

Self-Fashioning

Castiglione (Hoby) and Wyatt on Courtiership

Theatrum Mundi: All the World's a Stage

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances; And
one man in his time plays many parts

(As You Like It, 2.7.39-42)

SELF-FASHIONING

- Coined by Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare*:
- Self-conscious, theatrical construction of a "self" presented as an "unveiling" or "exposure" of a "true" "inner" being.

EG. Walter Raleigh's carefully written and rhetorically sophisticated poems to the Queen which are artfully constructed to "expose" his artlessness, honesty, and tendency to be "unstrung" by her anger.

SPREZZATURA

- Artful artlessness/artless artfulness;
- "artificial": exquisite workmanship of the skillfully fashioned as opposed to the "rude" or untrained or unrefined;
- The obscuring of hard work and effort in order to present skillful, painstakingly learned action as "natural" (i.e. as God-given, part of one's being; talent).

Protestant suspicion of *sprezzatura*

"*Sprezzatura*, which sets out to efface all signs of 'hard work and application' [central aspects of Protestant doctrine], is a cult of the 'too easy,' a kind of aesthetic magic" (Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning* loc. 3972).

"Playing" and "Showing"

- Tension between social self-presentation and the new emphasis on literature as an exposure of an INNER SELF
- In the context of *sprezzatura* (artless artfulness/artful artlessness), how can we tell the difference between calculated SELF-DISPLAY and "genuine" SELF-EXPOSURE?

Diplomacy and Social Nicety

Wyatt's self-presentation as part of a diplomatic struggle for power:

"The goal, both politically and sexually, is domination and possession ... but such a goal cannot be openly avowed; instead both diplomats and lovers constantly invoke and half believe in the values of 'service,' 'gentleness' and 'truth'" (Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning* loc.3230).

Group Work: Wyatt & Castiglione

WYATT

Compare the two versions of "They Flee..."

- How is *sprezzatura* expressed in the poem?
- What is the difference between "kindely" (20) and "unkindly" (Tottel 20)?
- What is the role of "gentleness" (16)?

CASTIGLIONE

Consider the two definitions of "grace" given in note 1

- What is the relationship between grace and *sprezzatura*?
- What is the significance of the "artificial" and the superficial?
- What is the role of community or mentors in the cultivation of one's self-presentation?
