

THE ISOLATED COURTIER OF CASTIGLIONE AND SIDNEY

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By

MARTA STITELER SIMON, B.A.

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AUTHOR: MARTA STITELER SIMON, B.A. (SETON HILL COLLEGE)

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## ABSTRACT

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We tend to associate the Renaissance period with a time in which man reaches out for new knowledge and discoveries. This is due partly to the discovery of the new continent and the many scientific breakthroughs which dissolved archaic and religious explanations for natural phenomena. These developments led man to believe his potential was untapped and enormous. In the frenzy to obtain the maximum of one's capabilities moving outward into the world, Renaissance man, adversely, finds himself isolated from it.

The two writers of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which I compare are Baldesar Castiglione and Sir Philip Sidney and how they describe situations in which man retreats from his surroundings. The first segment of this thesis focuses on the alienation of Il Cortegiano, how the courtier relates first, to his superior and later, how the intimacies which the courtier shares with women are weakened by his refusal to participate equally in this relationship. There are positive side-effects to this withdrawal from society, according to Castiglione, who shows how the Urbino nobility's impulse to create is stronger in a cloistered environment than in a more public climate. The depiction of the perfect man

aspirations while serving as a beneficially political means by which to instruct the prince.

In Chapter Two the shift of the thesis moves to Sir Philip Sidney's youthful courtier in Astrophil and Stella. The poet retreats from society in order to develop his own truthful language of love to Stella. Sidney's poet rejects the trappings of his culture, his religion and the literary past of England in his effort to rebuild a more expressive poetry. While the experience is a futile and solitary one for the lover, the art which he creates serves to rejuvenate the Elizabethan sonnet sequence.

I conclude that although alienation carries along with it the negative baggage that we in modern times impose on it, for the Renaissance artist isolation provided the atmosphere necessary for fruitful invention.

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## INTRODUCTION

The image that Count Baldesar Castiglione created in Il Cortegiano of the quintessential courtly man became the ultimate goal of the burgeoning and ambitious nobility in Renaissance Europe and Elizabethan England when Castiglione's idea of self-fashioning caught the imaginations of a generation. A humanist education and schooling in military techniques were the perfect mix to assist any man to approach the perfect ideal, which culminated in service in the court, leading to favour and the rewards that come with it. The courtier finds himself on the outskirts of society, once he reaches this goal. He is forced to protect his elevated position against competitors and enemies, which limits his intimate relationships politically as well as sexually. This "otherness", or "estrangement" is persistent throughout the period in which Castiglione was writing (Howard 49).

For Castiglione, the incorporation of refined manners into the realm of the court moved Italy closer to civilization and away from the corruption and war that crippled his nation. His group of courtiers withdraws from the world to their comfortable nest in the Urbino Castle, and conjures up a perfect world without hostile invasions and despots, as a defense mechanism against the realities of the outside world. Alienation marks their personal lives as well,



because every remark, every movement, must be guided by sprezzatura or non-chalance, an artless art that cloaks the courtier in seeming sincerity. Castiglione's advice regarding interpersonal male friendships is pessimistic: if this kind of relationship is essential, limit it to one person. And though women are arguably a part of the Urbino world, their interaction with the courtier is controlled and unequal. The love life of the courtier and his courtly lady leads to isolation from each other as witnessed by Bembo's lofty speech which praises the superiority of neoplatonic love, moving love of physical beauty toward the contemplation of divine beauty.

The principles evident in Il Cortegiano were readily available for the growing reading public to peruse in Sir Thomas Hoby's translation into English in 1561. The man who is considered to have best reached that pinnacle of courtly masculinity is Sir Philip Sidney, a crusader for excellence in English verse and a loyal Protestant and subject. Yet when serving the queen Sidney was not afraid of risking his political career by publicly disagreeing with her. Although Sidney never considered himself the accomplished poet that he is recognized as today and spent his life dedicated to public service and his religious beliefs, he campaigned for a better native poetry and surrounded himself with men of letters. Like Castiglione, Sidney expressed the importance of the humanist education of the uomo universale, which effectively armed the young man for a life of public duty, but alienated him from the rest of the community. The young

poet in Sidney's Astrophil and Stella inhabits a solitary world not with the intent of reaching the vita contemplativa but to envision only thoughts of his lady love. In Christian terms, alienation from the world is good if it leads to closer ties to God, but Astrophil's escape from reality fosters little more than self-absorption and denial.

As opposed to the collective reasoning and argument in Il Cortegiano which produces a single concept, Sidney's sonnet sequence promotes one speaker wavering between two viewpoints as critic and lover. Among many similarities, what Castiglione and Sidney share is a vision of withdrawn man, and where they differ is how they choose to present it. In a sense the nobility in Castiglione's drawing room represent a "flight from the truth," according to Bull (16), but their creation is a constructive one, aimed at improving and strengthening a segment of society. Astrophil, as the alienated and complaining lover, refuses to give in to the commonly-held Christian beliefs and Classical teachings of his time. It is a brave and dramatic performance to estrange oneself from one's background, but in effect a destructive action. Only his constructive efforts to elevate the state of English poetry can save him.

## CHAPTER ONE

From the golden age of Rome to the Renaissance the debate is waged over the superiority of the vita contemplativa over the vita activa: the private versus the public life. But the distinction of the self from the public image that appears in the community structure did not evolve until the Renaissance movement began in Italy, later filtering throughout the continent and over the English Channel. Ancient Rome, although touted for its fine republican principles, resisted blanket freedoms, clinging tenaciously to the practice of slavery. The citizens of the Middle Ages did not develop the resources necessary to have a powerful self-image, unlike that of the European Renaissance, where an emerging bourgeois culture began to assert a stronger sense of individuality. In Italy in the thirteenth century and onward man "became a spirited individual and recognized himself as such" (Burckhardt I, 143). Social intercourse came to ignore strict distinctions of caste and was based simply on the existence of an educated class. The humanist movement of the Renaissance filtered down into the upper middle and middle classes, giving them a heightened awareness of themselves and a greater sense of personal power; with this new individuality came a separateness or alienation of the self from external reality. This new pride of personality sought a way to express itself in painting, sculpture and the written word. In literature,

the sonnet became for the Italian poet a "condenser of thoughts," a series of clear, concise vignettes which reached into and focused on this private, inward life (Burckhardt II, 306). Renaissance literature now had two voices: one moving inward toward a more intimate glimpse at the soul of the artist and the other impersonal and flowing outward to the public realm. Count Baldesar Castiglione published Il Cortegiano in April, 1528, and it stands today as the most representative view of Italian Renaissance culture and manners, while probing the boundaries of defensive alienation and withdrawal in public and private experience. The Duke of Urbino's noble guests exhibit a public face in a very private world, cocooning themselves from the frightening political world of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Their environment is defined by the dimensions of alienation: "powerlessness based in a value for control,...and isolation based on competing value systems." (Finifter 10). The withdrawal of the nobility from the rest of society signals their retrenching efforts to regroup their collective powers. Their offensive gesture appears in a parlour game where they invent the perfect specimen of their class who in their fantasy would turn the starkness of their world around. Castiglione delivers an elevated view of the microcosm of the solitary, political man, juxtaposed against the ugliness of the real violence of Italy during the reign of despots. The contrary, sometimes contradictory, nature of Castiglione's work has been documented by Robert Hanning who implicates in the work "optimistic ideals" which are buttressed up

against "the recognition of complex, often harsh realities;" in other words, the concrete is placed against a portrait of something very elusive and fleeting (Hanning vii). Wayne Rebhorn devotes his book, Courtly Performances, to the public dramatics of the perfect courtier, always cognizant of and always dependent on the surrounding audience. As a performer, the courtier carefully maintains control, rarely allowing his intimate side to show. Granted, some skeletons are let out of the royal closet; the soiled laundry of the nobility is hung out to dry when the secrets of the ducal bed chambers are revealed as an open topic for the nocturnal gatherings, but the private behaviour of the men and women in the chambers of the duchess is unspoken or left to the imagination of the reader. The metaphor of the seclusion of the Urbino castle encompasses its inhabitants as we know little about the Urbino participants. Why does Gaspare Pallavicino so desperately hate women? And why is Fregoso such an incorrigible snob? The fictional characters are an exaggeration of their actual historic counterparts; the players in Castiglione's pleasant remembrances of things past must be accepted at face value as a generic representation. Their individuality is absorbed by the stereotypes which they portray. Gaspare and Frisio are fervent misogynists; Unico Aretino is an exaggerator; Emilia quick in wit; Morella irksome and forgetful; Bembo impractical and visionary; and the Duchess Elisabetta is remote (Kinney 109).

As a member of the ruling elite, the courtier is alienated from society, but within his own private circle he also suffers from personal estrangement, because competition makes friendship precarious. In the end, it is best to trust only one's own judgement. The private voice in Il Cortegiano that speaks directly to the reader is the nostalgic narrator at the opening of each of the four books. The close and privileged group involved in the disputations in the ducal salons demonstrate an ease with each other; but the casual parlour game they vote to play is not always light-hearted. All of this throws a shadow on the reputation of a book which enjoyed immediate success and which today is mostly remembered for Bembo's passionate prayer to love in Book IV.

Il Cortegiano is a far-reaching amalgamation of fiction and metafiction, a veritable encyclopedia of Italian courtly social culture and customs; it is a work that, emerging out of the ashes of four centuries past, records the events of its day while chronicling the timeless theme of the struggle for acceptance and power. Castiglione had the good fortune to know some of the greatest artists of his age: Michelangelo, Raphael, Bembo, Sadoletto, and Giulio Romano and was familiar with the works of the great Italian fathers of literature: Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. Castiglione's book quickly captured the imagination of his generation. Its "mellow and moderate philosophy" make the book of more than merely representative interest and contributed to its enormous popularity (Martindale 165). Categorically it belongs to the genre of courtesy literature in which texts were

written by and for courtly readers functioning "in relation to the social and political pressures of courtly life" (Whigham x). Castiglione outlines a system of control during the Renaissance, "a great moment for the fortunes of power," (Martines 77) that enables the courtly participant to establish subliminal command over his outwardly fixed surroundings. Il Cortegiano was embraced by all walks of society: Emperor Charles V reputedly kept a copy of Castiglione's book at his bedside along with Machiavelli's The Prince and the Bible while English educator Roger Ascham, a staunch critic of anything Italian, claimed that reading the book would benefit a young man more than three years of travel on the Continent (Martindale 150). It is, asserts translator George Bull "at the very least, an entertaining book" (17).

The recipe for the perfect courtier resists modern standards of class and society, producing a nobleman profoundly intuitive to the benefits of manipulating his surrounding audience. The preoccupation with manners sets the stage for insincerity and artificiality like the charismatic politician of today with a penchant for doublespeak and kissing babies. The difference between the present world and Castiglione's world of the Italian Renaissance is expressed best by him: "Thus it happens that the customs, behaviour, ceremonies and ways of life approved of in one period of time grow to be looked down on, and those which were once looked down on come to be approved (39)." The courtier's

blatant performance to ingratiate himself with the ruling party masks a desperation to cling onto the power of a faded memory.

Castiglione, the courtier-diplomat, seeks to control that which he can: the present and the image of the past. He leaves as a paean to glorious bygone days Il Cortegiano, a nostalgic look at a time when knowledge was a powerful tool which could make life more successful. J.R. Woodhouse claims that Castiglione penned his advice to the erstwhile courtier as a "handbook for survival" (64), in a world where it was difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood. The intricacies of courtly etiquette were important in helping the career diplomat to nurture a steady relationship with his patron so that he and his family could enjoy a decent way of life and more importantly avoid exile, a common punishment for disobedient subjects. To facilitate this tenuous courtship with the his royal master the courtier relies on his powers of artful diplomacy, concealing his own secrets, hiding his feelings and attempting to "perceive the reality which lay beneath the polite or inscrutable exterior of possible rivals or enemies" (Woodhouse 61), while allying oneself with the stronger side. Castiglione musters up all of the essential strengths of a good diplomat, calling on his own frustrated experiences to instruct the next generation of noblemen to avoid his mishaps and succeed where he failed. The elegant diction employed carries the message of Castiglione's history of experience as a courtly servant and diplomat with a knowing ear and an even



better memory, who understands the powerful potential of innuendo, eloquence and adulation.

Because the circumstances of "Fortune, who often rules everything that happens..."(55), are impossible to alter, following Il Cortegiano's step-by-step instructions to becoming the perfect courtier on a political scale provides a manageable formula for success, equated with the acquisition of power. The reign of despots early in Renaissance Italy fostered an individuality not only in the tyrant himself, but also the men whom he protected or used as his tools - the secretary, minister, poet and companion (Burckhardt I, 144). The instability of government may have led the nobility (the courtier) to "aspire not simply to tranquillity" but to even higher offices of authority, on the supposition that the swiftest way to a life of tranquillity was to "control the destiny of others who might control him" (Woodhouse 7). The irony is that once the courtier succeeds in ruling his own destiny, he has acted so well and protected himself with such skill that he has created a barrier around himself. What Castiglione could not have foreseen was how his valiant effort to bolster the image of the courtier may have also served to exile his creation within his home community by giving him a superior education and stripping him of honest companionship.

By the time Count Baldesar had reached his career peak the Humanist concepts of individualism and freedom in war-ravaged Italy were increasingly viewed as politically hostile; so, he assumes a more compromising passive pose,

in which corruption is ignored or completely washed over with an ethical blanket. And because the interlocutors are so desperately interested in maintaining their role with ease and sprezzatura, the dialogue keeps a light tone. The private voice of the introduction to each book becomes more accessible because the authorial memories are filled with personal emotion at the knowledge of the passing of a golden time: that perhaps is gone forever. If Castiglione missed defining the true inner personality of man it was not because he believed that man was doomed to error. His main contribution is political in creating, within the limits imposed, some approximation to the uomo universale, the many-sided man, and all of the definitions of courtier and master rest "on an unending pursuit of proof that man is educable, moral, and potentially perfect" (Kinney 89).

In his figurative role as teacher, Castiglione offers Il Cortegiano as a new curriculum which advocates neutral tactics of moderation as a means of survival, presenting the select group at the Urbino court of which he was a part, an institution with an impressive record of success, proved by its distinguished graduates: two Dukes, a Cardinal, a Doge of Genoa, a Papal Secretary, an Archbishop and a Bishop (Il Cortegiano 282). Bull claims that "As a handbook for gentlemen, The Courtier conceals the most shameless opportunism under the cloak of tiresome refinement" (17). Out of the "outrages of egotism, corruption, and licentiousness" of the Italian Renaissance grew a sense of moral responsibility; our modern standard of good and evil develops from this (Burckhardt I, 17). By

all indications, the author had a deep personal sense of Catholic morality. Therefore though this illustrious courtier created by the enlightened group opts for financial stability, there is no reason to doubt that his goals are ethical as well; his ultimate goal should be to fashion a good ruler. The Urbino speakers arm their perfect courtier with the best of knowledge, experience and natural ability so that he can best skillfully win princely favour and, through his instruction, lead the prince to virtue. The relationship between the courtier and his royal master is therefore reciprocal; the superior's own reputed identity derives from the character of his dependents so that preferment of others will indirectly depict the self (Whigham 131). Castiglione's courtier is a man of natural accomplishments and a liberal humanist education whose mastery of language and physical skill are used to serve the outward political and social life of the state. Castiglione's document meant to educate the nobility that occupies the court also endeavours to double as a guidebook for rulers without betraying sprezzatura where the artless art helps to camouflage a subordinate dictating to his superior.

The pattern for the perfect courtier emerges directly from Castiglione's early education in the Humanist movement, which advocated a group of subjects known collectively as the studia humanitatis. Its uniform ideology is its belief in the improvement of man and society through a new kind of education using the classics as the prime example of excellence. With the decline of the influence of the Catholic Church, education moved out of the monasteries and into the private

sector, shifting the educational perspective away from the biblical to a respect for the "pagan" texts. As man moved toward the centre of his world, his relation to his surroundings altered, forcing a new relationship between ambivalence in the temporal world and the uncertainty of a spiritual one. Many men lost faith in the church, which, replete with corruption, also insisted on playing a major role in politics. As the traditional hierarchy crumbled the humanists looked back to antiquity more and more for a solution to their problems. The decline of civil freedoms is attributed to this, since the Humanist movement favoured Roman law over the existing municipal laws, thereby facilitating takeovers by the greedy and ambitious despots (Burckhardt I, 212.) Ironically, the system that was to take the old world out of the dark to new heights of individual flexibility and freedom permitted only a choice few to excel, and abandoned the majority to a more regimented lifestyle, dependant upon the whims of a sometimes dangerous and wavering political leader.

The education of the whole man for a life of political leadership is a classical Roman concept linking education with public service, which in Renaissance Italy meant working under the court system, loyal to one monarch. At the apex, alone atop this social-climbing pyramid is the ruler. The prized role of the omnipotent monarch is primarily a fixed one. There were several ways of gaining such princely power: through birthright, by taking it forcefully or by becoming a crucial confidant to someone of even greater power and having a

portion of it bestowed on you. The concept of power requires a hierarchy in which those who hold the most powerful positions delegate orders to their underlings, and they to their servants, until there are no more people left to command. Those at the top must protect themselves from eager adversaries hoping to overthrow them. So in order to maintain the cherished position at the highest level, the ruler in question cautiously alienates him - or herself from the ambitious throng.

Power and creation dominate Il Cortegiano in that the very raison d'être of the group's activities is to fashion "in words a perfect courtier" (51). The males at the court accumulate all of their worthiest notions into the character of the courtier, believing that such a sublime creature could not be refused success; thereby their creation accomplishes their subliminal desires for freedom and the acquisition of power. Displaying marked restraint and civility, the courtiers gathered at the Urbino court seem the exemplum of harmony and camaraderie, choosing barbed words rather than weapons and innuendo rather than insult without losing control and maintaining a casual jocularly. The meandering conversations debate the superiority of sculpture or painting, ancient or vernacular languages, as well as politeness and rudeness, nature and art, love and hate, passion and spirit, duty and freedom (Kinney 90). Underlying this elegant civility is the competition between the main speakers during the four evenings of rhetorical conflict. The various nobleman and artists congregate in the spacious

Sala della Veglie at the ducal palace of Urbino for an evening of relaxation and amusement; under the pretence of this light fare each speaker competes to triumph over their peers. By excelling in his or her performance, the speaker hopes to impress the Duchess who is widely responsible for the financial well-being of most of the artists and noble courtiers, much in the same way that their ideal courtly man strives to outshine his fellow courtiers for princely attention. The Montefeltro guests meet to listen to music, to dance and join in interesting discussions which allow the numerous "high-born gentlemen" to flex their rhetorical muscles. On the first evening of the book's events, the group participates in a game to choose what the nightly discussion will be. The game is set up as a contest, judged by Emilia Pia ruling for the austere Duchess. At the suggestion of Federico Fregoso, the game encompasses their collective ideal of the complete courtly man:

Therefore if men are to be found anywhere who deserve to be called good courtiers and who are capable of judging what constitutes perfect courtiership, one must reasonably accept that they are with us now. So to teach a lesson to the many fools who in their presumption and absurdity think they are entitled to be called good courtiers, I would like our game this evening to be this: that one of us should be chosen and given the task of depicting in words a perfect courtier, explaining the character and the particular qualities needed by anyone who deserves such a title (51).

Fregoso's blatant indignation weakly masks a paranoia that social inferiors might aspire to gain control over their betters and draws the line where the Humanist ideals of self-improvement must stop, though, occasionally, an

infantryman can become a captain, and a priest a cardinal. Not surprisingly, Fregoso's first requirement of the courtier is that he be of noble birth since "it matters far less to a common man if he fails to perform virtuously and well than to a nobleman" (54). With the exception of two or three of the congregants, all come from select families of noble or aristocratic standing. The courtier should be therefore high-born and have "beauty of countenance" and a graceful carriage. These elements, "grace," "nonchalance" and "ease" are crucial to the secret of the perfect gentleman, but they also separate him from the great mass of Italians, whom he helps to govern at the side of the prince. The courtier is warned to steer away from public display, to "shun the ignoble crowd," to avoid wrestling with peasants and on the battlefield to show always mastery in arms in clear view of his prince (Martines 83). The elevated status of the courtier isolates him from the lower classes and within his own circle with fellow gentleman he may or may not trust; in the end, the courtier must follow only his own conscience. Fregoso's sensitivity toward the class infrastructure demonstrates how gravely important the courtiers of the Urbino court believed the task of governing was and how despotic the rulers could be during Castiglione's lifetime: Guidobaldo de Montefeltro's successor, Francesco Maria della Rovere, was driven from the duchy by Pope Leo X while Castiglione was writing his book and Rome was sacked by the Imperial troops the year before it was published (Martindale 165).

The game provides the courtly group with an escape from the actualities of the threatening world around them, by literally turning their backs on their surroundings. The city-state system of Italy during the sixteenth century worsened when the internal squabbles between the individual states were consumed by a wider conflict between the great European powers. Independent rule became a thing of the past when rather than combine forces to resist their invaders, the Italian states formed alliances against one another. One painful recollection for Castiglione was silently watching the French troops march into Milan and seeing his prince welcome the invading army. The Urbino group he reassembles recognizes the need for a powerful defense against outside aggressors and determines that the "first and true profession of the courtier must be that of arms" (57). Their ideal perception of the courtier would lead Italy to power and away from being a defeated nation, a country that has been preyed upon by foreigners until little is left. Creating a perfect and powerful specimen in their image provides the Urbino nobles with the opportunity for increasing their self-esteem and solidifies the courtly group as a unit. As Woodhouse points out, it is as if Castiglione were writing "in the only civilised, but non-cloistered environment visible to him in that very uncertain political period" (3). For Castiglione this group was a new and rising force, a social group if not class, in search of promotion and more importantly in search of a recognition of power (Saccone 6).



The circular placement of the speakers and the circular motion of the discussions provides closure and fortification against intrusion from outside forces, consolidating the group as a whole. The closed circle is indicative of the "notion of bounds" that Richard Regosin finds so central to the heart of Il Cortegiano (29). Rhetorically speaking the perfect courtier must beware of the boundaries of the performance of sprezzatura, while metaphorically/historically speaking the circle represents a fortress protecting Castiglione's vision of an ideal world. Viewed in this way, the courtiers and their ladies present in the Urbino court organize a system of self-defense uniting as a family unit, a group Castiglione recognized as crucial to a healthy society, willing to help in "the aggrandisement and the preservation of the state or the society in which it existed, but never willing to put at risk its own prosperity or safety" (Woodhouse 52).

The courtier must be talented on many fronts, at home in all noble sports, such as running, swimming and wrestling; he must be a good dancer and an accomplished rider. Adept at arms as well as skillful and wise in speech and philosophy, he exercises in all areas the quality of sprezzatura, a relaxed attitude which suggests strength and provides protection. Lodovico Canossa explains his universal rule delineating this necessity of eloquence:

steer away from affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practise in all things a certain nonchalance [sprezzatura] which conceals all

artistry and makes whatever one says or does soon uncontrived and effortless. I am sure that grace springs especially from this, since everyone knows how difficult it is to accomplish some unusual feat perfectly.... So we can truthfully say that true art is what does not seem to be art; and the most important thing is to conceal it (67)

Precise control over the physical aspects of one's person should be attended to in agreement with the doctrine of moderation crucial to the concept of sprezzatura. The outward appearance and the daily habits of the men and women in Renaissance Italy were considered superior and more polished than those of any other nation in Europe, because a handsome and becoming costume was seen as an element in the perfection of the individual (Burckhardt II, 361). Nothing about the perfect courtier should be the extreme: he must be neither too tall nor too short, neither too fat nor too thin, and must dress in clothes that "reflect the sobriety characteristic of the Spaniards, since external appearances often bear witness to what is within" (135). The Aristotelian golden mean is the path to follow in order to avoid affectation and provide oneself with a strong and reliable protection against envy from colleagues, which can abruptly end political advancement. The result from the consensus of the well-intended group becomes their perfect gentleman, but the vision arguably crosses over into the boundaries of excess, for if such a man possesses so many of the gifts relevant to the ruler himself he would be out of place at any court, because his inner and outer superiority would establish too much of an independent, separate spirit. In short, the model created by the Urbino guests is too perfect - superhuman. The inner

force which motivates his loyal service to the prince does not rest solely on impending reward from the monarch but on his own drive for personal perfection (Burckhardt Vol II, 382).

The language of Il Cortegiano must be clothed as appropriately as the man. Castiglione, ignoring the example of Boccaccio and Petrarch, held that Tuscan was the rightful speech in Italy, not Latin. The flexibility of this living language allowed for non-Tuscan as well as foreign words to be added to it. Language was "held to be an object of respect" (Burckhardt II, 373) and coupled with eloquence it embodied a tremendous power for Castiglione which cannot be overemphasized. Beautifully sculpted language lifted communication to a divine dimension, according to the most famous humanist Erasmus, who believed that "nothing among humans is more powerful at stirring all motions of the soul than speech [oration]" (Martindale 32).

The lasting success of Il Cortegiano has little to do with its originality, in that "hardly a page goes by without a bold plagiarism from Plato, Plutarch, Cicero or Livy" (Bull 13). Castiglione admired the ancient orators whom he had studied in his youth and he borrowed much of his theories from them. Castiglione's drawing room is similar to Cicero's Tuscan villa in De Oratore, where partaking of leisure and respite the assembled speakers also find time to delineate an ideal projection of themselves (Javitch 25).

For it is the words themselves which give an oration its greatness and magnificence, provided the orator employs good judgement and care, knows how to choose those which best express what he means, and how to enhance them...(77)

The fact that the writings of the pagan authors live on is proof that powerful words transcend death; Il Cortegiano nearly 500 hundred years after its conception, also survives as a monument to the annihilating powers of fortune and of time, for as long as the descriptions of the Urbino personages are read, they live infinitely. Castiglione says at the conclusion of his preface:

Let them [critics] at least be content with the verdict of time, which eventually reveals the hidden defects in all things and, as the father of truth and a dispassionate judge, is accustomed to pronouncing always, on all writings, a just sentence of life or death (336).

Book four opens with an encomium to Gaspare Pallavicino, Cesare Gonzaga and Roberto da Bari, victims of the death's final alienation, the destructiveness of Fortune and the unpredictability of Nature. The preface, a letter addressed to the Bishop of Viseu, Don Michel de Silva, declares Castiglione's intention to paint his own verbal "portrait of the Court of Urbino," with the cast of players including more of the cherished dead: Duke Giuliano de' Medici, Bernardo Bibbiena, Cardinal of Santa Maria in Portico, Ottaviano Fregoso and "so great a lady," the Duchess herself (32). But the powerful art of writing preserves their memories just as the painting of Raphael immortalizes the author

of Il Cortegiano on canvas; as long as Count Baldesar's elegant pen-strokes grace the canvas of the paper, death is cheated of the final silence.

Castiglione's open attempt to eternalize his characters is dual-edged, linked with the hope that as an artist he too might benefit from success, present and future, a characteristic of the modern idea of fame first witnessed in Dante, who "strove for the poet's garland with the power of his soul" (Burckhardt Vol I, 151). Roman authors, especially Cicero, who was largely rediscovered in the Renaissance, were obsessed with the concept of fame (distinction won by personal efforts) and their subject - Ancient Rome - stood as a permanent symbol in Italian minds of promise and success. Since Dante, the poet-scholar in Italy, had "the fullest consciousness that he was the giver of fame and immortality, or, if he chose, of oblivion" (Burckhardt Vol I, 160) Petrarch acknowledges his high aspirations of sculpting an everlasting sonnet sequence for his love Laura, when he writes,

Blessed be all the paper upon which  
I earn her fame (Canzoniere, Sonnet 61).

Mastering language and speaking fully and frankly had other applications as well: tempered with the art which does not seem like art, sprezzatura creates a calculated and persuasive idiom; even the deepest investments of thought and passion are transformed into the incidental comments of polite conversation. Castiglione discovered that the complexity of new political alignments at the turn

of the century and "the internal problems of court diplomacy, required the subtlety of chess rather than the brusqueness of a duel or a tourney (now reduced to a ceremonial role)" (Woodhouse 55). At times his eloquence cloaks the reality of the world of the early sixteenth century and he has been accused of sacrificing the truth while preserving elegance by omitting sordid events in which some of his royal cronies were implicated:

Just a few months after the discussion of his [Castiglione's] book supposedly took place, the seventeen-year-old heir-apparent to Urbino's dukedom demonstrated his "virtue" by treacherously stabbing to death his sister's unarmed lover while Duke Guidobaldo was temporarily out of the palace. Nor does Castiglione note that Francesco Maria's vivacita dello ingegno would manifest itself throughout his life in a violent brutality that would lead him to murder Cardinal Alidosi in the streets of Ravenna, knock the famous ambassador Guicciardini to the ground, and order his servants to beat to death three Venetian sentries who challenged his right to bear arms on Venetian soil... . Nowhere does he provide any hint that the courtiers and ladies of Urbino fell short of their expressed ideal of perfect chastity, even though some evidence points to the philandering ways of Bembo and Bibbiena, and a bastard son born in 1511 offers indisputable proof of the liaison at the court between Guilano de' Medici and Pacifica Brandono (Rebhorn 56).

As mentioned earlier, Castiglione's literary figures are moot representations of their actual predecessors. If he hides their faults it is not to heighten their perfection, for it is clear that their purpose is to be used as tools in conveying the teachings of the rambling nightly chats. The debates evade specific interpretation, because of the meandering technique of the classical philosophical style, featuring

one viewpoint followed by a different, modified counterpoint. There is no "privileged speaker, as in Platonic dialogue, and thus no privileged perspective" (Regosin 28). The reader must decide between the uncensored answers which seem to maintain equal authority, working through the "informed and reasoned" argument to achieve a moderate compromise (53). The dialogue form allows the topics to be presented obliquely and the conclusions to be suggested rather than laid down (Martindale 165). Depicting the perfect courtier, the game "proceeds according to its own rules of decorum and dialogue and generates its own movement," (Regosin 23) with the democratic discourse of the evening's activities blending all of the opinions of the thinkers and empowering their creation until none can reject their collective ideal. The discussion takes on the artless manner of the courtier himself, advocating a dialogue somewhere "between such supreme grace and such absurd folly" to find a "middle way," Castiglione's interpretation of Aristotle's golden mean (55).

Words command power for their persuasiveness and for their ability to immortalize their subjects, but who controls the words themselves if the author disinherits them? The narrator, presumedly Castiglione himself, claims that he is in England on a diplomatic mission at the court of Henry VII to accept by proxy the Order of the Garter for Duke Guidobaldo during the four evenings described. But the papal party did not travel through Urbino during Castiglione's visit to England. Castiglione disassociates himself from his words by claiming

that they are not his, but were recorded faithfully by someone who was present and that he "shall endeavour to reproduce them as accurately as...memory allows" (40). Why does Castiglione undergo an elaborate masquerade to withdraw himself from the body of the text? Is it modesty that persuades the author to deny creative involvement or does he hope to give the book, fatherless and motherless, with no apparent beginning and possibly no end, an affinity with the discussions circulating through the four nights that seem to continue indefinitely? Kinney goes further, suggesting that Castiglione re-dates his own mission to England in the autumn and winter of 1506-7 in order that the real people, who doubtless had somewhat similar debates at Urbino, are presented as ideal types (96). Though Castiglione endeavours to alienate himself from the text, the strongest character revealed in the pages of Il Cortegiano is Castiglione himself, who in opening each chapter sets the stage for his actors and their performances. He manipulates by setting the tone of the short prefaces: melancholic, but respectful; the narrator reiterates the grand qualities of his subjects and then, describing the stage, takes the reader back in time. In one isolated description of the palace, Castiglione's eloquence transforms the "hills which are perhaps not as agreeable as those found in other places" (40) which surround Urbino, into a majestic sight: the "lofty peak of Mount Catria...with a delicate breeze,...among the murmuring woods on nearby hills awakening birds into joyous song" (345).



The power of the words depends on the perspective response of the listener's, therefore the communication of the performance is crucial for the narrator when addressing the reader directly, just as it is essential for the courtier to act skillfully in front of his patron and colleagues. The happenings in the Urbino salon are like listening to a performance on the radio, for with few exceptions, there is little physical action to visualize taking place during the conversations. The success of the book relies heavily on the ability of the reader to listen to the witty repartee and petty arguments - adding a pictorial element is not tantamount to understanding. The visual descriptions are limited and therefore the reader is blindly forced to depend on his or her own powers of hearing the words of the assembled company. For instance, although dressing for success is considered crucial to the perfect courtier, it would be impossible to guess the habits of fashion being worn by the present company. One is hard-pressed to present an image of the people who are speaking in front of us. The crux of the performance lies somewhere in the dialogue between the group and it remains the reader's responsibility to judge by listening to the clues of Castiglione's language to decipher them.

If the courtiers close themselves away from their terrifying world in order to create a better one, they too are responsible for their failed opportunities with love. The men in Il Cortegiano have difficulty achieving intimate heterosexual love relationships because the women are treated as near-equals. The supreme

authority in the book rests on shifting sand, when the Duke, in absentia, passes his power to his wife, who in turn delegates Emilia Pia as judge and jury. Up to now the concentration of this study has dealt with how the aspects of power which the masculine ideal of courtly perfection wields in order to ameliorate himself into a heightened political and social position although fulfilling the collective, subliminal aspirations of the participants of the evening's festivities at the Urbino court also force him into a personal alienation or exile. The realm of power acquisition is gender-specific and male oriented, and the sexual guidelines are clearly defined. Significantly, the perfect embodiment of male political power is strictly aligned with masculine sexual potency. The Duke, head of the court, remains apart, in convalescence in his rooms, rarely seen during the nightly activities because of his nagging gout and other afflictions. Nevertheless, his absence does not impede the discussion from centering on him, when intimacies of the Montefeltro marriage come to light. It may not seem difficult to comprehend by modern standards of privacy, when juxtaposed against the immense popularity of supermarket tabloids, how the sexual practices of the Urbino couple are not only common knowledge, but nonchalantly announced in a public gathering, as when Cesare Gonzaga refers to "our Duchess, who has lived with her husband for fifteen years like a widow" (253). The Duke's sexual impotence accompanied with his military failures prevent him from attending the evening's festivities because he cannot ideally represent the potential perfection

of the role of prince. His inability to produce an heir underscores the dread that the group must have felt that "he was the last of the line that made their gatherings possible" (Kinney (99)).

As an impotent, crippled man, Duke Guidobaldo proves a poor example of the Aristotelian male principle, associated with active, formative and perfected characteristics. His weaknesses represent an excess of extreme of the worst variety. Consequently, he must relinquish his power to the subordinate female figure (Maclean 8). The ducal estate of Guidobaldo is the legacy of the former Duke Federico, his successful father, who selected the treasures of the palace himself with only the most rare of vases, gold, statues, rare paintings, musical instruments and the ancient humanist texts in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Duke Federico represents a more logical model for the perfect ruler than his son, who, though an intellectual paragon, was a physical failure, plagued by gout and later venereal disease (Kinney (100)). Male and female as separate and clearly defined entities categorically follow Aristotelian theory, with which Castiglione must have been well acquainted, tending to yield dualities where one is superior to the other. The duality male/female is therefore paralleled by these dualities:

active/passive,  
 form/matter,  
 act/potency  
 perfection/imperfection,  
 completion/incompletion,  
 possession/deprivation (Maclean 8)

Aristotle links the female with passivity, materialism and lack, and seeking the male in order to become complete. Courtly sexual hierarchy does not allow for gender deviation of any kind; a man must perform the acceptable role of "a certain robust and sturdy manliness." As Count Lodovico emphatically states:

I don't want him [the courtier] to appear soft and feminine as so many try to do, when they curl their hair and pluck their eyebrows.... Since Nature has not in fact made them the ladies they want to seem and be, they should be treated not as honest women but as common whores and be driven out from all gentlemanly society,...(61)

In strict Castiglionian-Aristotelian fashion, the Duchess opts for the "soft and delicate" passivity of feminine gentility, choosing to silence effectively half of the participants when she proclaims that the women may "be exempt from making any effort this evening, especially as we have so many men with us..."(46). She refuses to wield power over the males in the group by passing down that power again to Emilia Pia, her sister-in-law and young companion. Castiglione's ruse to quiet the women through one of their own sex allows the guilt to fall on the shoulders of the Duchess, but because she portrays the pinnacle of perfection of her sex, it is impossible to punish her. Her decision to allow the women to have a night's reprieve from participation in the rhetorical game underlines the alienation of the courtly woman in the Urbino court, and more largely in Castiglione's ideal world. Freedom for women during the Renaissance would have meant the ability to participate in public life without

reproach (Weisner 1). This was not always possible, claims Weisner, who explains that women such as the Duchess, compelled to defend their own activities, were ironically forced into anti-feminist postures as a means of justifying their presence in the male arena of public life (1).

The relative inactivity of the women in the book reflects the societal roles taken by men and women during the Italian Renaissance and their differing views regarding honour. The most respected route to gaining praise, i.e. power, for the courtly man was by distinguishing himself on the battlefield. While men strive for honour through action, honourable women choose passivity and inaction to avoid sexual temptation since respectable women are defenseless physically and politically. The exemplary women of Book III of Il Cortegiano force their men to act on traditional codes of male honour: the Persian women shame a routed Persian Army into returning into battle; the Spartan women disown and even murder their sons who show cowardice; and the Saguntum women fight against Hannibal. Though these women are elevated in status as examples of masculine courage, the highest praise which could then be given to the great Italian women, it is always an unhealthy, unnatural world which enables women to take on male tendencies (Burckhardt II, 391).

Castiglione deliberately de-emphasizes the domestic role of the courtly woman as a housewife: if married, her home, family and children are not to be her chief occupation. It would seem that serving her lady just as the courtier

serves his prince, is the prime career choice for Castiglione's perfect courtly woman, but her vocation to the wife of the prince and caring for her own family are secondary to her true purpose. The "profession" of Castiglione's donna di palazzo depends on her male counterpart and his existence relies on her as "no Court can possess adornment or splendour or gaiety without the presence of women, and no courtier... can ever perform gallant deeds of chivalry unless inspired by the loving and delightful company of women" (210).

The sexes remain distinct, with the courtly lady resembling the courtier in most respects regarding worth, endowed with many perfections and denied few fundamental human qualities essential to perfection in the courtier. But her stymied sexual role debilitates her position to one of eloquent idleness and inaction, as companion to amuse her male counterparts during spaces of military inactivity, because "the lady who is at Court should properly have, before all else, a certain pleasing affability whereby she will know how to entertain graciously every kind of man with charming and honest conversation" (212), like the wives of the rulers of the fifteenth century, who though distinguishing themselves in the arts, functioned primarily to influence distinguished men and to moderate the male impulse (Burckhardt II, 391).

A man had to respect a woman because she was under another's authority; it was not his own status that prevented him from sexual crime but that of the girl or woman who was the object of his attack. In Athens the crime of rape

drew less punishment than that of seduction because "the rapist violated the woman's body, while the seducer violates the husband's authority" (Foucault 146). The courtly woman exists to help whoever may need her, decorating the court rather than helping to define its parameters. What her creators deny her is the opportunity to communicate freely with the lords of the court because of her lack of self-definition and weakness in the areas of humanist education. Active literary work was not expected of her and the speech of the women in the Urbino circle is hampered by their inability to listen comprehensively in order to participate in the arena of classical argument. Confirmed misogynist Gaspare Pallavicino hesitates about delving into "such subtleties because these ladies would not understand them." Lady Emilia proves him correct when she interjects:

In heaven's name, leave all this business of matter and form and male and female for once, and speak in a way that you can be understood...Now we can't at all understand your way of defending us. (221)

The Urbino ladies of the court cannot retaliate against the incessant verbal abuse of Pallavacino and Frisio because they lack the vocabulary to complete the discourse. The same fear that the courtiers have against the ambitious "fools" who wish to usurp them separates them from their feminine companions. Education was not denied them, but making such a career choice public delegated them to a place of public scorn. The individuality of women in education was

developed in similar ways to that of men, but a life of political or public service meant scandal, as a public reputation was dishonourable for a woman, a sign of immorality. Educational achievements displayed in public were associated with "unnatural sexuality" (Weisner 12).

When the women are denied participation in the debate of the courtier the traditionally feminine characteristic of the labour of creation (birth) is taken away from them and transferred to the men. The male is established as the definitive controlling hand as artist and creator. Castiglione shows how Renaissance man desperately needed to play God in the hopes of altering his precarious environment. Italy during the writing of Il Cortegiano found itself in the middle of a grave moral dilemma, "out of which the best men saw hardly any escape" (Burckhardt II, 427). Machiavelli attributed the crisis to the highly developed individuality of the age: "We have outgrown the limits of morality and religion which were natural to us in our undeveloped state, and we despise outward law, because our rulers are illegitimate and judges...wicked men" (quoted in Burckhardt II, 433) Marriage and its rights were trampled under foot, and men flaunted their sexuality as they desired, without renouncing family, even when unsure of the parentage of the children. Castiglione recommends a stronger sense of adherence to fidelity in marriage, advocating only love that can eventually lead to sexual union with the marriage partner. In itself, the sanctified union is a divine institution, exempt from human tampering and as such, remains an



immovable object in the way of social change for as long as religion maintains its hold. But the primary purpose of marriage is not to act as a climax of a love affair, but to produce offspring. Spending one's energies pursuing sexual love, marital or otherwise, was to be avoided just as excessive practices of any other activity except study. The formulated idea of sexual activity as hazardous and damaging in itself arose early in the fourth century along with a general principle of moderation, a suspicion that sexual pleasure might be an evil, strict monogamous fidelity and the idea of absolute chastity (Foucault 250-1). Foucault argues that sexually styled conduct, or the system which dictates sexual liberties according to gender, proved attractive to the smallest minority of the population: free, adult males. As a "graceful and accomplished form," sexual role play establishes an "aesthetics of existence, the purposeful art of a freedom perceived as a power game" (Foucault 252-3). Lord Gaspare plays along enthusiastically with this traditional role, exposing his male sexual paranoia and skepticism regarding the virtue of women and the legitimacy of children. In Gaspare's view, a man's natural love for his children is dependent on the veritability of their blood connection. If the blood tie is doubted, the relationship dissolves. The exaggerated immorality of women proclaimed by Gaspare proves to be a sign of the times when his trepidation at rampant sexual freedom is viewed in relation to a corrupt world. The continuous ravings of Gaspare and Frisio in their single-minded attack on the feminine sex underscore the notion that even respected, and

so-called healthy, courtiers display weaknesses of character and that the courtiers that inhabit the palace do not singularly portray the multi-dimensional perfection of their own creation (Kinney 99). It also demonstrates how the excessive thrust of their misogynistic tendencies alienates them from a proportionate number of their fellow humans.

If Gaspare is pulling away from the women, there is little serious evidence that the good-natured Urbino women are genuinely insulted by his endless abuse. Only once, in characteristic charming and delicate fashion, do the women rise and in jovial pursuit surround him and merrily pound him with their fists. This brief encounter marks one of the few occurrences of physical movement in all of Il Cortegiano, a work that "surrounds and subordinates physical activity" (Kinney 344 n. 28), leading us to believe that the main activities of the Montefeltro residence occur off the page.

The difference in physical capabilities is recognized unabashedly by both sexes and neither takes offense when the women are labelled as "poor creatures" and "simple doves." Although she has the capacity to share the excellent traits of the courtier, the female ideal must have a certain "soft and delicate tenderness, with an air of feminine sweetness in her every movement" (211) Women are portrayed as easy prey to the clever tricks of a seasoned lover who employs snares to seduce them. The artful suitor performs for the lady with soulful expressions, passionate breathing and copious tears, while bribing servants and

friends. During the festivals, dances, games, masquerades and tournaments he repeats his act of agonized lover for her benefit. Under such pressures, it is understandable that the weaker sex can fail, making those who resist the assaults of love truly admirable.

Chastity is a crucial characteristic of the courtly woman only, surviving throughout a long heritage of sacred Christian literature. For women, it was the single most essential prerequisite for a life of Christian perfection; and through it they could enter into heaven (Schulenburg 29). The attraction to feminine celibacy was lauded equally by males, as a guarantee of fidelity in marriage securing the true family line, and females, as a ticket to paradise. The female notion of the importance of maintaining one's virginity was applauded throughout the social class system. The examples of female worth in Book III of Il Cortegiano reenact the drastic measures the exemplary women take in fleeing sexual attack; suicide is considered a reasonable alternative.

Although Daniel Javitch claims that the judicial power of Emilia Pia's arbitration of the parlour game "represents the degree to which court conduct is conditioned by female inclinations"(27), he omits a significant comment about the suitability of women to rule. When asked if women were as capable of governing cities and armies as men, the Magnifico replies that he has "not imposed those duties on them," since he is "fashioning a Court lady and not a queen" (217). The majority of the group, Bernardo Bibbiena, Gaspare Pallavicino, Unico Aretino,

Morello and even the Magnifico, express doubt concerning the sincerity of women as a group. The personality of the female is dissected on the sexual battlefield by the company. Unico Aretino claims that "beauty [in women] is nearly always accompanied by cruelty and ingratitude towards those who serve them most faithfully" and that his experience shows that women throw themselves away on rascals and rogues (264). Morello adds that "many beautiful women...were evil, cruel and spiteful; and this seems to me to be nearly always the case, since beauty make them proud, and pride makes them cruel" (329).

The irony of this argument is that the same group insists that good looks in women is far more essential to the courtly donna than to her male companion for "much is lacking to a woman who lacks beauty" (211). Should it come as a big surprise that women, playing a role in the sexual game of courtly love, "usually desire above everything else to be beautiful" (261)?

It is left for Bembo in Book IV to interpret the singular relationship between the courtier and his lady:

With the greatest reverence the lover should honour, please and obey his lady, cherish her even more than himself, put her convenience and pleasure before his own, and love the beauty of her soul no less than that of her body. He should, therefore, be at pains to keep her from going astray and by his wise precepts and admonishments always seek to make her modest, temperate and truly chaste; and he must ensure that her thoughts are always pure and unsullied by any trace of evil. (335)

Castiglione takes his position as schoolmaster very seriously as do his principal speakers. The connection between the lovers in this sexless love affair, after the courtier's obligation to obey his lady, takes on the scenario of teacher and pupil. Just as the courtier works to educate his monarch to ruling his people with wisdom and virtue, the courtier acts as the superior partner who dictates behaviour to his feminine underling. The failure to comprehend the opposite sex implicated in these comments further substantiates my argument that the courtiers prefer to govern their female associates and wives rather than accept them as peers, furthering their own isolation. Castiglione's courtly lady is not the equal of his courtier, despite his attempts to perfect her, and evidently she was never truly meant to be equal in the modern sense where equality demands individual powers and freedoms.

During Bembo's exalted treatise on neoplatonic love, that is loving chastely, the courtier uses his courtly lady to attain union with spiritual perfection, the heavenly Father. Ficino and Pico, Florentine neoplatonists of the late fifteenth century and known to Castiglione, make love the dynamic force in a transcendental religion of beauty (Smith 95). Beauty mirrors the magnificence of divine beauty and love serves as the magnet which draws us to beauty. The perfection of love is in reciprocity with the divinity; but its origin lies in beauty, which originates from the woman, who possesses it in greater store than man. Because the being least burdened with earthly matter is the most spiritual

(woman), her soul is more free to flee the chains of human existence. Women, particularly chaste ones, are therefore more capable of transcending the limitations of the physical world (Maclean 24). This outward beauty, says Bembo, is a true sign of inner wholesomeness and "an influx of the divine goodness," which attracts the gaze of others and "entering through their eyes...impresses itself upon the human soul" (325-66).

For the neoplatonists, the love of beauty moves us directly to consummation with the beloved. But because the state of contemplation is the ideal status of love, physical consummation is out of the question. The end of love should be stable and therefore "beyond sense, wholly intellectual" (Smith 96). The courtier must shun the ugliness of vulgar passion and guided by reason set forth on the path toward divine, mystical love. Some physical pleasures by the object of beauty, the woman, are granted to her impassioned courtly lover: pleasant smiles, intimate conversations, and the liberty to joke and touch hands. The lovers may also very innocently partake in kissing, because in rational love-making the mouth opens

a channel for words, which are the interpreters of the soul and for the human breath or spirit. Consequently, the rational lover delights when he joins his mouth to that of the lady he loves in a kiss, not in order to arouse in himself any unseemly desire but because he feels that this bond opens the way for their souls which, attracted by their mutual desire, each pour themselves into the other's body. (336)

With the help of reason the courtier turns his desire completely away from the body to beauty alone, contemplating its simplicity and purity, creating an abstract form distinct from any worldly body. He determines to "make use of this [pure] love as a step by which to climb to another that is far more sublime," compelled toward a universal beauty and "dazzled by this greater light" (338-9). He no longer concerns himself with his former earthly love. Directing his thoughts inward, the courtier opens up a latent vision of a true image of divine angelic beauty with which the soul craves to unite. In the last stage of attaining perfection, the soul flies to unite itself with the pure celestial nature, and abandons the senses and even reason. Transformed into an angel, the soul can now gaze on the wide sea of heavenly divine beauty, which it receives into itself to enjoy the supreme happiness the senses cannot comprehend.

Despite the influence of this neoplatonic idea of love, the "scholastic infrastructure" (Maclean 24) of the Renaissance regarding the weaker nature of women remained sound which means that the true motives of Castiglione's courtier are suspiciously singular. Even though this idealized love seems to exalt women, it is male-centered because the lover's feelings for his lady are fully outlined, but nothing is said of hers for him. This leads conclusively to the idea that women are merely a vehicle for the completion of his perfection, as a stepping stone on Plato's ladder eventually leading to ecstatic union with the Divinity. It is a risk to dwell on the role of the female counterpart to

Castiglione's perfect male when outlining the courtier's alienation from society, but it is hoped that by studying the nature of their relationship, his near-complete isolation from the world is more clearly defined. Even in the most secretive, intimate experiences of life, the courtier cannot maintain a balanced discourse with another. Castiglione's lover is forever banned from earthly companionship, forced to live alone on the fringe of the public sector and in his own private life.

Castiglione's final irony is Cardinal Bembo's performance in Book IV. His inspired speech fulfils his vocation as courtier, drawing attention to his voice, to his powerful persuasiveness, a "lyric moment" which transcends "time and contingency" (Regosin 44). And as a most powerful human inclination, transcendence moves the courtier to a higher plane where the importance of the performance disappears (Regosin 46). The dramatic leap which the speech takes into the upper stratosphere of mystical union with angels takes the group by surprise and leaves Bembo and his audience stunned and mute. For him the pursuit of love is the utmost important occasion of the courtier's inward life. His moving monologue on love oversteps the notion of the Aristotelian mean because there is no middle of the road in Bembo's theory of sexless love. The performance marks a transformation in the "dazed" Bembo, and he must be brought down to earth by the gentle tug of his robe by Emilia and her witty words of warning: "Take care, Pietro, that with these thoughts of yours you too do not cause your soul to leave your body" (343). The hush that marks the



platonic climax of Bembo's consummating experience with the love of beauty furthers delineates the boundaries between the public and the private. Emilia's interruption shatters the sacred moment, but her good-nature, her humanity, draws Bembo back to the land of the mortal.

Castiglione uses a progression in the four books beginning in Book I, which demonstrates the required makeup of the courtier; Book II, how the courtier should best serve society; Book III, how women can show courage and how they should serve their courtly male counterparts; and Book IV, how to love on earth leading to a purity of the next life. With all of his concern with the realities of life, or the vita activa, and because of his service to princes and in his career as international diplomat, it is ironic that Castiglione clearly chose to close his work with a sublime vision of the vita contemplativa. Concluding his work with a purified vision of beatific love breaks the tradition of the Aristotelian mean which Castiglione has consistently adhered to throughout Il Cortegiano. Although Bembo's courtier is alienated even in the love experience from true partnership because love of the beautiful splinters into a singular experience with the divine image, he has finally escaped his world of continuous dialogue to a safe harbour where celestial perfection wipes out war, governments, inequality between the sexes and the ambition for power which accompanies them.

## CHAPTER TWO

The conflict of an inner, personal world and its public opposite is an idea that can be explored as extending from Castiglione's work to Sidney's sonnet sequence, Astrophil and Stella. Castiglione's influence on Elizabethan taste and manners "can not be exaggerated," according to John Buxton (19). In fact the translation by Sir Thomas Hoby of The Courtyer of Count Baldassar Castilio in 1561 has been deemed a "watershed in the development of the character of the English Renaissance courtly mentalite" (Bartlett 249). Walter Raleigh, who published an edition in 1900, proclaims that

The Courtier crossed the Channel and became an Englishman. The translator was a pioneer of Italian studies in England; his book, reprinted again and again, became one of the most influential books of the ensuing age,-the age of Shakespeare and Spenser and Sidney (xxvi).

And though, as Kenneth R. Bartlett says, we must avoid identifying Castiglione's work as "the sacred text" which begins the "roots of the Italianate nature of Elizabethan culture," we know that by the time Hoby's version was introduced in English, a new group composed of well-born, young gentlemen "eager for a new model of polished, social behaviour" had risen in English society (250-1). Young Philip Sidney would undoubtedly have been familiar with the book, as well as the books of della Casa, Guazzo and others, and most likely read

it before his famous first journey to the Continent in 1572 for two years. Sidney has come to epitomize the ideal of Castiglione's courtly knight. Gabriel Harvey's poem praises his affinities with Count Baldesar's courtier and he was and is often considered "Castiglione's courtier made flesh, and wherever he went among men he was received with admiration and delight" (Buxton 37). Both he and Castiglione were born into noble families and despite Sidney's meteoric rise internationally after his successful European tour, he was frustrated by the idiosyncratic ruling methods of the English monarchy. Queen Elizabeth's practice of ruling by political factions and keeping court favourites excluded Sidney in his short career from attaining high office, while his public disapproval of her courtship by the Duke of Alencon placed him squarely in opposition to the sovereign. While his political career stagnated, his literary life flourished. Along with his friends Fulke Greville, Edward Dyer and his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, Sidney planned an artistic movement to elevate the quality of English poetry to that of Renaissance Italy or of the classical authors. Generally, the heritage of English verse during Sidney's time "made up a very slender store" (Lever 51), and he and his group were anxious to change that. Wyatt and Surrey's lyrical verse was available in Tottel's famous anthology, with five publications between 1557 and 1578, and proved influential to the end of the sixteenth century. Sidney leaves no sign of direct imitation of the two poets, or other contributors to the miscellany, though he does repeat many of their

traditional motifs, using virtually the same conventional diction and the same verbal patterns, in his earlier love poetry (Ferry 119). Gascoigne presented Sundrie Flowers in 1572, imitating Surrey's form in most of its thirty three sonnets. Other minor contributions were made but are recognized today more for their evidence of the continuance of the form between the Tudor and Elizabethan eras than for their poetic genius. It was not until Sidney's creative experimentation with the sonnet sequence Astrophil and Stella that the English sonnet form reached maturation.

Il Cortegiano and Astrophil and Stella, though from different genres and cultural backgrounds, are bridged by many overlapping ideas and perceptions concerning the excellence of classical rhetoric (oratory), the essential importance of a humanist education and the attempt to interpret the complexity of the individual alienated from reality. In Astrophil and Stella, the voice is singular in anticipation of one reader (at least initially), Stella, but the argumentative tone masquerades as one voice in conflict with itself, weighing the significance of two different appeals. Castiglione hints at the correct answer to the many discussions presented in Il Cortegiano through the speech of the dominant speaker of each book. When in doubt, the best solution lies with compromise, like the middle way which Castiglione supports. The intensity of the lover's plight in Astrophil and Stella blinds him to the outside world, and even to God. In alliance with his views on the state of English verse, Sidney opts for a different kind of Petrarchan

lover, whose self-delusions soon become obvious to the reader. The conclusions of the reader are therefore in direct opposition to those of Astrophil. This final alienation even from the reading public seals the fate of the doomed Astrophil.

Sidney's commitment to restructuring the sonnet is underlined by his belief in the power and opportunities that accompany a mastery of the art of language, any language, not just Latin. Castiglione had said that the courtier should write in the more vulgar Tuscan because it is as beautiful as Latin and more easily understood. Another attraction for Castiglione to the nationalization of Tuscan as the only true language of Italy was that it would unify the population of the Italian peninsula by allowing them to communicate in one tongue. A common language would make diplomacy easier, and help to diminish the minute differences between the city-states making covenants with foreign powers more difficult. Rather than surviving in smaller, divided pockets of civilization, a language shared by all Italians of all regions would institute a heightened national pride. Sidney understood the importance of defending native talent: "heretofore poets have in England also flourished" (Defence 62). He encouraged English originality boasting of poets who proceed "from their wit, being indeed makers of themselves, not takers of others" (Defence 61). Sidney exposes his rhetorical skills in The Defense of Poetry and facility with prose in The Arcadia, and before launching the sonnet sequence, Astrophil and Stella, he experimented with verse.

Castiglione greatly admired Petrarch, Boccaccio and Dante, but retreated to the writings of the classical authors for much of the substance of The Book of the Courtier, most notably Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. Astrophil and Stella is a story of love, which echoes the tradition started by Petrarch in his Canzoniere, using the tighter Italian rhyme scheme, the most common form of Sidney's sequence being ABBA/ABBA/CDC/DEE. Sidney's main adaptation in the sonnet form is the innovation of the sestet (Kalstone 123), where often he allows divisions by grammar and by rhyme to isolate the last line as in the sonnets where he ends the sonnet with a twist or a surprise.

In other similarities between the books, Il Cortegiano chronicles the happenings of actual people that Castiglione knew when he was in service to Duke Guidobaldo in Urbino; Astrophil, with its phonetic association to the name Philip, might be loosely based on Sidney, considering the group of poems in the sequence which coincide with biographical facts concerning Sidney's life. This view overall imposes remarkably restricting boundaries. Though one risks becoming mired in the significance of the biographical love affair between Lady Penelope Rich and Sidney, it is generally agreed that to some degree Penelope Rich was used as the model for Stella. Rather than concentrating on this one aspect of Sidney's love poem, it is far better to take only a cursory glance at the historical private life of its author and the former Penelope Devereux, a topic which has been thoroughly exhausted, moving instead toward the telling

relationship between their fictional counterparts: Astrophil and Stella.

Astrophil's perspective dominates the poem. His is the voice that we hear, be it as a dedicated and critical artist or a foolish and impatient young lover. Sidney's ingenuity invents Astrophil's dual personality, which allows him to play both parts of poet and ingenu simultaneously. As poet he challenges the artistic traditions of the very real literary world that precedes him, questioning the honesty and imagination of rhetoricians before him who have turned "poor Petrarch's long-deceased woes" into the trivial and criticizing "You that do search for every purling spring,/Which from the ribs of old Parnassus flows," for turning mythical allusion into the mundane. As a lover Astrophil struggles with the angst of unrequited love and the frustration of virtue, moving through stages of powerlessness to open hostility and aggression. Although critics tend to address Astrophil as a single voice, it is apparent that he has what is defined in psychiatric terms as psychophrenic tendencies. There are two distinct voices of the lover: one introverted, pained and sometimes hostile and the other social, pedantic and playful. And the two dimensions are best understood by the roles which they assume. Astrophil, the lover, writes as therapy, as a route to self-discovery to identify and alleviate the pain associated with his persistent nagging feelings for Stella. The side of Astrophil who acts as the critic/poet writes more scientifically, with less sensitivity, to document the affair with the knowledge that

his words, circulated throughout the court, could be dispersed throughout the public.

"If a man is to be loved he must himself love and be lovable," according to Emilia Pia, when asked what it is that women find most suitable in a mate. Astrophil, understanding this, tries every manageable avenue to prove his loveableness to Stella. The egotistical lover immediately proclaims his sincerity in the first sonnet of the sequence.

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,  
 That she (dear she) might take some pleasure of my pain:  
 Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know;  
 Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,  
 I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,  
 Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain;  
 Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow  
 Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburnt brain.  
 But words came halting forth, wanting invention's stay;  
 Invention, nature's child, fled step-dame study's blows,  
 And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.  
 Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,  
 Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,  
 'Foole,' said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write.'

"Truth" becomes the pinnacle of perfection to which Astrophil, the poet-lover, aspires. Defining "truth" proves a dilemma for the youthful poet who doubts his own inward powers to describe what he hopes to write, turning to the public domain of what has come before in literature. "Study," relying on the words of others, he at length discovers is inferior to "Invention," which is "Nature's child." Astrophil, in turn, refuses to succumb to the limitations of the



literary past; instead he moves toward the inward power of expression where he can speak what he feels. Sidney seems to be stressing the importance of expressions of sensitivity over the adherence to rigid and unoriginal rules of poetic inspiration. The first sonnet is the first in English which examines what may be uttered "in truth" and what may be revealed "in verse," indicating just how explicitly Astrophil and Stella delves into the legitimacy of inner feelings and impulses, while implying the infirm condition of public discourse to rightfully delineate his inner emotions of love. The love sonnet portrays "experience as simultaneously outward and inward, public and private, apparent and secret, expressed and silent, readable and inscrutable" (Ferry 173). The spontaneous feel of the words is due to dynamic alternation of the poet's own persona: morose and passionate, furious and then flattering and self-serving and congenial. Eventually a pattern presents itself where Astrophil repeats his plight to Stella, she rebuffs him, he retaliates with a joke to discount her seriousness, he acquiesces for an instant and then restates his appeal more earnestly and loudly (Sinfield 10). In order to determine whether this is staged drama or genuine emotion, or both, we must examine the volatile personality of Astrophil. The poem is after all a portrait of the artist as a young man passionately in love with the idea of love.

Astrophil inhabits the Elizabethan court, and like Sidney is adept with arms and is involved in international politics. But this lover plays a real person, vulnerable to human foibles, more like the factual participants of the Urbino

Court than the ideal creation they amusingly conjure up. Astrophil resembles the young courtier described by Bembo in Book IV, who is more easily swayed by earthy desires because of the senses which

are at their full strength in youth, when they are stimulated by the urges of the flesh which sap a man's powers of reason in exact proportion to their own vigour and so easily persuade the soul to yield to desire. For since it is sunk in an earthly prison and deprived of spiritual contemplation, the soul cannot of itself clearly perceive the truth when it is carrying out its duties of governing the body. (327)

Astrophil would have responded to Bembo with Sonnet 21

Your words, my friend, right healthful caustics, blame  
 My young mind marred, whom love doth windlass so  
 That mine own writings like bad servants show,  
 My wits, quick in vain thoughts, in virtue lame;  
 That Plato I read for nought, but if he tame  
 Such coltish gyres; that to my birth I owe  
 Nobler desires, lest else that friendly foe,  
 Great expectation, wear a train of shame.  
 For since mad March great promise made of me,  
 If now the May of my years much decline,  
 What can be hoped my harvest time will be?  
 Sure you say well; your wisdom's golden mine  
 Dig deep with learning's spade; now tell me this,  
 Hath this world aught so fair as Stella is?

Astrophil's struggle between his public responsibilities and his private thoughts infiltrate the text of Astrophil and Stella. Though Sidney did not title the poem (Lanham 107), it is interesting to consider why Stella's name is brought into the title of the poem at all, which more appropriately would have been called just Astrophil. If Stella is indeed not "dethroned" (Kalstone 130), she is at the

very least relegated to a fixed position. Stella exists primarily in relationship to Astrophil and others, each of whom defined her in terms of his own requirements: she is a daughter (to Lord Devereux); she is a wife (to Lord Rich); she is a proposed mistress (to Sidney and/or Astrophil); and she is chaste in marriage (in accordance to the teachings of Christ). Astrophil, his reason overwhelmed by her physical beauty and exceptional qualities, finds it impossible to provide a truthful portrait of her. From the description we receive, it is difficult to see her as more than just a compilation of body parts as in Sonnet 77 where she is just a "face," "presence," "hand," "lips," "skin," and "voice." She is a lovely moving representative of virtuous beauty, an immutable image of negation that murmurs "No, no, no, no, my dear, let be," to her ardent suitor's persistent wooing. Like the characters in Castiglione's Il Cortegiano, Sidney's courtly lady acts more as a sounding board for the courtier's (Astrophil's) pleas, and a reason for his pain. Stella maintains a constant, dignified demeanour that isolates her from and contrasts sharply with the plotting and hyperactivity which accompany Astrophil's mood swings.

The character of Sidney's youth is at once naive and experienced, thoughtful and egocentric. His chief occupation is to encounter conflict and then recede from it. Astrophil moves quickly to and from the conventions which dictate the boundaries of courtly love, the roles of lover and lady, and the attitude, or wish, that love be more openly and honestly sexual. Each poem is an

enclosed and private moment in Astrophil's mind, but he cannot manage to find an adequate way to console himself. A technique which Sidney uses frequently and innovatively in Astrophil and Stella is to personify objects that bridge the gap between the complaining lover and the loved. In sonnets 31, 39, 84, 98, and 103 he confers personality on the moon, sleep, bed, the highway, and the Thames. Perhaps Astrophil hopes that this charmed dialogue with natural images will induce the lovely Stella to loosen what he feels to be the less than natural principles of infidelity induced by society.

Astrophil's manic love for Stella is uncontrollable and it releases a torrent of emotional undulations. Because he is human and sensitive to earthly pleasures, his admiration for the heavenly virtue of his lady-love has little power to reconcile his suffering at not attaining her (Kalstone 117). Discovering that he loves her is not a euphoric moment, but a withdrawal into woe and dread, an experience similar to a loss, equivalent to the death of a close one or the impending end of oneself. Cupid's power does not have to persuade Astrophil of the gravity and seriousness of his love for Stella. For the young courtier, loving Stella means living the existence of a "slave-born Muscovite," not because his lady repels him, but because love reminds him of his vulnerability and saps him of his power and personal control. Love of such a perfect beauty must be stripped of sexuality; fantasies are bridled, forbidden in this genuine love affair, for virtue has wrestled control away from Astrophil's every waking moment.

Virtue, alas, now let me take some rest:  
 Thou sett'st a bate between my will and wit.  
 If vain love have my simple soul oppressed,  
 Leave what thou lik'st not, deal not thou with it.  
 Thy sceptre use in some old Cato's breast;  
 Churches or schools are for thy seat more fit. (4)

The marital status of the object of his desire, Stella, is undeniably a stumbling block in the affair, but what restrains Astrophil from plunging headlong into pursuing the reasonable conclusion to his painfully passionate musings or dropping the love affair entirely is his need to document his sufferings. Stella is initially oblivious to the secret yearnings of the young Astrophil and though he castigates her for being "most fair" and "most cold," it would appear that she is innocent of his charges, ignorant of his visual overtures. By his silent sighs and occasional glances, Stella could not imagine the inner battle taking place between Astrophil and his masculine image and Astrophil and his Christian values and Classical education. Sonnet 5 exemplifies the confusion which takes place when the arduously ingrained institutions of education and religion combat against sensual love:

It is most true, that eyes are formed to serve  
 The inward light; and that the heavenly part  
 Ought to be king, from whose rules who do swerve,  
 Rebels to Nature, strive for their own smart.  
 It is most true, what we call Cupid's dart,  
 An image is, which for ourselves we carve;  
 And, fools, adore in temple of our heart,  
 Till that good god make Church and churchmen starve.  
 True, that true beauty virtue is indeed,  
 Whereof this beauty can be but a shade,

Which elements with mortal mixture breed,  
True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made,  
And should in soul up to our country move;  
True; and yet true, that I must Stella love.

Lifelong beliefs are restated and justified, and in the fourteenth line, instantly toppled by the sensual love for a woman. A dedicated Protestant, Sidney was expert in Platonic philosophy. He was also "virtuous, but not prudish: courtly but not dissolute" (Lever 78). Here, as alter-ego to his creator, Astrophil refuses to deny the neoplatonic truths he has learned. He knows that sensual love is foolish and must be tempered by reason and that Love (Cupid) harms not only its victim but deceptively tempts true Christians away from true religion. By adding the startling statement of the last line, Sidney calls into question the preceding lines, and forces the reader to reevaluate the speaker. For Sidney, who placed much emphasis on the conscience of the individual, and whose philosophical background was deeply entrenched in moral and rationalist aspects of Platonism, the idea of creative expression was better worked out organically with intellectual principles (Lever 79). The maintenance of these basic principles is positioned against a new principle, his need for Stella, so that Astrophil balances what is expected of him by societal norms with what he personally and inwardly desires. The realization that Astrophil is aware of his faulty thinking in Sonnet 5 marks the beginning of his alienation from society and its rules, a retreat which gains momentum in sonnet 14 when the poet refuses the

camaraderie and well-intentioned advice from a well-meaning court friend. Astrophil chooses to isolate himself from the world, like the Urbino courtiers, remaining on the circumference of the life of the court, seeming "most alone in greatest company" (27). Astrophil is clearly the lost lamb, who is caught between his immature lack of self restraint and his sexual passion, but what has permitted him to reach the extremes of his experience is the delusion that he could pull it off. Sidney uses the first-person in the sonnet sequence to get into the character of Astrophil, to show the reader how his manipulations and flights of fancy are the tools of his own imprisonment. Clearly these "errors and mistaken ideas" point to the ethical question of the poem: Astrophil's inability to balance his reason and his passions. In fact, his portrayal and slide into darkness take on a demonic flavour as witnessed early in the sonnet sequence when the poet shrouds himself in "the blackest face of woe," and in sonnet 2 where he laments "while with a feeling skill I paint my hell." Allusions to Christian imagery invade the black undertones of Astrophil's verse; as he claims to "burn in love," we are reminded of sinners burning in hell. This hellish descent marks his grief at losing self-control and all sense of privacy over his most intimate thoughts. Astrophil's "willful decline from virtuous conduct" as Alan Sinfield terms it (4), indicates that he pretends self-comprehension in his actions.

By Sonnet 30, Astrophil is completely "isolated from society and its concerns," dismissing the crucial political happenings of the day (Hamilton 208).

Considering the honourable reputation of the Sidney family, which served English kings loyally for decades, the prospect that this young courtier refuses to be encumbered with important matters of state because he is lost in love is meant to wake up the reader. It is a shock if we are to take the role of Astrophil to coincide hand-in-hand with his creator, or if we are to trust what he (Astrophil) says implicitly.

Astrophil and Stella is not the only work of Sidney's where he removes the poet from society. The shepherd-poet in his pastoral The Lady of May lives on the circumference of genteel companionship and there he can freely compose lyrics and love honestly. What Sidney implies is that art is better created far away from the beaten path, isolated from the temptation of well-used traditional forms and conceits. Only in alienation and suffering can the poet discover himself and therefore truthfully surrender his work to others. Removing oneself from the world may be the key to good poetry, but it also allows for the perpetuation of Astrophil's self-deception, a topic which Alan Sinfield dissects so convincingly.

The youth, blissfully ignorant of his self-imposed hoodwinking, avoids coming to terms with the facts of his courtship of Stella, preferring to focus on his plot for successfully seducing her. Progressing through stages of Astrophil's pain and self-discovery there is an undeniable suggestion that perhaps this young lover is practising duplicity. The poet's successful technique of persuasion drags the



reader along on the dramatic crests and ebbs of his wooing. By elevating Stella to a position of omnipotence over Astrophil, the poet seeks to gain the allegiance and forgiveness of the reader for Astrophil's weakness in love. In the first few sonnets, we learn that Stella is the source of his inspiration. Her presence also has a debilitating power, for legions of mere mortals have fallen victim to her.

Or would she her miraculous power show,  
That, whereas black seems beauty's contrary,  
She even in black doth make all beauties flow?  
Placed ever there, gave him this mourning weed  
To honour all their deaths, who for her bleed.(7)

Astrophil continues to campaign for the sympathy of the reader depicting himself as a victim to the onslaught of his partnered foes, Cupid and Stella. In the fictional realm of the Elizabethan battlefield of the sexes, Astrophil's fragile ego views Stella as a frigid monument, a citadel, resplendent in martial dress, and strong in "wit" and victorious in "disdain / That to win it, is all the skill and pain" (12).

There is a marked hyperbolic commitment in some of the sonnets to paint a portrait of Stella as a stony and tight fortress, a sinister temptation that threatens to destroy those who attempt to enter her. This is not mere dementia on the part of Astrophil that transforms a young, albeit unhappily married, beauty of the court into a cold and calculating witch, but something different happening under the surface. Astrophil endeavours to alleviate the powerlessness of his situation by persuasion, coercion, and even desperation to gain power:

privately, by gaining the favours of the lover, and publicly, over his courtly readers. The success of his performance depends on how his audience believes his sincerity or escapes his manipulative techniques. Affectation, the reef to be avoided at all costs in Il Cortegiano, is also criticized by Sidney in A Defense of Poetry:

Now, for the outside of it, which is words, or (as I may term it) diction, it is even well worse. So is that honey-flowing matron Eloquence apparelled, or rather disgguised, in a courtesan-like painted affectation: one time, with so far-fet words that may seem monsters but must seem stranger to any poor Englishman; another time, with coursing of a letter, as if they were bound to follow the method of a dictionary; another time, with figures and flowers, extremely winter-starved. (70)

Astrophil is all too aware of himself, and less cognizant of the object of his desires in any way other than pursuing her with a vengeance. Sidney supplies him with a controlled ironical self-observation which is remarkable considering he is so unreasonably in love. By focusing all of his impatient energy in victory over Stella's commitment to virtue, Astrophil sidesteps the real crisis that has overtaken him and that is his control over his unfortunate love affair with Stella. It is love "Not at first sight, nor with a dribbed shot," unlike the traditional Petrarchan lover who loves immediately, but a love that comes slowly until eventually, he is captured like a slave. The love aspect of the poem progresses beyond sexual frustration toward more individual questions of the poet's struggle to regain control, in love and in poetry, much in the same way as Castiglione's

interlocutors create their own perfect courtly man as an outlet for their vented hostilities for their lack of power. Sidney's Elizabethan lover feels an insecurity, a paranoia at the loss of personal power, and hence attempts to manipulate his surroundings rhetorically and socially in order to regain it.

Feeling control leaving him, Astrophil struggles with the forces of love. He makes excuses for his behaviour by initially portraying himself as the victim that happened to be in Cupid's way, blaming him as that "murth'ring boy" who stalks him "like a thief hid in dark bush" and wounds him mortally. Astrophil stalks a defenseless sleeping Stella in the second song, showing no regret at pursuing her, only remorse at not taking full advantage of the moment.) Curiously, the young, boyish lover and saucy Cupid come to resemble each other; Astrophil admits that he is "somewhat kin" to the god of love, sharing a common enemy. In Sonnet 46 he and Cupid are both abused by Stella.

I cursed thee oft; I pity now thy case,  
 Blind-hitting boy, since she that thee and me  
 Rules with a beck, so tyrannizeth thee,  
 That thou must want or food, or dwelling-place.

Now Cupid and Astrophil form an alliance against Stella, as Astrophil begins to gather his resources and launch his own affront. One cannot help noticing the increasing similarities between the language in the agitated lover and that of the courtiers gathered in the Il Cortegiano concerning women and beauty. It is important that women be beautiful, but if they are, it makes them haughty

and ungrateful. In sonnet 31, Astrophil, having no luck communicating with his star, addresses the moon on how he views the contrarities of women.

With how sad steps, O moon, thou climb'st the skies;  
 How silently, and with how wan a face.  
 What may it be that even in heav'nly place  
 That busy archer his sharp arrows tries?  
 Sure, if that long with love acquainted eyes  
 Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case;  
 I read it in thy looks; thy languished grace  
 To me, that feel the like, thy state describes.  
 Then even of fellowship, O moon, tell me,  
 Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?  
 Are beauties there as proud as here they be?  
 Do they above love to be loved, and yet  
 Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?  
 Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?

Astrophil alternately believes that Stella should love him by virtue of his love for her and nothing more, and because she gently denies him that corporeal part of love she is deemed ungrateful.

Astrophil's inner turmoil faces a head-on collision in sonnet 14, when, rejecting the counsels of common sense, he decides instead to rewrite the rules first laid down by religion and philosophy and if "love is sin, then let me sinful be." The ultimate rebuff of philosophy and religion keeps Sidney's poetry firmly rooted in the earthly world of sensuality. But the argument is presented as an open-ended dialectic with a need for a "cause" and "answer," like the rhetorical dialogues so evident in Aristotle (Warkentin 181). The "argumentative strain" of Astrophil and Stella, the presentation of a truth later juxtaposed with a second

truth, channels a discourse not unlike the debates witnessed in Castiglione. The irony of the sonnet sequence is that the dominant viewpoint is not necessarily the one of the most excellent and noble intentions. The love that continues to ail the suffering youth pulls him away from reason, dramatizing the "demands of appetite on the world of the ideal" (Kalstone 122). The failure to overcome the temptations of earthly flesh makes it impossible to achieve a median point somewhere between excess and deficiency, and the Aristotelian mean, so crucial to Il Cortegiano, cannot be reached. And as often as the poet criticizes the oxymoronic waverings of the Petrarchan lover, he too lives through excessive mood swings consistent with the bold contradiction of "living deaths, dear wounds, fair storms and freezing fires" (Sonnet 6).

Astrophil betrays youthful arrogance toward those "curious wits" at court who attribute his new-found demeanour to academic pursuits or matters of state. The relationship and the loss of control expressed in Astrophil's anguish is a metaphor for the political environment of Sidney's time which changed the sexual styling of courtly love when Elizabeth took the throne. The aim of pure love in the sonnet is reciprocated love, with its reward speedy consummation; for the courtier service and loyalty to the monarch expected monetary reward and preferential treatment. In socio-historical terms, this crisis can be transferred to Sidney himself, who, in allegiance to a female monarch, finds it difficult to attempt to have the powerful edge over her in the traditional way the courtier in

Il Cortegiano may have practised. The mutual distrust which took place between courtier and prince might have been due to Sidney's triumph among the Dutch: Elizabeth feared Sidney's possible marriage to William of Orange's daughter might destabilize her foreign policy. The friction erupted shortly thereafter when he shows marked lack of tact in boldly confronting Elizabeth during 1578 to 1580, during the negotiations for the nuptials between the queen and the duke of Alencon, brother to France's king. In "A Letter written by Sir Philip Sidney to Queen Elizabeth, touching Her Marriage with Monsieur," Sidney so angered the queen that it briefly forced him from court. As much as Sidney conceals the importance of public life in Astrophil and Stella, he knew that good relations with the queen were crucial. "Sidney was as covetous of material advancement -- and as desperately in need of it - as any prodigal young Elizabethan courtier committed to the code of ostentation and largesse" (Montrose 22). For whatever unexplained design, he still was determined to advise his sovereign, who although tolerant of flattery, repudiated his unrequested counsels.

Like many court poets and artists of the time, Sidney chooses to portray Elizabeth as an ideal figure rather than as a human with sexuality - a woman. In the pageant The Fortress of Perfect Beauty, which Sidney helped produce and also performed in, the queen is allegorized as the fortress defending itself from the attack of a contingent of gentlemen-courtiers, the author among them, who

call themselves the "Four Foster Children of Desire." A messenger delivers to her majesty their challenge:

Know ye...all onely Princesse, that hereby (for far of they are never) there lyes encamped the foure lang haples, ...as they are weake in fortune, encouraged with the valiaunt counsaile of never fainting Desire, and by the same assured, that by right in inheritaunce even from ever, the Fortresse of Beautie doth belong to her fostered children. These foure I say...doe will you by me, even in the name of Justice, that you will no longer exclude vertuous Desire from perfect Beautie....But if...Beautie be accompanied with disdainful pride, and pride be waighted on by refusing crueltie...they will beseige that fatal Fortresse, vowing not to spare (if this obstinacie continue) the swoorde of faithfulnessse, and the fire of affection (qtd. in Montrose 12).

At the end of the second day of tilting and pageantry, the challengers capitulate to the fortress, delivering "their most humble-hearted submission," acknowledging themselves "to be slaves to this fortress forever" (328). Therefore, although there is a new sexual twist on the relationship between courtier and prince, in this case princess, it is devoid of passion, "idealized as a love purified of physical desire; its erotic energy has been transformed into art and service" (Montrose 4).

Stella is also a "princess of beauty (28)" with a heart like a "citadel (12)". The same metaphor of the fortress is used for the portrayal of both the queen and Stella with conflicting results particularly when viewed through the viewpoint of the author and protagonist. In Astrophil and Stella, Astrophil initially blames

Stella for her coldness, like an impenetrable fortress. As his aggression increases, the victim becomes the attacker and the lover pledges:

Now will I invade the fort;  
Cowards love with loss rewardeth. (2nd song)

This new strategy in Astrophil's amorous pursuit of Stella adopts the kind of approach evident in Ovid's Ars Amatoria. The pursuit becomes literally a chase, a hunt or battle which glorifies forced love, without concern for the lady's wishes (Sinfield 10). Sidney shows this same attitude in the speech of Cecropia in The New Arcadia.

No, is no negative in a womans mouth. My sonne, beleeve me, a woman, speaking of women: a lovers modesty among us is much more praised, then liked: or if we like it, so well we like it, that for marring of his modestie, he shall never proceed further. Each vertue hath his time. (452)

The opportunity to invade the fort is lost when after losing the nerve to do more than kiss her, Astrophil flees when Stella awakens. The idea that Stella intends to continue rebuffing his demands never culminates in a cathartic realization for Astrophil. She cannot change because she exists as a steadfast representation of an ideal like the allegory for Elizabeth I, the fortress of perfect beauty, a symbol of an untouchable and powerful concept. The beliefs that he has subsequently placed aside are far more integral to the makeup of Stella than he is willing to recognize; she is not so easy a prey as he thinks. Like Elizabeth, who is married to the state, Stella is already married - realistically to a husband -



and figuratively to the doctrine of marital fidelity. But Astrophil has travelled too far in this affair to turn back when confronted by opposition. Determined to improve his political standing with the queen, Sidney wrote the pageant of the Four Foster Children of Desire. In the same way, Astrophil changes tactics from submission to aggression when he chooses to campaign more strongly for a phallic attack on Stella's fortress. His name, Greek for lover of a star, an object impossible to embrace, symbolizes how Astrophil's project is eternally doomed as he cannot successfully straddle two worlds: the real and the sublime or earth and heaven.

The moment when the sequence abandons heavenly aspiration occurs in sonnet 71, called by many critics the pivotal sonnet in Astrophil and Stella.

Who will in fairest book of nature know  
 How virtue may best lodged in beauty be,  
 Let him but learn of love to read in thee,  
 Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show.  
 There shall he find all vices' overthrow,  
 Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty  
 Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly,  
 That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.  
 And not content to be perfection's heir  
 Thy self, dost strive all minds that way to move,  
 Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair;  
 So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,  
 As fast thy virtue bends that love to good.  
 But ah, desire still cries: "Give me some food."

The legal judgement between Stella's inner beauty and the beauty of the body in sonnet 52 has ruled against virtue, in Astrophil's perverse set of

principles. Like "It is most true, that eyes are formed to serve (5)," sonnet 71 juxtaposes the reality of two ways of thought, only Astrophil clearly stands allied with the machinations of the material world. If Stella is perfection itself, then Astrophil draws attention to his desire - his imperfection. Desire has become a visible character in the confrontation, a long time companion, not demanding, but constant and pleading. Platonic dialogue leads the "non-lover" step by step from "sheer bodily appetite" to possess the beloved "without even the rudiments of sentiment, up to the stage of purely verbal insemination" (Burke 424). But at this point, Astrophil is weary of long philosophical debate, tired of talking and eager for the physical benefits of love. Two sonnets later he steals the kiss that so angers Stella, losing the nerve to partake of more.

The conflict between male and female honour is the same as exemplified in Il Cortegiano, where male virtue is tested on the battleground of war and women's on the battlefield of love. The consequences of the war between the sexes have competing resolutions in the Italian and English books. Sidney, preferring to alter the hero of the sonnet sequence, makes Astrophil desperate to force Stella to sacrifice her virtue, whereas in Il Cortegiano, the doctrine of Christian fidelity encourages the women in Book III to go to drastic measures, including suicide (a mortal sin in the Catholic faith), rather than live an unchaste life.

Stella is finally given an opportunity to state her case in the eighth song.

'Astrophil,' said she, 'my love  
 Cease in these effects to prove:  
 Now be still; yet still believe me,  
 Thy grief more than death would grieve me.

and then,

Trust me, while I thee deny,  
 In myself the smart I try;  
 Tyrant honour thus doth use thee;  
 Stella's self might not refuse thee.

Such restraint and gentleness in the image of Stella imply to the reader that Astrophil has been using manipulation all along, slandering her as a tyrant leading him on. In fact, her good-nature and constancy are useless against the lover who descends the ladder of decency from caring lover to potential rapist when he resorts to violence in the same song - "her hands, his hands repelling/Gave repulse," to get his wish. It is a wonder that Stella withstands the single-minded pleadings of such an incorrigible suitor. She has been patient beyond belief in the courtship while Astrophil has been the complete antithesis of her reserve. This final meeting ends any hope that Astrophil may have an idyllic sexual liaison with Stella and kills any chaste love they may have had. Astrophil's alienation from the truth leaves him mired in the self-delusion of his hopes and dreams, doomed perpetually to repeat life as a solitary, hermet-like experience.

Sidney fabricates a poem that propels the clichéd forms of Petrarchan love poetry into a new, more imaginative form. The first sonnet is a bold

departure in the use of the Alexandrine away from what Wyatt and Surrey had early established as the metrical norm for the sonnet in England. This departure may have been intended to alert the reader to a new look of love and a new "adventurousness" in the handling of the sonnet form. Ambitious to make English poetry rival the poetry of Italy, Sidney reworked the tired convention first fresh in Petrarch. And even if Sidney uses material previously found in other writers, the Elizabethans did not

seek originality, and they would not have understood the meaning of 'self-expression'-or if they had they would have rejected it as easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting. A poem was to be discussed objectively as a work of art. (Buxton 5)

That is why we might challenge Sidney when he writes disapprovingly of contemporary poets

that do dictionary's method bring  
 Into your rhymes, running in rattling rows;  
 You that poor Petrarch's long-deceased woes  
 With new-born sighs and denizen'd wits do sing.

As much as Astrophil/Sidney claims to be sincere and original, it is not the imitative form that he objects to, but the lack of spontaneity and originality in handling the popular conventions. In the sixteenth century the writer attempting to describe the extremely personal love experience was being entirely conventional and enacting what was expected of him. "For each poet of the Renaissance, the power to be himself had been delegated: each one imitated in order to be original" (Lever 56). Sidney was not entirely different from

Castiglione, who liberally borrowed from Cicero, Aristotle and Plato. Following the lead of Castiglione, who preferred his "fresh and new" native tongue over the Latin language which had been "corrupted and spoiled" by foreign invasion, Sidney, along with Wyatt and Surrey, had little regard for "inkhorn terms" and foreign phrases, but chose the plain words in English use. Astrophil fashions himself in the same way that the courtiers of Urbino concoct a vision of the perfect man in a game. As an actor, Sidney's poet uses different voices, speaking to different audiences and donning different masks, suspect for his insincerity and artificiality. He dreams of changing roles with Stella's pets in Sonnet 59 in order to partake of the pleasure of their mistresses' company, like Stella's lap dog, her "sour-breathed mate" who eagerly tastes of her "sugared lips," and the lecherous sparrow in Sonnet 83, who sings "love-ditties" at her neck. Clearly here is a courtier, who like the perfect courtier in Il Cortegiano knows the value of the rhetoric of persuasion: the poet (Astrophil) employs a repertoire of techniques to assuage Stella, speaking to her, but always mindful of his courtly audience. Astrophil debates between the superiority of the power of the orator's words over the power of delivery:

Whether with words this sovereignty he gain,  
 Clothed with fine tropes, with strongest reasons lined,  
 Or else pronouncing grace, wherewith his mind  
 Prints his own lively form in rudest brain (58).

The strength of Astrophil's own presented argument is undoubtedly in the covert method of manifestation. Sidney's poet is more like Cicero's orator than the Gaspare or the Magnifico or even Bembo, because he stands alone, not in the "relaxed seclusion" of comfort with friends, but isolated in a predicament tinged with confrontation, struggle and strife, reflecting the assumption that oratory is a sublimated form of warfare (Kalstone 25). Like Cicero, Sidney employs martial imagery in the sonnets 29, 36, 41, 53, 75, and 98 to name just a few. The orator operates in a public meeting area like the senate, the forum or any place of a social gathering, whereas Astrophil's persuasive wooing of Stella eventually finds a larger audience, when the poems are circulated among the ladies and gentlemen of Elizabeth's court. The prize for a fine oration would be Stella's acquiescence, but this cannot happen because she is too closely linked to perfection. For the true poet, the ultimate achievement is eternal fame for him/herself and his/her poetry. Astrophil attempts to downplay the enticement of the rewards associated with the laurel branch, swearing "In truth" that his epitaph be other than for his artistic talents. Every repetition of "truth" suspiciously calls the reliability of the poet/lover into question. He tries to make the reader believe that, in truth, winning fame does not interest him, yet he mentions it several times: in sonnet 28, when he eschews imitation in favour of simplicity because he will not "dig so deep for brazen fame;" in sonnet 64, when he aspires not for "Aristotle's wit" or "Caesar's bleeding fame;" and in 90:

Nor so ambitious am I, as to frame  
 A nest for my young praise in laurel tree;  
 In truth I swear, I wish not there should be  
 Graved in mine epitaph a poet's name:

In The Defence of Poetry, Sidney disregards his own literary skill but bids the reader to respect the poets for "they will make you immortal by their verses" (30).

How can it be possible that the story of a young, sexually-charged man striving to make physical love to a married woman be a suitable story with a moral message? As risqué as it may seem, in view of the many sexually explicit double entendres pointed out by Thomas Roche, the sonnet sequence does effectively work on a didactic level. Just as Castiglione wanted his courtier to serve his monarch ethically with the good of the community in mind, and to love chastely for heavenly rather than earthly rewards, relating a message that teaches a lesson was an integral part of the responsibility of the poet, according to Sidney. In A Defence of Poetry Sidney summarizes the importance of ethics in poetry.

since neither his [the poet's] description nor end containing any evil,  
 the thing described cannot be evil; since his effects be so good as to  
 teach goodness and to delight the learners.(48)

Astrophil's continuous badgering of Stella to abandon her marital fidelity cannot be construed as a noble end; the effect of his lesson is an example of avoidance, a parable of how not to act. It is the reverse message of Astrophil's

folly which succeeds in the "winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue" (Defence 40).

In the final sonnet of the Canzoniere Petrarch resigns himself to the superiority of the heavenly world to this, and regrets wasting so much time on earthly endeavours:

I go my way regretting those past times  
I spent in loving something which was mortal  
instead of soaring high, since I had wings  
that might have taken me to higher levels.

You who see all my shameful, wicked errors,  
King of all Heaven, invisible, immortal,  
help this frail soul of mine for she has strayed,  
and all her emptiness fill up with grace,

so that, having once lived in storms, at war,  
I may now die in peace, in port; and if my stay  
was vain, at least let my departure count.

Over that little life that still remains to me,  
and at my death, deign that your hand be present:  
You know You are the only hope I have. (365)

Astrophil never learns from his experience, shows no remorse and appears incredulously unaware of his turning away from years of following Christian ideology. By the end of the sequence, although Stella is cured of the attraction she once felt for her suitor, Astrophil has not changed and claims to be as madly in love with her as when he first realizes it. If we can judge the beginning and the end of the sonnet sequence as fixed, it indicates that Astrophil, the lover, has learned little about women and love throughout his brief encounter with Stella,



treading water for 108 sonnets, but much about self-exploration. The poet, in contrast, has discovered much about his craft, experimenting with metre, rhythm and imagery. With the incorporation of an easy conversational tone, strong imagery, undulations in tone that mimic life and a witty self-consciousness into the make-up of Astrophil, Sidney has created a protagonist inherently neo-petrarchan and uniquely egocentric.

## CONCLUSION

Count Baldesar Castiglione and Sir Philip Sidney, from varying backgrounds and sensibilities, chose to write about, among other things, how the individual seeks isolation as a strategy for self-expression. For Castiglione the historical backdrop of Renaissance Italy provided a dreary reality for his courtiers, who, hemmed in by the actual hostilities of their time, retreat to their small castle to develop a perfect man who would be exempt from their imperfect world. Alienation is symptomatic of the power struggle, both for these actual personages playing the parlour game and for their exceptional creature, who by adhering to the instructions "sprezzatura" and "grazia" lives on the fringe of honesty. Castiglione's attempt to instruct his generation on how to garner princely attention in order to receive earthly reward is also his way of escaping the truth. The characters, although based on real people, are greatly embellished to enhance their singularly noble qualities. His instruction in courtly artifice veers heavily away from the Aristotelian middle way which Castiglione so clearly advocates throughout the book. Castiglione's advice for the private life of the courtly man in counselling on how to love best and how to be best loved also deviates from this path. It appears that in making the courtly man perfect he becomes super-human, the ultimate isolation, no longer requiring anything that a fellow human

can give and incapable of communication on an intimate level with humanity. It is not crucial that the workable construct of their man is relevant in consideration of the success of the collective creative powers that made him. The supreme experience of Il Cortegiano is not the final judgement of the beauty of their perfect man, but the experience of the many vacillations of wit and fury that precede it.

Sidney writes about the intense personal experiences that become powerful poetry, chronicling the extremes that people succumb to when their lifelong principles of religion and society are confronted with earthly powers of the senses. Astrophil alienates himself from the world because he is alienated from his love and in his inability to come to grips with losing a part of himself, he creates art that is true.

Love, the only hope for intimate union in temporal life, fails both Castiglione's courtier and Astrophil because the neoplatonic, sexless love transfers the love of beauty away from the woman onto the abstract idea of beauty itself and finally onto the divinity. For a creature like Astrophil, who is so intensely bound to earthly desires, the attraction of the union is mystical but solitary. The idea of love is also a sham for Sidney's poet. The chaste love of Plato is too restraining for Astrophil, who pleads for a more human edge to the relationship. Armed with all of the necessary learning and manners of the Renaissance man, and though making truthful art, both isolated courtiers are cheated of the give

and take experience that comes with carnal knowledge.

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