.⁷⁸ Ambitious courtiers, and would-be courtiers, complained bitterly about the lack of opportunities available to them. Francis Bacon wrote eloquently on the subject. In a letter to Burghley (undated, but probably composed in 1593), he observed forlornly: 'I wax now somewhat ancient; one and thirty years is a great deal of sand in the hour-glass'. Having reached the advanced age of thirty-one, he was baffled and distressed by his lack of employment:

I ever bare a mind (in some middle place that I could discharge) to serve her Majesty; not as a man born under Sol, that loveth honour; nor under Jupiter, that loveth business (for the contemplative planet carrieth me away wholly); but as a man born under an excellent Sovereign, that deserveth the dedication of all men's abilities.⁷⁹

If his fortunes did not improve, he declared, he would be forced to abandon his Ciceronian ideals and ambitions altogether:

the *Declaration*. In order to defend his, Bacon was prepared to redirect the polemicist's invective at Elizabeth. Alex Gajda has noted similar cases, from 1599-1601, in which defenders of the Cecils called the bluff of polemicists who played the 'evil counsellor' card. Alexandra Gajda, 'Political culture and the circle of Robert Devereux, 2nd earl of Oxford' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2005), p. 263.

⁷⁸ HMC *De L'Isle & Dudley*, II, 175; 245-46.

⁷⁹ Spedding, *Letters*, I, 108.

... if your Lordship will not carry me on, I will not do as Anaxagorus did, who reduced himself with contemplation unto voluntary poverty: but this I will do; I will sell the inheritance that I have, and purchase some leases of quick revenue, or some office of gain that shall be executed by deputy, and so give over all care of service, and become some sorry book-maker, or a true pioneer in that mine of truth, which (he said) lay so deep.⁸⁰

Bacon subsequently reiterated his intention to retire from public life when, having failed to obtain the Attorney Generalship, it seemed uncertain whether he would be able to procure the lesser post of Solicitor General. He would, he declared, retreat to Cambridge, ‘and there spend my life in studies and contemplation, without looking back’.⁸¹

This promise (or threat) was ideologically loaded; in the context of the ongoing *otium versus negotium* debate, it represented a vote of no confidence in the values – indeed, the validity – of a courtier’s existence. Many of Bacon’s contemporaries ostentatiously subscribed to the old maxim, ‘exeat aula’, with varying degrees of sincerity. Thomas Bodley, Essex’s candidate for the secretaryship secured by Robert Cecil in 1596, recalled that when his hopes of preferment were dashed, ‘I resolv’d to possess my soul in peace all the residue of my days; to take my full farewell of state employments; to satisfy my mind with that mediocrity of worldly living, that I had of my own, and so to retire me from the court’.⁸² In 1597, the earl of Southampton wrote bitterly to Cecil that: ‘my fortune was neuer so good as to enioy any fauor from her *Majestie* that mought make mee desier to stay in her courte’. Southampton insisted that he still wished to serve his Queen and country; he simply felt that he would be able to do so

⁸⁰ Spedding, *Letters*, I, 109.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁸² Birch, *Memoirs*, II, 63.

more effectively away from the royal entourage.⁸³ The queen's cousin Robert Carey was similarly unapologetic about his decision to abandon the court when he failed to prosper there: 'after I had passed my best time at court, and got little, I betook myself to the country ... where I lived with great content'.⁸⁴ Essex's strategic flirtations with the *vita contemplativa* were notorious, as a 'true seruant' warned him: 'vpon euery cross, or discontentment ... thou absentest thy self from the courte, and sometymes as now makest a show of goinge to liue in the countrey'.⁸⁵ The episode to which the anonymous well-wisher alluded was Essex's confrontation with Elizabeth in November 1597, in the aftermath of the Azores fiasco. The crisis was precipitated when the queen made lord admiral Howard earl of Nottingham.⁸⁶ Unwilling to countenance his rival's elevation, Essex wrote coldly to Elizabeth: 'I crave leave to put your Maj. in mind what a stranger I was made to-day, which doth so ill fit with my past fortune and mind at this present, as I had rather retire my sick body and troubled mind into some place of rest'.⁸⁷ The notion that dignified retreat was an appropriate response to the vicissitudes of court politics appeared to contravene the Ciceronian orthodoxy that had been dominant for decades. Yet advocates of retirement became increasingly vocal and confident at the end of the sixteenth century.

Even those who did not seriously contemplate leaving the court often complained that their legitimate ambitions were thwarted there. Francis Bacon described his frustration in a letter to Fulke Greville: 'For to be, as I told you, like a child following a bird, which when he is nearest flieth away and lighteth a little before, and then the child after it

⁸³ NA, SP 12/264/2.

⁸⁴ *The memoirs of Robert Carey*, ed. by F. H. Mares (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 22.

⁸⁵ NA, SP 12/265/10.

⁸⁶ See Hammer, *Polarisation*, pp. 384-8.

⁸⁷ Devereux, *Lives and letters of the Devereux*, I, 462.

again, and so *in infinitum*, I am weary of it; as also of wearying my good friends'.⁸⁸ Bacon's simile evoked the *De curialium miseriis* construct of the tormented courtier, obsessed with the endless and exhausting pursuit of glittering prizes that remain just out of reach. Like Spenser, he was learning from firsthand experience 'What hell it is, in suing long to bide'.⁸⁹ He had not expected to find himself in this particular version of purgatory. In 1580, whilst still a nineteen-year-old student at Gray's Inn, he was apparently persuaded that Elizabeth had immediate plans for his advancement. He wrote to Burghley, thanking his uncle for the 'comfortable relation of her Majesty's gracious opinion and meaning towards me':

It must be an exceeding comfort and encouragement to me, setting forth and putting myself in way towards her Majesty's service, to encounter with an example so private and domestical of her Majesty's gracious goodness and benignity; being made good and verified in my father so far forth as it extendeth to his posterity, accepting them as commended by his service, during the non-age, as I may term it, of their own deserts.

He added that he would be

well content that I take least part of either his abilities of mind or of his worldly advancements ... yet in the loyal and earnest affection which he bare to her Majesty's service, I trust my portion shall not be with the least, nor in proportion with my youngest birth. For methinks his precedent should be a silent charge upon his blessing unto us in all our degrees, to follow him afar off, and to dedicate unto her Majesty's service both the use and spending of our lives.⁹⁰

Much has been written about the humanist concept of a 'nobility of virtue'. Bacon was not a scion of the old aristocracy; by default, his claim to office rested solely on

⁸⁸ Bacon, 'To Foulke Greville', in Spedding, *Letters*, I, 359.

⁸⁹ Spenser, *Mother Hubberds tale*, in *Shorter Poems*, ed. by McCabe, line 896

⁹⁰ Bacon to Burghley, 18 October 1580, in Spedding, *Letters*, I, 13-5.

humanist ideals about the elevated function of able and conscientious commonwealthsmen. Yet his letter to Burghley suggests that he regarded this claim as hereditary. His sense of entitlement, like that of a nobleman, derived from his assumption that he would automatically be given the opportunity to serve his queen and country as his father had done. He did not merely cite the achievements of Sir Nicholas Bacon as a ‘precedent’ that he was bound to emulate.⁹¹ He used the specific vocabulary of dynastic transmission, describing the appetite and aptitude for worthy employment as his ‘portion’.⁹² He was gratified, but not surprised, to find himself ‘commended by [the elder Bacon’s] service’. His great expectations appear to have been based upon a genuine fusion of lineal and meritocratic definitions of nobility.

Other late sixteenth century courtiers regarded the procurement and retention of court offices – sometimes particular offices – as a matter of familial honour. In 1597, Sir William Cornwallis wrote to Robert Cecil, requesting the Secretary

to be a means to Her Majesty, that if God dispose of my old cousin, she will accept the younger into the office of groom porter, in which he has done her service during the illness and age of the other, for the last 16 years; it will be an utter undoing and unending disgrace to him, if another of less standing in Court, and *with no title to the place*, should prevail [my italics].

If Cecil found Elizabeth disinclined to grant the suit, Cornwallis proposed an alternative solution:

...will you make motion to her to bestow the office between him and me, and say that I have said as she would not make me one of her Council, yet if she

⁹¹ The children of great men and noble families were frequently exhorted to replicate and, if possible, surpass the worthy deeds of their ancestors. See Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Cii^v: ‘the noble of birthe counte it a shame not to arriue at leaste at the boundes of their predecessours set forth vnto them’.

⁹² Of course, Bacon modestly insisted that his talents were far inferior to those of his father.

will one of her Court, by this means I may have a poor chamber in Court, and a fire, and a title to bring a pair of cards into the privy chamber, at 10 o'clock at night.⁹³

There were certainly precedents for the quasi-hereditary transfer of offices. In 1587, Essex had succeeded his stepfather, Leicester, as Master of the Horse, in accordance with the wishes of the latter.⁹⁴ Henry Brooke, the eleventh Lord Cobham, replaced his father as lord warden of the Cinque Ports.⁹⁵ Yet such proprietorial attitudes could embitter the already intense competition for placement at court. Cornwallis could hardly have stated his position more emphatically; failure to procure the office of groom porter would plunge his cousin into 'unending disgrace'. His rhetoric illustrates the ease with which hopeful place-seekers could be transformed into malcontents, inclined to identify with the traditional image of the courtier as a perpetual victim of injustice and disappointment.

Using similar vocabulary to Cornwallis, Bacon described the Queen's procrastination over his appointment as Solicitor General as an 'exquisite disgrace'. His correspondence suggested a growing sense of disillusionment with Elizabeth's court. Yet, interestingly, the *Essays* that he published in 1597 often repeated the prescriptions of orthodox courtly conduct manuals. In his assessment *Of discourse*, for example, he noted that

It is good to varie and mixe speech of the present occasion with argument, tales with reasons, asking of questions, with telling of opinions, and iest with earnest. But some thinges are priuiledged from iest, namely Religion, matters of state, great persons, any mans present businesse of importance, and any case

⁹³ *CSP dom. El.* 1595-7, p. 429.

⁹⁴ Hammer, *Polarisation*, pp. 60-1.

⁹⁵ Mark Nicholls, 'Brooke, Henry, eleventh baron Cobham (1564-1619)', *DNB*, vii, 893-5.

that deserueth pittie.⁹⁶

The passage neatly summarizes the Urbino interlocutors' discussion of jesting and playful conversation.⁹⁷ In *Of ceremonies and respectes*, Bacon observed that 'To attaine good formes, it sufficeth not to despise them, for so shal a man observe them in others, and let him trust himselfe with the rest: for if he care to expresse them hee shall leese their grace, which is to be naturall and vnaffected'.⁹⁸ The quality to which he referred was *sprezzatura*, which Hoby translated as 'grace'. *Of negotiating* extolled the advantages of face-to-face interaction (the cornerstone of Castiglionean culture). It also insisted that 'If you would worke any man, you must either know his nature and fashions and so leade him, or his ends, and so winne him, or his weaknesses or disadvantages, and so awe him'.⁹⁹ The latter part of that sentence is perhaps more reminiscent of Machiavelli than Castiglione. When Bacon offers advice on collective, as opposed to individual, man-management, his writings take on a decidedly Florentine tinge. This is discernible in *Of followers and friends*:

In gouernment it is good to vse men of one rancke equally, for, to countenance some extraordinarily, is to make them insolente, and the rest discontent, because they may claime a due. But in fauours to vse men with much difference and election is good, for it maketh the persons preferred more thankefull, and the rest more officious, because all is of fauour.¹⁰⁰

The fact that Bacon appears to echo Machiavelli, rather than Castiglione, on questions concerning the manipulation of socio-economic groups within the body politic may

⁹⁶ Bacon, 'Of discourse', in Spedding, *Works*, VI, part II, 526. See also 'Short notes for civil conversation', in Spedding, *Works*, VII, part I (1879), 527.

⁹⁷ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Rii^r – Aaiii^r.

⁹⁸ Bacon, 'Of ceremonies and respectes', in Spedding, *Works*, VI, part II, 527.

⁹⁹ Bacon, 'Of negotiating', in Spedding, *Works*, VI, part II, 533-4.

¹⁰⁰ Bacon, 'Of followers and friends', in Spedding, *Works*, VI, part II, 527-8.

simply reflect the more extensive treatment that such questions receive in the *Prince*. The *Prince* adopts the perspective of a ruler, who must exercise control over his people *en masse*. The hero of the *Courtier* faces a different challenge; his priority is to establish an intimate relationship with a powerful individual. Bacon's interests encompassed both personal politics and broader issues of 'gouernment'; it is hardly surprising that his *Essays* seem to blend Castiglionean wisdom with Machiavellian policy. What is perhaps surprising is his willingness to reiterate courtesy book truisms, at a time when his personal correspondence was redolent with chagrin at the less-than-stellar trajectory of his own court career.

Ultimately, Bacon believed that court service was the only appropriate *modus vivendi* for an able, ambitious commonwealthsman. He talked of retreating to the ivory towers of Cambridge, but never did. Neither did he encourage others to follow career paths that took them away from the court. His famous letter of advice to Essex is instructive. Bacon urged Essex not to pursue his 'ambition of warre' too ostentatiously; Elizabeth would feel intimidated by a powerful military leader, operating beyond her immediate sphere of vision, and with an independent popular support base ('I demand whether there can be a more dangerous image than this represented to any monarch living, much more to a lady, and of her Majesty's apprehension?').¹⁰¹ Instead of lobbying for the office of Earl Marshal or Master of the Ordnance, Essex should ask to be appointed Lord Privy Seal. This prestigious position would keep him close to the queen, and she could thus reassure herself that he was under her supervision. Meanwhile, he could continue to gather intelligence and influence military policy from the centre of the

¹⁰¹ Spedding, *Letters*, II (1862), p. 41.

regime.¹⁰² However, Bacon prophesied little success for his patron if the latter persisted in seeking glory and honourable employment beyond the royal circle.¹⁰³ This was despite the fact that his own attempts to forge a career at court had thus far achieved little, besides humiliating rebuffs.

During Elizabeth's last decade, war with Spain and rebellion in Ireland created a tense and unsettled political atmosphere. The English court tended increasingly to be viewed as a potential hotbed of Italianate cloak-and-dagger politics.¹⁰⁴ The case of Dr Lopez, a foreigner who appeared to have insinuated his way into the Queen's good graces for the express purpose of poisoning her, was notorious. In 1594, Bacon compiled a *True report of the detestable treason, intended by Dr. Roderigo Lopez*. He represented Lopez as a snake in the grass - a 'Proteus' figure who had blended in nicely at court. His 'pleasing and applicable behaviour' ensured that 'he grew known and favoured' there.¹⁰⁵ In this respect, he was a model courtier, securing the confidence of his prince through a winning combination of pliancy, resourceful versatility and civilized manners. However, he wickedly abused the trust reposed in him. He used his knowledge of, and proximity to, Elizabeth to plot her murder. Bacon repeatedly emphasized the fact that Lopez had 'private access', 'ordinary access', to the Queen.¹⁰⁶ He embodied a particular threat – the kind that only a trusted but treacherous courtier could pose.

¹⁰² Spedding, *Letters*, II, p. 43.

¹⁰³ In his fascinating article on friendship, David Wootton argued that Bacon's essays 'Of followers and friends' and 'Of faction' were designed to forestall Essex's rejection of the court as irredeemably corrupt. According to Wootton, Bacon sought to demonstrate that Essex could still follow his 'honourable commonwealth courses' at court, and should not succumb to the bleakness inherent in the Tacitean view of courts and courtiers. David Wootton, 'Francis Bacon: your flexible friend', in *World of the favourite*, ed. by Elliott and Brockliss, pp. 184-204 (p. 195).

¹⁰⁴ The Council was certainly security conscious; see, for example, *CSP dom. El.*, 1591-4, pp. 432-3.

¹⁰⁵ Spedding, *Letters*, I, 277-8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 277; 286.

Yet lowly, peripheral figures could also be sucked into the devilish intrigues that seemed to swirl about the royal household. In 1599, Bacon published the officially sanctioned account of another attempt upon the queen's life. He reported that Edward Squire, 'lately executed for the same treason', had been entrusted with 'an employment about the Queenes Stable'. Squire had sailed with Drake, and had been captured by the Spanish. Whilst a prisoner in Spain, he had come to the attention of the Jesuit Richard Walpoole (damningly described as 'a kinde of Vicar generall to Parsons in his absence'). Walpoole 'vnderstood, Squire had formerly had some attendance about the Queenes Stable, which he streight caught holde of, as an opportunity'. He promptly converted the captive to Catholicism, arranged for his return to England, and persuaded him to smear the pommel of Elizabeth's saddle with poison. In accordance with the best traditions of the Medici, the toxic lotion would be absorbed through the queen's skin. Death would follow swiftly. Squire did as he was told, but on the day of the assassination attempt, Elizabeth providentially failed to rest her hand upon the pommel of her saddle.¹⁰⁷ Squire, of course, was a stable-hand, and not a courtier. His treacherous, murderous escapades did not reflect directly upon the courtly profession. Nonetheless, the circulation of such stories served to reinforce the contra-Machiavellian image of the court as a sinister hub of conspiracy and murder most foul. It is surely no coincidence that grisly dramas starring homicidal courtiers became enormously popular at the turn of the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Francis Bacon, *A letter written out of England to an English gentleman remaining at Padua containing a true report of a strange conspiracie* (London: Christopher Barker, 1599), pp. 2-9.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1600-1). The play is set at the court of Piero Sforza, duke of Venice. The first scene provides a fair, and graphic, indication of what is to come. Piero enters, 'unbraced, his arms bare, smeared in blood, a poniard in one hand, bloody, and a torch in the other'. He is followed by his henchman, Strotzo, 'with a cord' (*s.d.* 1. 1. 1). He informs the audience

The war with Spain also served to exacerbate tensions between military men and their civilian counterparts. As we noted in chapter five, Essex presented himself as the figurehead and champion of the soldiery.¹⁰⁹ Not everyone found his relentless promotion of martial men, values and policies congenial. Crucially, Elizabeth and Burghley regarded protracted warfare as a drain on the nation's resources. By the late 1590s, the prospect of peace seemed enticing.¹¹⁰ Essex saw it as his duty to resist this sapping of the government's collective will. His *Apologie* reaffirmed the ancient dichotomy between effeminate, self-serving court-dwellers and military practitioners of the *vita activa*.¹¹¹ This dichotomy undermined Castiglione's composite model of courtliness. It did so not merely by suggesting that soldiers and civilians were a different breed of men, but by staking an exclusive claim for the former to be recognised as servants of the commonwealth. Since ancient times, the public service credentials of the two groups had been compared and contrasted. Those who favoured the military had often disparaged the polity, and vice versa. Cicero, with whom the ideal of the *vita activa* was most strongly associated in the Renaissance, preferred the civil politician to the soldier:

Most men consider that military affairs are of greater significance than civic; I must deflate that opinion. For men have not infrequently sought war out of desire for glory, This has most often been true of men of great spirit and talent, and all the more so if military service suits them and they love the business of

that it is 'dead night', then discloses that he has cunningly slain an old rival, Feliche: 'This brain hath choked / the organ of his breast' (l. 1. 14). He explains that, years ago, Feliche won the hand of Maria, 'fair Ferrara's heir', 'For which I burned in inward swel'ring hate, / And festered rankling malice in my breast, / Till I might belk reuenge upon his eyes.' (l. 1. 27). He demands Hell's 'loud applause to my hypocrisy' (l. 1. 31). John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*, ed. W. Reavley Gair, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978; repr. 1999).

¹⁰⁹ Bod. MS e Mus. 55, fols 75^v – 76^f.

¹¹⁰ Read, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth*, pp. 539-40.

¹¹¹ See the discussion of Tacitus, below; and Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, IV, 189.

warfare.¹¹²

The army thus acted as a magnet for the personally ambitious and vainglorious; the polity, by default, was a more reliable guarantor of the common weal. By contrast, the *Book of the Courtier* declined to differentiate the authenticity of military and civic virtue. Castiglione suggested that a courtier's soldierly ideals and exercises should complement his service as a politician. On the battlefield, in the lists and in the privy chamber, a 'perfect Courtier' would strive consistently to foster virtue and promote the commonweal. His commitment to this agenda would render all his activities benevolent and useful. Essex's insistence that military service was intrinsically more valid than civilian politics torpedoed this elegant solution to an ancient rivalry.

The Essexian preference for men of war is reflected in much of the Tacitean literature that came to be associated with the earl's intellectual circle.¹¹³ Tacitus was no hagiographer of the soldier. In what he deemed 'a most corrupt age', he did not expect decency or discipline from the rank and file. He also observed that the lieutenants and generals 'for the most part were persons drowned in riot, beggerly and guilty of most hainous crimes'.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, he praised the virtue of military heroes such as Germanicus and Agricola. He presented the latter in particular as a disinterested patriot,

¹¹² Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On duties*, trans. by E. M. Atkins, ed. by M. T. Griffin and T. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; repr. 1996), pp. 29-30.

¹¹³ In 1591, Henry Savile, the warden of Merton College and a member of Essex's Oxonian clique, published a substantial vernacular text entitled *The ende of Nero and the beginning of Galba: fower bookes of the histories of Cornelius Tacitus. The life of Agricola*. The *Histories* and the *Life of Agricola* were translations. However, Tacitus's account of the last two years in which Nero was emperor (66-68 AD) did not survive. Savile therefore narrated and analysed the events of these tumultuous months himself. See David Womersley, 'Sir Henry Savile's Translation of Tacitus and the Political Interpretation of Elizabethan Texts', *Review of English Studies, New Series*, vol. 42, no. 167 (August 1991), 313-42. Subsequently, in 1598, Richard Greenway published a translation of Tacitus' *Annales* and *Germania*. Greenway's work was dedicated to Essex.

¹¹⁴ Tacitus, 'Histories', in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 75.

who resolved at the start of his military career ‘to desire no imployment vpon vaine glory’ and ‘to refuse none for fear’. Agricola took soldiery seriously, ‘not spending the time in riot after the maner of youthes, which conuert warfare into wantonnesse’. When posted to Britain as a tribune, he behaved like a conscientious gentleman traveller of the Renaissance, ‘wholly directing his minde to knowe the prouince’.¹¹⁵ His only ambition was to serve Rome to the best of his abilities: ‘Neither did Agricola at any time bragge of his doings as seeking to winne fame for himselfe, but humbly alwaies as a minister referred to his superiour, and General, the good fortune and honour of all his exploites’.¹¹⁶ Appointed commander of the twentieth legion in Britain, he helped to subdue the disorderly province, and inspired his soldiers with his valour on the battlefield.¹¹⁷ He subsequently took steps to safeguard the peace by establishing a fair, impartial and meritocratic administration.¹¹⁸ In 78 AD, he was elevated to the governorship of Britain, in which capacity he extended the frontiers of the Empire to the north, in Caledonia. Despite his great achievements, he continued to eschew personal glory, and returned to Rome at night to avoid the adulation of the people.¹¹⁹

Agricola exemplified all the qualities for which martial men had traditionally been respected: modesty, self-discipline, dedication, a commitment to justice and devotion to the *patria*. Unfortunately, Tacitus submitted, these attributes were antithetical to the political culture of the imperial court. Agricola’s ‘desire of militare renoune’ was ‘a quality not so acceptable in those seasons, wherein great vertues were greatly suspected,

¹¹⁵ Tacitus, ‘Agricola’, in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 239.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹¹⁹ Tacitus, ‘Agricola’, in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 262.

and a great fame endangered more than a bad'.¹²⁰ His style of government in Britain ('his house first of all he reformed and restrained'; 'he received no soldier neare to his person vpon priuate affections of partiall suiters') was a reproach to the extravagance and favouritism habitually practised in Domitian's entourage.¹²¹ As 'men of no action', Domitian's courtiers resented martial virtue, and regarded Agricola with 'spite and enuy'. More disturbingly, the Emperor himself viewed 'militare glory' as a threat to his preeminence; 'to bee a good commander of an army was to bee aboute priuate estate, that being a vertue peculiar for a Prince'.¹²² Hence, Tacitus intimated, the exemplary soldier died a courtier's death, secretly poisoned by those who claimed to be most solicitous of his welfare.¹²³ This unbecoming end demonstrated the irreconcilable nature of military and courtly aspirations and values.

Tacitus suggested that the court, as an accessory to monarchy, was irredeemably degrading. When government is vested in a single individual, proximity to that individual becomes a valuable commodity. Few of the prince's friends and servants can resist the temptation to capitalise on their position. Hence, under Galba, the emperor's freedmen 'made open sale of al matters: his bondmen [were] greedy vpon present aduantage, and hasty, as being vnder a master that was old, and not like long to

¹²⁰ Tacitus, 'Agricola', in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 240.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 262-3. In his *Annales*, Tacitus observed that Tiberius was similarly 'grieved' by 'the glory that Germanicus got' whilst campaigning in Germania. The emperor was also afraid least Germanicus, who had so many legions at commaundement; such strong aides of confederates; and so exceedingly beloved of the people; should rather hold, then expect the possession of the Empire. He stode on his reputation likewise, and seemed rather to be called and chosen by the Common-wealth, then creepe in by the canuasing of a woman [Tiberius's natural mother, Livia], and adoption of an old man [Augustus].

Cornelius Tacitus, *The annales of Cornelius Tacitus. The description of Germanie*, trans. by Richard Greenway (London: Arn. Hatfield for Bonham and John Norton, 1598), pp. 21; 4.

¹²³ Tacitus, 'Agricola', in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, pp. 264-5.

continue'.¹²⁴ The problem was that the influence enjoyed by these attendants depended entirely upon their relationship with one man. They consequently sought to enrich themselves as much as possible within the limited span of their master's life. Savile also highlighted the chronic corruption of Galban court politics, noting that Titus Vinius, 'seruing in great place a weake master, made open sale of his Princes free graces and fauours'.¹²⁵

Alongside peculation and bribery, prodigality was rampant in many of the courts portrayed by Tacitus. Again, the historian identified this phenomenon as a symptom of monarchy. Emperors usually expect to live luxuriously, and their households thus become centres of 'riotous liung'.¹²⁶ Galba's adoptive son Piso warned his supporters that Otho, who was then in the process of deposing Galba, would turn the imperial palace into an un-stately pleasure dome: 'bodily pleasures & banqueting, wanton daliance with women ... these he accounteth the prerogatiues of Princes'.¹²⁷ Tacitus attributed a similar attitude to Otho's successor, Vitellius. He described how Vitellius advanced upon Rome with a 'disorderly' train of revellers: 'the nearer Vitellius came to the city, the more dissolute & corrupt was he & his company, stage plaiers associating themselues to the traine, and droues of eunuches, and the rest of the buffons of Neroes court'.¹²⁸ Courtiers pandered to his self-indulgence: 'No man in that court sought to rise by vertue or ablenesse: the onely way to credit was with prodigall banquets, and sumptuous cheere to satiate vnsatiabile appetites of Vitellius'.¹²⁹ Vitellius was

¹²⁴ Tacitus, 'Histories', in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Savile, 'Ende of Nero', in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 14.

¹²⁶ Tacitus, 'Histories', in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 14.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-4.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

surrounded (as he deserved) by ‘the baser sort’.¹³⁰ Nero suffered the same self-inflicted misfortune. According to Savile’s analysis, his ‘ryot and carelesse licentious life’ left him fatally devoid of reliable allies in his hour of need.¹³¹ When disaster loomed, his sybarite courtiers simply melted away. Nero’s lonely, furtive suicide provided a bleak testimonial to the calibre of men and women in the entourage of a hedonistic monarch.

The greatest temptation for the advisors, friends and flunkeys of princes was undoubtedly flattery. As Galba explained to his designated heir, Piso, no monarch could hope to escape the attentions of flatterers: ‘flattery will breake in, and pleasing speeches, and the most pestilent poison of all true meaning, priuate respectes for priuate aduantage’. This was because of the problem expounded by More in *Utopia*: ‘to persuade a Prince that which is meete, is a point of some paine; to flatter any Prince whatsoeuer, needeth small endeouour’.¹³² Tacitus subsequently observed that Vitellius’s life and regime might have been saved by the counsel of ‘expert Centurions’, ‘but Vitellius inwardest frendes hindered them from accesse, the Princes eares being so framed, that he accounted all sharpe that was wholesome, & liked of nothing but that which was presently pleasant, and afterwards hurtfull’.¹³³ The *Life of Agricola* described how Domitian lost all judgment, ‘so blinded hee was, and so greatly corrupted by continuall custome of flatteries’.¹³⁴ We conclude that it would take a prince of great moral courage and exceptional intelligence to discourage flattery in his entourage. Sovereignty engenders an inflated sense of self-importance, and most monarchs like and

¹³⁰ Tacitus, ‘Histories’, in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 104.

¹³¹ Savile, ‘Ende of Nero’, in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 7.

¹³² Quotation from Tacitus, ‘Histories’, in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 10. See also More, *Utopia*, p. 57.

¹³³ Tacitus, ‘Histories’, in *Ende of Nero: Histories. Agricola*, p. 148.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

expect to be feted. Their courtiers quickly learn that offering honest but unpalatable advice is no way to secure royal favour. They consequently lie, and fawn, and feed the delusions of their master. The process is demeaning and dangerous for everyone involved.

The *Book of the Courtier* postulated that classical republican skills and virtues could be practised in a courtly context. Henry Savile's Tacitean omnibus advanced a more pessimistic interpretation of monarchy in general, and courts in particular. Both institutions were presented as morally toxic, contaminating all those who engaged with them. According to Tacitus, the courtier was a servile creature, profoundly diminished by his participation in a corrupt political system. By promoting and subscribing to this analysis, Savile and his fellow Essexians reaffirmed the old adage: 'exeat aula, qui volte esse pius'. Moreover, the Tacitean canon suggested that the pious ignored Lucan's injunction at their peril. It warned that virtuous men and women were like fish out of water at court – and would probably suffer accordingly.

In the late sixteenth century, the courtly profession was subjected to a serious and sustained literary assault. Historians such as John Guy and Alistair Fox have explained this phenomenon through reference to the political pressures of the 'nasty nineties'. They have certainly demonstrated that court politics were problematic at this juncture. Numerous men of letters were embittered by their experience or observation of the royal entourage, and responded accordingly with swingeing satire or biting complaints. However, their responses frequently bear the impression of pre-Elizabethan critiques and caricatures. The resilience of medieval anti-courtier discourse, and its resonance within late Elizabeth political culture, should not be underestimated.

To understand the fin-de-siècle reaction against courtiers more fully, we need to dispense with the notion that it can be treated as a cohesive phenomenon with a single set of circumstantial causes. In his study of *Popular politics and the English Reformation*, Ethan Shagan examines the use of reformist vocabulary in Henrician, Edwardian and Marian England. He argues that religious change was gradually accepted because a range of individuals and groups chose to exploit selected strands of this vocabulary to advance their ambitions and interests. Hence, 'the Reformation entered English culture through the back door, not dependent upon spectacular epiphanies but rather exploiting the mundane realities of political allegiance, financial investment and local conflict'.¹³⁵ This analysis can help us to appreciate how the courtier's fall from grace was effected at the end of the sixteenth century. Of course, it was not coincidental that negative stereotypes were revived and reinvented in a period when court patronage was scarce and court politics seemed hopelessly cliquy and corrupt. Yet the real damage to the image of the courtier was not done by self-aware iconoclasts, whose experience of the 'nasty nineties' had caused them to repudiate Castiglionean idealism. The image was dented and distorted during decades of political and religious controversy. Politicians, place-seekers and polemicists invoked a range of pejorative discourses to discredit their opponents and promote their own agendas. Some of these discourses were obviously anti-curial. Spenser, for example, chose to criticise the Cecils' ambition and influence by referring his readers to the familiar construct of the predator-courtier. Other discourses did not explicitly target the courtier, but were directed more generally at the political establishment. However, the

¹³⁵ Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 306. For a synopsis of Shagan's argument throughout the book, see pp. 305-310.

most influential politicians were usually, in some sense, courtiers. The mud that was flung at them sullied the image of all court acolytes. Hence, for instance, Catholic dissidents fuming about the devious policy of Elizabeth's ministers helped to fashion the figure of the Machiavellian courtier.

The process whereby anti-courtier literature increased in volume and virulence was complex, protracted, and (to a certain extent) haphazard. It was more than a response to the political and structural problems that emerged during the 'nasty nineties'. It ultimately diminished the credibility with which the Courtier had endowed his profession. However, Castiglione's ideals of civil behaviour proved more resilient.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this study of the courtier's reputation in Elizabethan England, it is worth considering those characterisations of court acolytes that were not developed as fully as they might have been before 1603. We have already analysed Elizabethan images of the courtier in conjunction with their medieval counterparts. By comparing them (briefly) with Jacobean images, we can isolate the traits that were not widely or vociferously attributed to courtiers until the early Stuart era. An evaluation of what was *not* said between 1558 and 1603 will shed useful light upon contemporary constructs of the courtier. As Sherlock Holmes reminds us when he draws Watson's attention to the curious incident of the dog in the night, silence can be very instructive.

We observed in chapter four that medieval clerics routinely accused courtiers of promiscuity and sexual deviancy. Elizabethan critics of the court were relatively sparing in their use of obscene and scatological satire. Standards slipped around the turn of the century - a phenomenon that Paul Hammer attributes to the deterioration of respect for a queen whose honour was heavily invested in the chastity of her privy chamber.¹ There was certainly a boisterous bawdiness to John Liliat's 'passinat Poëm, enigamtuely written againste a Gentleman Courtier, which regarded one Gentlewoman, and neglected the other'.² Lilliat reminded the courtier that he had no reason to spurn the advances of his would-be paramour, pointing out with unanswerable logic that 'thou

¹ Paul E. J. Hammer, 'Sex and the Virgin Queen: aristocratic concupiscence and the court of Elizabeth I', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 77-97.

² The poem survives in Lilliat's manuscript collection of verse (Bod. Rawl. Poet MS 148). The manuscript was compiled in the 1590s, when Lilliat was vicar choral at Chichester Cathedral. See Edward Doughtie's 'Introduction', in *Liber Lilliat: Elizabethan verse and song (Bodleian MS Rawlinson Poetry 148)*, ed. by Doughtie (Newark, DL: University of Delaware Press, 1985).

thy self, hast with a fowler layne'.³ In a letter dated 9 October 1601, John Harington joked about the number of cuckolds to be found at court.⁴ Ben Jonson's play *Cynthia's revels*, written for the court and probably performed at Twelfth Night 1601, featured corrupt nymphs who sully the reputation of Cynthia's entourage with their lewdness 'in this licencious time'.⁵ Yet the offence caused by *Cynthia's revels* reminds us that, at this juncture, there were definite limits to the scurrility with which court acolytes could be satirized. References to the lascivious desires of female courtiers presumably left Queen Elizabeth unamused.⁶

As Alistair Bellany has demonstrated, explicitly sexual satire became more prevalent after the death of the 'Virgin Queen'.⁷ This phenomenon was noted by contemporaries. One should always be wary of taking complaints about declining standards of sexual morality too seriously. The fulminations of Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury

³ Bod. Rawl. Poet MS 148, fols 68^v - 69^r.

⁴ *The letters and epigrams of Sir John Harington together with the prayse of a private life*, ed. by Norman Egbert McClure (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1930), letter 22, pp. 90-1.

⁵ Ben Jonson, *The fountaine of selfe-loue: or Cynthia's reuels* (London: [R. Read] for Walter Burre, 1601), sig. E3^r. A very plausible case can be made for identifying *Cynthia's revels* as the play that was performed by the Chapel Children on 6 January 1601. See Michael Shapiro, *Children of the revels: the boy companies of Shakespeare's time and their plays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 259.

⁶ *Cynthia's revels* is a very useful text for gauging what kind of material was unacceptable at the Elizabethan court, because Jonson published it twice. The first edition was published in quarto in 1601, shortly after the court performance. A folio edition followed fifteen years later, in 1616. The folio text was essentially the uncut version of *Cynthia's revels*; it incorporated lines and scenes that were deemed inappropriate in 1601. See Herford, Simpson and Simpson, *Jonson*, IV (1932), 3-21. The corrupt nymphs' discussion of what they want most in the world, for example, makes an interesting addition to the folio. Philavtia's wish-list is typical:

I would wish my selfe a little more command, and soueraignetie; that all the court were subiect to my absolute becke, and all things in it depending on my looke; as if there were no other heauen, but in my smile, nor other hell, but in my frowne; that I might send for any man I list, and haue his head cut off, when I haue done with him; or made an *Eunuch*, if he denied mee: and if I saw a better face then mine owne, I might haue my doctor to poyson it.

Ben Jonson, *Cynthia's revels*, in the *Workes of Benjamin Ionson* (London: W. Stansby for Rich. Meighen, 1616), p. 219.

⁷ Alistair Bellany, "'Raylinge rymes and vaunting verse': libellous politics in early Stuart England, 1603-1628", in *Culture and politics in early Stuart England*, ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 285-310.

serve as a useful reminder that such complaints were repeated by successive generations, each convinced that its courtiers had sunk to a new nadir of bacchanalian permissiveness. Nonetheless, a number of particularly salacious scandals tarnished the reputation of James' court and its inhabitants. The Overbury murder case provided gossip-mongers with their most sensational fodder. The amorous exploits of leading court luminaries, such as Robert Cecil, earl of Salisbury and Thomas Sackville, earl of Dorset, also attracted widespread comment.⁸ More generally, the fact that the Privy Chamber was no longer staffed by women, as it had been under Elizabeth, meant that sexual purity was placed at less of a premium among the monarch's immediate associates. Whatever the cause, frank discussions of sensual appetites and proclivities played an increasingly prominent part in Jacobean anti-courtier discourse. Sir John Harington, for example, published his collection of epigrams after the death of his godmother, Queen Elizabeth. The collection included a verse about a courtier who flatters and grovels so basely at the feet of a friend that the latter invites him to perform oral sex ('three foote higher you deserue to kisse').⁹ The character of the courtier was thus projected from smutty innuendo.

Bellany interprets the vulgar castigation of early Stuart courtiers as a response to contemporary court politics. Jacobean libellers were particularly exercised by the

⁸ Anne Somerset, *Unnatural murder: poison at the court of James I* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997; repr. 1998), pp. 31-6. A posthumous character sketch of Salisbury recorded that 'he was Lauish in his Lust; the caus that this amongst others of like neture ware sprinkled vpon his graue.

Here Liees Robert Cicil
Compos'd of back & Pisle

BL, Add. MS 25348, fol. 9^r. The symbolism of the pestle is illustrated by Francis Beaumont's comedy *The knight of the burning pestle*. In Act III, Scene 4, the hero, Rafe, orders a vanquished opponent to kiss his burning pestle as a token of submission. See Francis Beaumont, *The knight of the burning pestle*, in *Three comedies: The knight of the burning pestle; The critic; The importance of being Earnest*, ed. by G. P. W. Earle (London: Ginn & Co, [1929]), p. 86.

⁹ John Harington, *The most elegant and witty epigrams of Sir John Harrington* (London: G. P. for John Budge, 1618), sig. K8^v.

perceived ubiquity of Catholic influence at court.¹⁰ This concern had not agitated Elizabethan commentators to the same extent. Everard Guilpin depicted 'Balthazar' the courtier as a 'holy and rose water' papist in 1598.¹¹ A few prominent courtiers were accused of being crypto-Catholics during Elizabeth's reign. In 1585, the author of a secret intelligence report 'concerning the King of Scottes and the Scottish queene' claimed 'That the Papistes have to there ffreundes in the Courte of England the lord of Comberland, the lorde of Rutland, the lorde Compton the lorde Morley'.¹² In the 'last decade', the possibility of the Spanish Infanta's accession to the English throne encouraged such allegations. In 1601, for example, Lord Buckhurst was rumoured to be working covertly for a Spanish succession, hoping thereby to 'set up Popery' by stealth.¹³ In general, however, the fear of popery at court was conceived in terms of infiltration by hostile outsiders - such as Richard Walpoole, who brainwashed the stable-hand Squire into acting as a Jesuit assassin.

During James' reign, by contrast, the court itself was widely regarded as a seedbed of Catholicism. The king's eagerness to co-exist peacefully with Spain disappointed and distressed many of his subjects, who argued that his Hispanophilia was inflamed by the presence of powerful Catholics in his immediate circle. Arthur Wilson claimed that James 'closed with' the 'Popish party' in England 'by entertaining into his Councils the

¹⁰ Bellany, 'Raylinge rymes', pp. 292-301.

¹¹ Guilpin, *Skialetheia*, pp. [65]-[66].

¹² The agent drew a blank searching for female Catholic sympathisers at court: 'for woomen I cannott learne of any'. BL, Harl. MS 290, fol. 157^r. See also M. C. Questier, *Catholicism and community in early modern England: politics, aristocratic patronage and religion, c. 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 98-9.

¹³ HMC *Salisbury*, XII, 565-7; Michael Questier, 'Practical antipapistry during the reign of Elizabeth I', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4 (October 1997), 371-96 (391-2).

Lord Thomas Howard, and the Lord Henry Howard'.¹⁴ The latter was widely mistrusted. He was described as a Catholic 'by Education as well as decent ... so far Zealous as to giue ordar to be buried at rome'. It was noted that 'he neuer married, parhaps the caus, report rembred him amongst those had takne ordars, to which may be added his Loue to spaine, for a pease with whose King he was a gret stikelar'. It was even alleged that he was 'not utterly out of hope of a Cardinals Cap, a dignity he cuold not refraine commending'.¹⁵ Of course, Howard's religious allegiances had been deemed doubtful in Elizabeth's reign. Before the Jacobean accession, however, he had played a peripheral part in court politics. His social and political elevation under James rendered his crypto-Catholicism more alarming.

Other factors lent credence to the notion that popery had lodged itself firmly at the heart of the Jacobean regime. The Catholic leanings of Queen Anna were disconcerting, although they created far less consternation than the open Catholicism of the next queen, Henrietta Maria. A number of influential Jacobean courtiers who were not personally suspected of popery were condemned for being dangerously sympathetic towards English papists. Gondomar identified Robert Carr, earl of Somerset, as a friend of the Catholics. Somerset's accommodating reputation earned him the deep animosity of the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Abbott.¹⁶ Finally, the 'Popish party' at court was blamed for aiding and abetting the scheme to marry Prince Charles to the Spanish Infanta. John Rushworth noted darkly that opponents of the Spanish match were

¹⁴ Arthur Wilson, *The history of Great Britain being the life and reign of King James the first* (London: Richard Lownds, 1653), p. 3.

¹⁵ BL, Add. MS 25348, fol. 6^{r-v}.

¹⁶ Somerset, *Unnatural murder*, pp. 260-1.

systematically 'cross'd in Court-preferments'.¹⁷

The idea that courtiers were peculiarly susceptible to Roman religion was therefore taken seriously in the early Stuart era. The stereotypical image of the vacuous and decadent court acolyte intersected neatly with that of the superstitious, Hispanophilic papist. After all, the courtier was commonly derided for his obsession with meaningless words and empty ritual: 'He puts more confidence in his words than meaning, and more in his pronunciation than his words'.¹⁸ He was also accused of affecting foreign forms and customs.¹⁹ His alleged aptitude for Catholicism had been noted by satirists such as Guilpin before 1603. Thereafter, however, references to Catholic beliefs and practices became increasingly common in descriptions and criticisms of courtiers.

Characterisations of the courtier tended to be bawdier, more contemptuous and more confessionally loaded after the Jacobean accession. Late Elizabethan strands of anti-courtier discourse were also projected into the new reign. Essexian claims that the court had been colonised by flatterers, back-stabbers and 'private' men were reiterated. Poets and playwrights were less inhibited about addressing Essex's grievances after Elizabeth's death – although they quickly discovered that attempts to vindicate the earl could still cause grave offence. Samuel Daniel's *Philotas*, for example, dealt with the Essexian themes of treachery, selfishness and sycophancy among the advisors and

¹⁷ John Rushworth, *Historical collections of private passages of state, weighty matters in law, remarkable proceedings in five Parliaments: beginning the sixteenth year of King James, anno 1618, and ending the fifth year of King Charles, anno 1629* (London: Tho. Newcomb for George Thomason, 1659), p. 4.

¹⁸ Thomas Overbury, *The "Conceited newes" of Sir Thomas Overbury and his friends: a facsimile reproduction of the ninth impression of 1616 of Sir Thomas Overbury his wife*, ed. by James E. Savage, University of Mississippi (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968), p. 71.

¹⁹ Before 1603, the archetypal 'outlandish' courtier was the Italianate Englishman. After the Jacobean accession, courtly 'foreignness' was more often associated with Spain. Richard Braithwaite lampooned the early seventeenth century courtier as an ardent Hispanophile, who 'could talke of Spaine, / Yet nere was there', and dressed himself in ridiculous Spanish fashions. Richard Brathwaite, *A strappado for the Diuell* (London: J. Beale for Richard Redmer, 1615), pp. 64; 124-5.

associates of a tyrant.²⁰ In popular verse, the courtiers whom Essex had blamed for his estrangement from the Queen were denounced as self-serving *politiques*. ‘Wilye Watt’ Raleigh was warned in no uncertain terms that

Essex for vengeance cries,
His blood upon the lies,
Mountinge above the skies,
Damnable fiend of hell,
Mischevous Matchivell!²¹

Robert Cecil was saddled with ‘the Large bill of Reproches & preiudice writ one the poples harts with the Earle of Essex blud, which no Endeauour of his could expunge in his life, no[r] any Apology of frends discharge him of at is graue’.²² The stereotype of the flattering, devious, envious courtier thus featured prominently in early Jacobean political discourse.

Complaints about extravagance and rapacity in the royal household also became more vociferous after 1603. As we noted in chapter six, the issue of monopolies inspired some stinging criticism of the court and its inhabitants in the 1590s. The root of the problem was identified as Elizabeth’s alleged ‘Neerness’, and the selfishness of leading court grandees.²³ The Queen was deemed too parsimonious to reward her servants properly, which encouraged them to exploit the (already over-burdened) populace to meet their expenses. According to disgruntled satirists such as Spenser, the situation was exacerbated by the acquisitive instincts of the Cecils, who grabbed at every perk

²⁰ See Gazzard, ‘Graue presentments of antiquitie’, 423-50.

²¹ *Poetical miscellanies from a manuscript collection of the time of James I*, ed. by James Orchard Halliwell (London: T. Richards for the Percy Society, 1845), pp. 13-14.

²² BL, Add. MS 25348, fol. 7^r.

²³ Wilson, ‘State of England’, 28.

and preferment, leaving others to fend for themselves in straightened circumstances.²⁴ The courtier was consequently characterized as a hungry, grasping predator.

In contrast to Elizabeth, James was criticised for the excessive generosity with which he treated his favourites. His inability to curb his household expenditure was a perpetual trial to his lord treasurer, Salisbury.²⁵ His willingness to indulge the rapacity of spendthrift courtiers occasioned stormy scenes in Parliament. In an acrimonious debate on 19 February 1610, Sir Thomas Wentworth famously wondered ‘what purpose is it for us to draw a silver streame out of the contry into the royall cesterne, if it shall dayly runne out thence by private cockes?’. Wentworth added that, for his part, ‘he would never give his consent to take money from a poore frize jerkyn to trappe a courtier’s horse withall’.²⁶ Censorious descriptions of phenomenal profligacy were thus more pronounced in Jacobean anti-courtier discourse; Elizabeth was now pointedly commemorated as ‘the best huswife of the peoples [sic] treasure that was euer intrusted with the manigment of a sceptar’.²⁷ Moreover, the accession of a foreign-born king rekindled old fears about the greed of ‘alien’ favourites. For over forty years, England had been in the relatively unusual position of having a single, childless, self-consciously native monarch, with no foreign consort, friends or kinsmen at court. After 1603, the new king’s distribution of gifts and patronage was jealously scrutinized. James’ English subjects alleged that royal largesse was misdirected towards carpet-bagging Scots in the Bedchamber. The king was accused of

²⁴ Spenser, *Mother Hubberds tale*, lines 1143-56.

²⁵ See Pauline Croft, ‘Robert Cecil and the early Jacobean court’, in *Mental world of the Jacobean court*, ed. by Peck, pp. 134-47 (pp. 141-7).

²⁶ S. R. Gardiner, *Parliamentary debates in 1610* (London: Camden Society, 1862), p. 11.

²⁷ BL, Add. MS 25348, fol. 7^r.

bury[ing] the english-mans hopes in his partiality to the Scots, coming short in parformance of what the expectation of all (weared with a feminin gouernment) had ingaged him to; which he surpassed in nothing but riot & excesse, the parents of oppression, & fomentors of the peoples discontent.²⁸

Denunciations of greedy, exploitative courtiers were leavened with the bitter yeast of xenophobic resentment.

There can be little doubt that the courtier's reputation deteriorated after the Jacobean accession. Contemporary concerns about sexual licence, extravagance and the entrenchment of popery at court were translated into virulent anti-courtier invective. The fact that these concerns did not impress themselves as strongly on Elizabethan cultural constructs of the courtier sheds interesting light on the peculiarities of Elizabeth's reign. Female monarchy discouraged ribaldry. The lack of a dominant Catholic presence in the royal entourage ensured that courtiers were scrutinized less rigorously for incipiently 'papist' characteristics. The Queen's reputation for ('feminin') meanness affected responses to her servants' expenditure and revenue-raising. Because her foreign connections were relatively limited, the rapacity of 'outlandish' favourites was not a consistently urgent theme of anti-courtier discourse between 1558 and 1603. Specific issues pertaining to Elizabeth's regiment thus influenced perceptions and representations of her acolytes.

This scenario was scarcely unprecedented. The men and women who surrounded a monarch had always been imbued with a certain symbolic significance. They existed at the hub of a regime, in close proximity to the being who was considered the fount of

²⁸ BL, Add. MS 25348, fol. 7^v.

authority within, and embodiment of, the state.²⁹ They consequently acted as a lightning rod, through which reactions to the monarch and his or her government could be channeled. In problematic reigns, they served as scapegoats for the sins of their sovereign. The court was also treated as a microcosm of the realm. We noted in chapter four that it was often held accountable for the financial and spiritual health of the kingdom. Courtiers were urged to set a good example to their fellow subjects. Moralists insisted that courtly fashions, faults and foibles would be aped at every level of society. They traced numerous pernicious social trends back to the court, which they identified as a source of corruption.

From the classical era onwards, the courtier thus tended to absorb criticism on behalf of the prince and the people. His name became a synonym for numerous vices - greed, ambition, sycophancy, selfishness, inconstancy, effeminacy and pride. Castiglione deliberately sought to challenge this state of affairs. His manifesto, the *Book of the Courtier*, was a considered response to centuries of negative characterisation. His interlocutors addressed and answered traditional objections to curial conduct. Their discussion of courtiers' mendacity exemplified this process. Federico Fregoso suggests, with Machiavellian candour, that the courtier should be prepared 'to dissemble'. Pallavicino contests the legitimacy of such practices: 'I thinke not this an art, but a verie deceite'. Fregoso, however, mounts an eloquent defence of strategic trickery:

Will you not saye also, that he that beateth his fellow, where there be two playiing at fence together, beeguyleth hym, and that is bicause he hath more art then the other. And where you haue a iewell that vnsett seemeth faire,

²⁹ David Starkey, 'Representation through intimacy: a study in the symbolism of monarchy and court office in early modern England', in *Symbols and sentiments: cross-cultural studies in symbolism*, ed. by Ioan Lewis (London, New York and San Francisco: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 187-224.

afterward whan it commeth to a goldsmithes handes that in well setting it maketh it appeere much more fairer, will you not saye that the goldsmith deceiueth the eyes of them that looke on it? And yet for that deceite, deserueth he praise...³⁰

Similarly, in Book IV, Bembo tackles the old association between courtiers and sins of the flesh. He acknowledges that sensual love plays a prominent part in court culture, but argues that it can inspire the courtly lover to seek spiritual fulfilment. By engaging directly with anti-courtier discourse, Castiglione thus attempted to prove the startlingly novel proposition that no-one ‘should refuse this name of a Perfect Courtier, which (in my mind) is woorthie verye great praise.’³¹

The *Book of the Courtier* did not simply refute traditional criticism of court acolytes; it sought to demonstrate ‘what in Court a Courtier ought to be’.³² Its delineation of a positive role for the courtier was timely. During the early modern era, princely courts became increasingly significant and central to the political scene in many areas of Europe. The importance of curialists was correspondingly inflated. The Renaissance courtier deserved his Castiglione, just as the Roman orator deserved his Cicero. The Urbino interlocutors defined the ultimate ‘ende’ of a courtier as the inculcation of virtue in a prince, to the benefit of the commonwealth.³³ They discussed practical strategies and patterns of behaviour whereby *familiares regis* could accomplish this objective.

In Elizabethan England, Castiglionean models of courtliness were exploited with considerable deftness by the Queen’s close advisors and associates. Vigorous, athletic courtiers such as Leicester, Sidney and the youthful Essex conformed to the Urbinese

³⁰ Hoby, *Covrtyer*, sig. Ri^v.

³¹ *Ibid.*, sig. Ss ii^v.

³² *Ibid.*, sig. Aii^v.

³³ *Ibid.*, sig. Ss ii^v – Siii^r.

template of a martial courtier. Athenian politicians such as Burghley, Walsingham and Mildmay enlisted civil ideals of courtly conduct when fashioning their public personae. Castiglione's protagonists envisaged civil and chivalric courtiership as complementary strategies, directed towards the same benevolent agenda. The first three decades of Elizabeth's reign demonstrated that these two political styles could, indeed, be cultivated in juxtaposition, by politicians who forged functional and durable working relationships. It was only during the 'last decade', when the pressures of Irish and continental warfare were taking their toll, that the creative symbiosis was threatened. The earl of Essex and his followers dichotomized martial and curial values, suggesting that the latter were inimical (and vastly inferior) to the former.

Anti-courtier tropes from classical and medieval literature featured extensively in late Elizabethan political discourse. They were not only deployed by jaundiced or sardonic outsiders, but by courtiers and their clients. Established motifs were updated to comment on contemporary developments (such as the furore over monopolies, or Essex's fall from grace, or the realisation of Cecilian dynastic ambitions). They were also used to challenge the value and legitimacy of 'Italianate' approaches to court politics. The most aggressive challenges were mounted by 'city' wits in the 1590s. Guilpin and Marston in particular attacked the Urbino prototype, interspersing satirical checklists of his accomplishments with traditional, derogatory imagery. Castiglione's rehabilitation of the courtier was thus dismissed as an illusion.

The *Book of the Courtier* was subjected to a certain amount of criticism at the turn of the seventeenth century. Yet, when we consider the contempt with which court acolytes were characterised immediately before, and more noticeably after, the Jacobean

accession, the treatment of Castiglione seems remarkably restrained. His dialogue retained its popularity (a new edition of the Hoby translation was published in 1603).³⁴ It continued to be read and respected. The reception of the *Courtier* in Stuart England is a topic that lies beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it seems probable that the text owed its enduring success to its broad-based appeal. It was a courtesy manual, as well as a guide to court politics. Its directions for ‘civil’ conversation and conduct could be applied to a wide range of scenarios beyond the walls of Whitehall. As the image of the court deteriorated, the broader commonwealth was increasingly regarded as the natural heartland of Castiglionean culture. Precepts outlined in ‘courtly’ conduct books were assimilated by men and women who were not based at court, and who were often sharply critical of manners and morals there. For example, the fifth earl of Huntingdon’s *Advice* to his son Ferdinand contained instructions about clothing, conversation and demeanour that could have come straight from the *Courtier*. Yet Huntingdon advised his son to attend the king only occasionally, ‘for Court is a very chargeable place. I should rather wish thee to spend the greatest part of thy life in the country than to live in this glittering misery’.³⁵ Evidently, Castiglionean precepts could ‘fashion’ a civilized country gentleman, as well as a ‘Perfect Courtier’.

The Urbino Courtier can therefore be said to have outgrown his original habitat. Conceived quite specifically as a creature of the court, he embodied an eminently transferable set of skills and ideals. This allowed him to withstand the tide of bitterness

³⁴ The 1603 *Covrtyer* was published by Thomas Creede, a London printer. At this stage of his career, Creede was working autonomously. He had already demonstrated an interest in reissuing prestigious humanist texts. In 1597, he produced a new edition of Thomas More’s *Utopia* – the first for several decades. See Akihiro Yamada, *Thomas Creede: printer to Shakespeare and his contemporaries* (Tokyo: Mesei University Press, 1994), pp. 158-9.

³⁵ Henry, fifth earl of Huntingdon, ‘Certaine directions for my eldest sonne Ferdinando’, in HMC *Hastings*, IV, 325.

and bawdiness in which the court was engulfed during the early years of the seventeenth century. In 1616, Sir Thomas Overbury sardonically remarked that a Jacobean courtier 'is not, if he be out of Court, but fish-like breathes destruction, if out of his own element'.³⁶ Castiglione's creature was altogether more adaptable. His versatility guaranteed his survival as a cultural icon for many generations to come.

³⁶ Overbury, *Conceited newes*, p. 71.

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