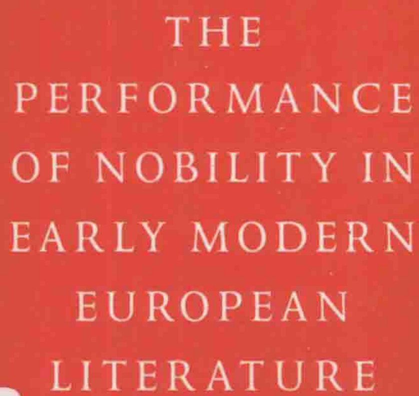

THE PERFORMANCE OF NOBILITY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

DAVID M. POSNER

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1 Introduction: "The Noble Hart"

Edmund Spenser summed up the aspirations of a class and an age when he described, in the *Faerie Queene* (I, v, 1, 1–4), the state of mind of the Redcrosse Knight on the eve of a great tournament:

> The noble hart, that harbours vertuous thought,
> And is with child of glorious great intent,
> Can never rest, untill it forth have brought
> Th' eternal brood of glorie excellent...

This image of nobility – as something pure, unmediated, even innocent – is one which late Renaissance nobility liked to hold of itself, at a time when the possibility of artless, unconstrained public self-presentation seemed as if it were rapidly being foreclosed. The historical position and identity of the nobility were being threatened by the rise of the modern nation-state and the new power and importance of the princely court. A nostalgic yearning for a Golden Age of artless self-presentation thus formed an important part of the ideology of nobility in this period. Spenser's text itself executes a double movement of optimism and despair; even as these lines enunciate the idealized image of the "noble hart," they simultaneously suggest the impossibility of its realization. This comes about both through the self-conscious archaism of the *Faerie Queene* as a whole, situating itself in a nostalgically viewed and no longer accessible past, and through this passage's insistence on the inability of that "noble hart" to rest, to be content, until it has attained the "eternal ... glorie" – that is, the public fame, the perfect reputation always still to be achieved – that will render it immortal. In Spenser, internal virtue is not enough for the noble soul; that soul cannot rest, indeed noble identity cannot be said to exist, until it is confirmed in front of an audience.[1] It is this imperative of display, of the public performance of nobility, that is the subject of the present work.

The link between theatricality and ideas of nobility and courtly behavior in the late Renaissance, hinted at here in Spenser, is made far more explicit by other Renaissance writers, who regularly use the metaphor of the theatre to describe both the court and noble identity. To be sure, this usage

is in part just another version of the ancient commonplace of the *theatrum mundi*;[2] but for authors and readers of the period, who are often themselves players on the stage of the court, it seems to acquire a particular urgency.[3] The present inquiry will investigate the reasons for this urgency and its futility. Starting with the concept – new in Spenser's time – of nobility as a quasi-theatrical performance before a courtly audience, and taking into account Renaissance sociopolitical and ideological contexts, I will investigate why nobility seems to become more difficult both to act out and to define as the Renaissance draws to a close. Building on the work of Norbert Elias, Stephen Greenblatt, and others, this study seeks ultimately to work towards an understanding of the role of literature both in analyzing and in shaping social identity. Elias's theatrical model of the absolutist court of Louis XIV, in which role-playing acts to suppress individual affect in the interests of the king and the State,[4] is counterbalanced by Greenblatt's model of Elizabethan and Jacobean court society, in which the courtly performer constantly adapts to the shifting matrix of power relations in the court, fashioning identities appropriate to whatever circumstances arise.[5] Where, for Elias, repression gives rise to civilization and the State, in Greenblatt's model repression acts merely to perpetuate itself, or to reproduce itself in new forms, a paradigm owing something not only to Elias but also to Michel Foucault. The present study, while indebted to these writers, will emphasize not so much the totalizing energies of the theatre of the court as the tensions and contradictions within it. These tensions – centering around the radical dissimilarity between, on the one hand, the nobility's literary or imaginative images of itself, and on the other hand its increasingly problematic position in historical reality – eventually doom the court society and its theatrical mode of self-presentation.[6]

Strongly "literary" texts – a loaded term which will be discussed below – best foreground these tensions, which is why I have chosen to focus on them. This is not to say that I have considered them in isolation. While I do not claim to have produced either a political or a social history, projects for which I would in any case be insufficiently qualified, the readings of literary texts here offered are necessarily conditioned by attention to the matrix of historical experience in which the texts themselves are embedded, without, however, thereby reducing the texts to mere appendages of history. While history generates the conditions of possibility for literature, modulating what a given text can articulate or reflect, a text also creates its own re-vision of history, laying claim to a certain (perhaps illusory) autonomy. Whatever its legitimacy, that claim generates a space, a zone of tension, between text and history, and it is this space that the present study seeks to explore.

Forming the backdrop for our discussion is the large-scale historical

debate over the idea that there was a generalized crisis of European society in the late Renaissance and seventeenth century,[7] and that the nobility were particularly at risk.[8] This notion of crisis – by now a (much-contested) commonplace – conditions, if sometimes only negatively, most recent work on the problem of noble identity. While aspects of the problem vary with time and locale, its general features are fairly clear, whether in France or in England: a class of persons accustomed to considerable political and economic power and independence, and to a certain monopoly on violence, finds these privileges being challenged by a royal power, or state, interested in appropriating them for itself.[9] At the same time, this class finds itself facing competition in the form of parallel claims to "nobility" from other groups of persons whose skills are more useful to the new state, and who – owing more to that state's authority – tend to be more tractable. Each of these two competing groups therefore attempts to define itself against the other, even as they lay claim to the same vocabulary of identity, and compete for the same rewards from an increasingly powerful Crown.[10] Nor is this picture exclusively one of division and conflict; nobles, whether *épée* or *robe*, whether old nobility or "New Men," operate along with the Crown within a complex web of mutual interdependencies, in which no one element can do entirely without any other.[11] This web, however, is anything but stable, and its shifting strands produce a corresponding instability in concepts of nobility and noble identity. Nobility and noble comportment in this period are not a predetermined set of axioms, but rather a series of questions posed and re-posed, whose constantly shifting terms are variously imagined, projected, and described by their supposed or would-be possessors. Efforts by Renaissance nobles themselves, by the Crown or the State, and by contemporary writers on the subject, to define what nobility is, what it does, and who may have access to it, are therefore marked by a contentiousness and desperation mirrored in the descriptive and interpretative work of modern historians. It is perhaps not inaccurate to speak of a "crisis of the historians" surrounding the idea of late Renaissance nobility, so striking are the disagreements among students of the subject. However, the concern of the present study is not to decide whose view of the economic or social status of the various nobilities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Western Europe is, historically speaking, "correct"; instead, we will examine a point on which most students of the period actually do agree: that the nobility found itself, or – more importantly – perceived itself, to be in a period of difficulty, tension, and transition, in which certain previously secure ideas of what it meant to be "noble" were being challenged, modified, or replaced. (Whether these pre-existing models of nobility were in fact as stable as their adherents wished them retroactively to have been is less important than the desire that they be so, since it is this desire that – as will

be seen – both produces and destroys claims to nobility.) In any event, disagreements between Renaissance or modern writers on nobility may reflect, more than anything else, the essential slipperiness of the subject; nobility, far from being what it invariably claims to be – something timeless, immutable, and consistent – is always being called into question by its actual or would-be possessors, as well as interested observers, whether critical or not. Terms and definitions, and the authority to control and manipulate them, are at all times being fought over, both because control over vocabulary is in this case not unconnected with actual political power, and because the terms are terms of self-definition, terms from which individuals construct their own identities.

Recent students of the period have therefore tended to link their examinations of noble identity to larger questions of identity and the structure of the self in the Renaissance and afterwards. Not only literary critics like Greenblatt, Jonathan Goldberg, or Timothy Reiss, but also historians like Kristen Neuschel or Jonathan Dewald, have engaged in a series of efforts to rewrite Burckhardt, searching for the genesis of modern concepts of selfhood.[12] Most of these revisions of Burckhardt's *Entwicklung des Individuums* reject his nineteenth-century optimism – an extension of the optimism of the Florentine *quattrocento* – in favor of a more pessimistic, not to say paranoid, vision of the individual's relationship to Renaissance society. These readings, conditioned to a greater or lesser degree by the Foucault of *Histoire de la folie* and *Surveiller et punir*, tend to see the fabrication of the self as a response to the repressive forces of Crown and State.[13] From Greenblatt's Thomas More to Dewald's memoir-writers, each critic's subject seems to become, in that critic's hands, the inventor of modern interiorizing subjectivity; this peculiar concidence perhaps means nothing more than that, like Burckhardt himself, modern readers are persuaded by the dazzling rhetoric of Renaissance performances of selfhood.[14] It might perhaps be more judicious to suggest that, while the self is always and everywhere being (in the etymological sense of *invenio*) "invented," the form taken by the self as *literary* subject, as constituted in writing and print, undergoes a transformation during this period, a transformation conditioned both by the actual political and historical circumstances of the writers and their subjects, and by what they thought those circumstances – and themselves – to be. Our study is therefore concerned with literature's intersection with the *myths* of nobility – imagined versions of what it was or should have been – as well as with its reality.

In what follows, we will begin by seeing briefly how one text in particular, Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, brings to the fore the overarching *topos* of the theatre that will govern the literary discourse of nobility in the late Renais-

sance. This discourse ranges from a literature of overt definitions of nobility, through a series of self-help books addressing the practical needs of actual or would-be courtiers, to more overtly "literary" texts, all of which conceive of the self and its relationship to society in explicitly theatrical terms. The next chapter explores Montaigne's versions of this theatrical model of the self in the dual contexts of his readings of classical texts and his own public career. Montaigne's assimilation and critique of the Italians, and his simultaneous readings of Seneca, Plutarch, and Tacitus, among others, are informed by the practical realities of his situation as a *noble de robe* in late sixteenth-century France. Early on, he posits a neo-Stoic model of nobility in which a radical scission exists between the social self and the "true," extra-social, moral self. He associates this version of the self with a putative transparency of language, and presents it in anti-courtly, anti-performative terms specific to the contemporary discourse of *épée* nobility. However, Montaigne's deployment of this model of identity exposes the instability of any discourse depending upon such terms as *franchise*, *générosité*, and so on, and shows neo-Stoic noble identity to be a mystification-dependent performance like any other. Indeed, Montaigne's conception of nobility depends precisely upon being able to demonstrate that there is an irreducible distance not just between social ("false") and private ("true") identity, but between the subject and *any* identity recognizable as such. The pose of the nobleman as a non-performer, one whose *parole* is a transparent (re)presentation of identity, is simply one performance among many, and the successful nobleman is one who can control and deploy an array of performative selves according to situational demands, while maintaining an essential separation between performer (however defined) and performance. Montaigne's performance of nobility also has ideological dimensions; it is designed, of course, to establish his own noble credentials in conventional *épée*-defined terms, but in so doing it rewrites those very terms in ways that paradoxically make the claims to noble identity of *nobles de robe* like himself more powerful than those of the "true" *noblesse d'épée*. Montaigne brings this about in two complementary ways: through ironizing traditional definitions of nobility, and through a surreptitious replacement of those definitions with others better suited to the growing court society of the late sixteenth century. Central to success on this new stage is the capacity for performance, and Montaigne goes to great lengths to demonstrate his own theatrical facility. Throughout the *Essais*, but particularly in the essays of the third book, Montaigne is able to present to the reader a multifarious array of selves, selves which both reveal and conceal themselves to and from the reader in ways which inevitably implicate that reader. The audience is inexorably drawn into playing an active role in Montaigne's *jeu de miroirs*.

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Nascent in Montaigne's text is an opposition, or at least a dichotomy, between "public" and "private" (terms which he negates or ironizes even as his text generates them); but the presence of this quasi-doubling of the self foreshadows a sharper opposition in the next author to be studied, Francis Bacon. His *Essayes* bear little real resemblance to those of Montaigne; but, like the *Essais*, Bacon's text bears an isometric relationship, structurally and dynamically, to the model of noble identity it describes. The *Essayes* are a kind of manual, although perhaps not in the sense in which they have been conventionally understood as such; rather, they are a text whose rhetorical strategies mirror the performative and interpretive behaviors expected of its reader, the ambitious "New Man" eager to succeed at court. In its quasi-didactic intent, and in the particular form taken by that ædificatory impulse, it is consistent with Bacon's larger interest in how best to convey and understand information, as expressed in such works as the *Advancement of Learning* and the *Novum Organum*, where he says, "[w]e must lead men to the particulars themselves."[15] While the exact content of these "particulars" will vary according to the field of knowledge to which they belong, their structure and presentation will always be similar. Specific quanta of information are presented in an aphoristic discourse that compels assent by seeming clear and self-evident, while imperceptibly leading the reader to look beyond that appearance to the truth of the matter at hand. Bacon acknowledges the initial assent (the "contract of error"[16]) produced by the (potentially) specious truths of rhetoric as a tool, to be used to move the mind of the reader/beholder towards true understanding; however, he also acknowledges – and capitalizes on – the potential for deception, particularly in the arena of what he calls "civill Businesse."[17] He insists in this context on the utility, even the necessity, of the Lie, the performance that deceives the better to persuade; and what began as a quest for truth quickly becomes a drive to deceive without being deceived, to further one's own interests without regard for, and if necessary at the expense of, others seeking to do precisely the same thing. The dangers confronting Bacon's "New Man" produce an imperative of masking and dissimulation; whatever "real," "true" identity the performer in this treacherous court-world might possess is entirely irrelevant, since – if it exists at all – it is essential that it be concealed behind an array of masks. The *Essayes* therefore call into question the existence of *any* "private self," or at least any observable one; all that can be seen is the performance. This is true even between friends; in the first version of the essay "Of Frendship," Bacon posits the possibility of a relationship unmediated by masking or performance, but in the final version he rejects even this tentative gesture, and insists that the "frend" functions only as an auxiliary to one's own public performance, extending

its range and effectiveness beyond what it could accomplish alone. In Bacon, what will become the "private sphere" may be imagined, but its realization, in the absolutist realm of Elizabeth and James, remains impossible. Bacon's consequent avoidance of the subjectivity of Montaigne calls into question the existence of any self other than that self's various roles on the public stage; when the house lights go up, the actor vanishes.

The next chapter turns to theatre *per se*, specifically that of Pierre Corneille, to explore responses on the stage to theatrical models of the noble self. Much of Corneille's work may be read as a set of carefully orchestrated variations on a single theme, one which dominates his dramatic *oeuvre*: the articulation of the conditions of possibility for the noble self. Defining that self as a quasi-theatrical role to be performed within a courtly context, he focuses on one particular moment in this theatre of state, namely the conflict, whether potential or real, between an independent-minded nobility on the one hand and centralizing royal authority on the other, with parallels both obvious and subtle with the real political situation of seventeenth-century France. In the theatrical court-world of Corneille, everyone must know their lines; deviating from the script, i.e. the modes of behavior proper to one's role, whether that role be King, Defender of the Realm, Sage Counsellor, or Virtuous Princess, is the worst possible error, and inevitably entrains the direst consequences.

This is, for example, what separates Don Gomès from Rodrigue in the first of Corneille's variations on this theme, *Le Cid*; both can legitimately (although not simultaneously) claim to be the Bravest Man in Castille, but Don Gomès's crucial error is to insist that he personally is essential to the well-being of the State. "Sans moi, vous passeriez bientôt sous d'autres lois, / Et si vous ne m'aviez, vous n'auriez plus de Rois."[18] ["Without me, you would soon be subject to other laws, / And if you did not have me, you would have no more Kings."] He fails to realize that the "moi" he considers so indispensable is not he himself, but rather the role he plays in the theatre of the state. His too-close identification with his role makes him a dangerously destabilizing force; he must therefore be eliminated. Rodrigue, on the other hand, while he fulfills exactly the same state-sustaining function, avoids confusing him*self* (a term which, as I shall attempt to show, is of questionable value in describing the Corneillean model of identity) with the role he plays. He also is willing to play that role in concert with his nominal liege lord, in an elaborate public ritual of mutual admiration, where they simultaneously acknowledge their reciprocal dependence on one another and assert their individual worth as uniquely necessary elements of the State. This kind of performance is possible only if all the actors on the stage speak the same language, the language of honor and nobility, sharing a

common understanding of such key terms of the Corneillean vocabulary as *gloire*, *magnanimité*, *générosité*, *franchise*, *vertu*, and so on, terms which define the relations that exist between the various *personnages*.

Hence, the real conflict in *Cinna*, the next play to be discussed, is a lexical one, in which Emilie and Auguste struggle over who will control the discourse of true nobility. Emilie loses because she tries to retain sole ownership of certain key words, words which must on the contrary remain common property in the interest of the *res publica*. Auguste, on the other hand, triumphs because he is able, at the last, both to recognize that this discourse is public property and to demonstrate, through an act of supreme *magnanimité* – the entire renunciation of any private "self" – his complete domination of that discourse, the very discourse on which his antagonists base their opposition. That dominance can be sustained only because, just as in *Le Cid*, all the characters are ultimately willing to abide by the same set of discursive rules. This willingness evaporates in the plays that follow *Cinna*, and therefore the play's optimistic and transcendent resolution of the conflict between noble and king in the unique *personnage* of Auguste is without sequel. An elegiac note (admittedly present even in *Le Cid*) therefore comes to dominate the later works. The play of *noblesse* becomes a tragedy of nostalgia, in which the noble hero casts a longing glance back toward a time when men were noble and kings knew their place – a *bon vieux temps* which, like all such entities, seems always to have been written into the past, and to have been replaced by an inferior and corrupt imitation. The tension, in Corneille, between this elegiac vision of an idealized past and the grim reality of the historical present is finally unresolvable, leading inevitably, in such plays as *Suréna, général des Parthes*, to the forced exit of the noble subject from the stage.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the performance of nobility has become a dead-end spectacle in which the courtier no longer participates; he merely reads and watches, as if from afar, the odd antics of the "characters" presented on the metaphorical stage of La Bruyère's text – "characters" which are, of course, distorted versions of the courtiers themselves. The theatre of nobility becomes a tiny theatre of marionettes, in which aesthetic satisfaction comes not from being fooled into forgetting that the puppets are merely puppets, but on the contrary from being constantly aware of all the *ressorts*, from knowing at every instant that one is merely watching lumps of wood being jerked about by strings. For La Bruyère, this is both an aesthetic and a moral imperative; he insists that the reader look beyond and behind the glittering surfaces of courtly performance, in order to perceive the unflattering truths those surfaces strive to conceal. He is nevertheless compelled to acknowledge the persuasive power of those surfaces, and to recognize the difficulty of seeing through them. To avoid

being drawn into this play of appearances, La Bruyère's text endeavors to situate itself – and its audience – "outside" of the world it both inhabits and observes. The noble protagonist moves away from being a *personnage*, performing a role in front of an audience, and towards becoming a *caractère*, under examination by a detached observer; but this movement always remains incomplete. The spectator, in La Bruyère's text, is inevitably and perpetually implicated in the spectacle, and indeed the spectacle itself seems to depend for its very existence on the presence and participation of the observer. Moreover, the mystification upon which that spectacle depends turns out to be irresistible, since the distinction that La Bruyère attempts to establish between *masque* and *visage* depends on the possibility that there are at least some cases where there is no distinction – where the performance is merely a setting forth of unmediated truth, rather than an attempt at persuasive deception or concealment. The problem thus becomes one of distinguishing between "true" and "false" performances, and – despite La Bruyère's strenuous efforts to demonstrate otherwise – it quickly becomes apparent that, for the observer at least, there is no reliable way of telling the difference. The pose of the detached observer, watching with amused indifference the impostures of those performing onstage, is itself a mystification, a rhetorical gesture no different than any other performed within the theatre of the court.

The work of La Bruyère seems to represent the ultimate development, or perhaps the last gasp, of what one might call the literature of the theatre of *noblesse*. It is itself a theatrical discourse, with a succession of *personnages* strutting across its stage, but it is also a meta-theatrical discourse which works extremely hard to unmask the mode of theatricality it describes. As such, it seems to want to leave behind a theatrical mode of presentation and to move towards a novelistic or narrative one, in that it speaks often in the voice of a remotely situated narrator, observing and describing in the third person the phenomena of the court. La Bruyère's text does not complete this movement; but, precisely because of its failure to resolve (or at least conceal effectively) the fundamental contradictions it so strongly foregrounds, it paves the way for the movement towards a narrative mode to be completed in the literature of the eighteenth century.

The theatrical discourse of which the *Caractères* are a kind of culmination is set in motion, in the early sixteenth century, by Castiglione's *Cortegiano*. Its dazzlingly aestheticized vision of courtly behavior, dominated by metaphors of performance and theatricality, engenders a seemingly endless proliferation of texts on questions of nobility, courtliness, and identity, all governed to a greater or lesser extent by the same *topos* of the theatre.[19] The *Cortegiano* can in some sense be held responsible for the entire range of

such texts, from the sophisticated critiques of Montaigne or La Rochefoucauld to the compound platitudes of Cammillo Baldi or Eustache de Refuge. While these texts vary widely in complexity and sophistication, they all work within a discourse of public identity whose terms and conditions are largely established by Castiglione. This is not to suggest that Castiglione invents the problem, nor that he is the first to apply systematically the metaphor of the theatre to the question of public identity. On the contrary, the notions of public life as a kind of theatre, and of the individual-as-actor therein, are already commonplaces for Cicero, from whom Castiglione borrows not only the quasi-theatrical form of his work but also a number of key metaphors. But Castiglione's artful reformulations of classical *topoi* of theatricality have resonances for his Renaissance readers that even Cicero cannot always match.[20] It would nevertheless be misleading to claim that Castiglione effects a radical reversal of the Ciceronian ideal, or that Cicero himself proposes as his ideal orator a naïvely straightforward Mr. Smith *à la* Frank Capra. To be sure, Cicero insists, in a famous pun, that the orator should present himself to the public as *actor veritatis*, the advocate – and performer – of truth. However, even as he presents this ideal he complains that orators have abandoned the essential art of *actio* – delivery or performance – to mere *imitatores veritatis*, that is, *histriones* (theatre actors): "Haec ideo dico pluribus quod genus hoc totum oratores, qui sunt veritatis ipsius actores, reliquerunt, imitatores autem veritatis, histriones, occupaverunt."[21] ["I dwell on this because the whole area has been abandoned by the orators, who are the performers of truth, and taken over by the actors, who are merely imitators of truth."] Cicero immediately goes on to insist that the cultivation of this art is essential, since the orator cannot rely solely upon the naked truth to persuade his audience. On the contrary, since the minds of the audience are so often clouded by emotion, the orator must attempt to control those emotions through *ars* and *actio*, in addition to persuading through a rational presentation of truth.[22] Indeed, the concluding portion of Book III of *De Oratore*, which follows this passage, is concerned primarily with the application of *actio* to this form of non-rational persuasion, with extensive examples drawn from the theatre.

Castiglione's emphasis on the persuasive effectiveness of performance is therefore a development of something already present in Cicero, rather than a radical turning away from the Ciceronian ideal. The direction of this development is nevertheless significant and revealing. Castiglione recognizes the danger of persuading an audience of something they do not want to hear (a danger equally real for Cicero, although he was perhaps less willing to recognize it), and therefore moves away from the idea that the purpose of persuasion, and of its attendant *delectatio*, is to present poten-

tially uncomfortable truths with overwhelming rhetorical force. The aesthetic pleasure brought to the audience becomes, for Castiglione, more of an end in itself; rather than being in the service of forensic persuasion, it is part of a larger context of princely *otium*, and functions for the performer primarily as a means of attracting favor and *onore* to oneself, and as a means of self-protection.[23] Even and especially when the noble courtier is performing that function most proper to his class, namely making war,[24] that activity becomes above all a performance designed not so much to serve the interests of the State as to impress one's employer.[25] One should be sure, when in battle, to perform one's heroic deeds as visibly as possible, and if it can be managed, right in front of one's boss.[26] The practical results – if any – of this martial performance, and of other, less overtly dangerous forms of showing off, are vastly less important than the perception thereof by the princely onlooker. In the discussion in book II, section 11, of masquerade ("lo esser travestito"), and of its great utility for showing off one's true (noble) identity through disguising it, Castiglione emphasizes that the success of the courtier's performance is determined by the audience reaction, and in particular by whether or not the audience "si diletta e piglia piacere" ["is delighted and pleased"]. Control of that reaction, through controlling the pleasure experienced by the beholder, thus becomes paramount.[27] This pleasure arises not from the audience's experience of the showing forth of some Truth, *à la* Cicero, but rather from its being deceived. Castiglione shows that the essence of the courtier's performance is a kind of multi-layered deception, in the form of a performed concealment – a concealment that pretends to be the opposite, to be an intentionally incomplete concealment that instead reveals, with a wink and a nudge, the "truth" behind its supposedly consensual pretense. Through performing "con abito disciolto," in a disguise meant to be seen into, the performer invites the audience to feel as though it is in on the joke. The audience's pleasure arises from its accepting that invitation, from being fooled into believing that, rather than being fooled, it is seeing beyond the mask (representing e.g. a *pastor selvatico*, a peasant) to the "real" (i.e. noble) visage underneath. The precise *locus* of this pleasure, as Castiglione makes clear, is the tension between what is actually seen and what is artfully hinted at, without however being revealed in what Bacon will call the "Naked, and Open day light"[28] of Truth. Nor could that shadowy something-hinted-at ever be thus revealed, as it is neither presence nor substance, neither essence nor Truth, but rather the reflection of the desire of the beholder, the very movement of "l'animo … [chi] … corre ad imaginar…" ["the mind which rushes to imagine"]. In this specular performance, there is always something more – Castiglione's "molto maggior cosa" – than can be seen, or indeed be present; the desire for that shadowy *cosa* is

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