The Pastime of Master F. J.

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Summary: *Characters in Gascoigne's "Adventures of Master F. J." (1573) use reading as a pastime by which they sort out or complicate their relationships with others; the novel's readers, for their pastime, recreate these relationships as they read the novel. These linguistic, rhetorical and social pastimes are moves in a serious game of access to power, and the "Adventures" is thus an ironic 'institute' for the transformation of the individual.*

To one class of literary works, variously descended from the Platonic dialogue, the representation of leisure is a necessary prerequisite. Without it, philosophical conversation in the gymnasium or at dinner parties is impossible; night-long discourse about the best courtier, unlikely; garden-talk about perfect societies, merely utopian. For another class of works, leisure is a central problem. Where philosophy provides no occupation, leisure transforms itself from luxury into burden. Faced with empty hours, the characters must either fall into lassitude or find a pastime. Many of these characters turn for such a pastime to sorting out – or, in some cases, complicating – their relationships with others. The readers' task, undertaken in turn partly to fill their own leisure, is the re-creation and re-sorting of the relationships presented in the work, so that the pastime and the work of fiction are paradoxically identical. The problem of 'pastime,' therefore, grounds a broad range of literary fiction. The development of modern understanding of play in general has largely shaped the directions that literary criticism has taken in the treatment of specific texts in which pastime is important.¹

George Gascoigne's *Discourse of the Adventures passed by Master F. J.* (1573) displays well the paradoxes of serious play in Elizabethan literature. George Gascoigne (c. 1533-1577), a remarkably versatile writer, was a prolific poet, playwright of the *Supposes* (1566, the first surviving English prose play), author of an instructive critical essay, and an innovator in prose fiction: the *Adventures* is generally regarded as the earliest English work in

which the outlines of a novel form can be perceived. Gascoigne's productive career may be taken as typical of literary (if not financial) success in the period just before the great age of Elizabethan poetry and drama. Modern commentary on the *Adventures* has emphasized the seriousness of the pastimes in the work, particularly in relation to its literary context. Both as a critique of misread romances and as a review of humanist assumptions about literary education, the text expresses a conspicuously modern attitude toward the art and the act of reading.² These linguistic, rhetorical and social pastimes can thus be seen as moves in a serious game of access to power, and the *Adventures*, therefore, as an ironic 'institute' for the transformation of the individual.³

In outline, the story is a familiar one. F. J., a young man untried in the ways of love, spends the summer at a castle in northern England. There he meets the lord's wanton daughter-in-law, Elinor. In the absence of her usual paramour, she and F. J. have an affair, which he chronicles in a series of poems. Frances, the lord's innocent (but hardly naive) daughter, falls in love with F. J. Her indirect warnings to him are useless, and she watches as Elinor makes a fool of him: casual flirtation leads to adultery; Elinor's ardor cools and dies; F. J. at last realizes his foolishness and departs, wiser but embittered. The story is told by F. J.'s friend G. T., who "reduce[s] ... into some good order" F. J.'s poems and account of their composition.⁴ In G. T.'s telling, *pastime* is a key word, for virtually every scene and episode occurs as a pastime for the otherwise unfilled summer days. Dances, dinners, walks and rides in the park offer the occasion for the 'discourse' – very often mere idle talk – that gives the affair its life, while the pastime is occasionally formalized in actual games (pp. 87-94, 97-101). In G. T.'s version of the affair, F. J. and the other characters occupy their leisure with a particular pastime of love.

These players occupy themselves with mutual deceits that complicate the affair so that its moves and counter-moves require considerable ingenuity.⁵ F. J. first commits himself to the pastime by writing a letter ("this telltale paper") that Elinor acknowledges at a dance (p. 52). To all appearances, F. J. and Elinor are already involved in a pastime, the 'braule' or dance that the castle's residents perform. Elinor uses this pastime, however, as a cover for her counter-move to F. J.'s letter, an apparently decorous rejection of his suit. F. J., committed to the love-game, breaks up the pastime of the dance, thus breaking the cover that Elinor had chosen. The attempted deceit of the company therefore collapses and instead becomes an invitation for Frances and Pergo, an older woman, to join later in the new pastime of love. In the sequel, this social deceit has a private aspect: Elinor takes up the game by

offering a gambit of her own, so that her apparent rejection of F. J. turns out to be deceptive.

Underlying the apparent pastime that F. J. and Elinor devise is a twofold problem of communication: conveying the love messages and interpreting their meaning. In the earlier part of the *Adventures*, up to the seduction of Elinor (p. 69), F. J.'s occupation is to discover the rules by which this pastime is conducted. In a world of deceit, his inexperience makes it difficult for him to sort out truth and falsehood. When Elinor re-opens the game, F. J. mistakenly takes her at her word:

Walking in a garden among divers other gentlemen & gentlewomen, with a little frowning smyle in passing by him, she delivered unto him a paper, with these words. *For that I understand not (quoth she) th'intent of your letters, I pray you take them here againe, and bestow them at your pleasure...* F. J. somewhat troubled with hir angrie looke, did sodenly leave the companie, & walking into a parke near adjoyning, in a great rage began to wreake his mallice on this poore paper, and the same did rend and teare in peeces. When sodenly at a glaunce he perceaved it was not of his own hande writing, and therewithall abashed, uppon better regard he perceyved in one peece therof written (*in Romaine*) these letters *SHE*: wherefore placing all the peeces therof, as orderly as he could, he found therein written these fewe lynes ... (pp. 52-53)

To the others present, Elinor's remark seems to explain the paper she passes to F. J. His inability to understand her deception leads him through several stages of confusion. At first he takes the letter to be his own returned, then to be an answer from her, and finally to be evidence of collusion with another person unknown, to whom F. J.'s first letter is an actual "telldale paper" (p. 53). In the succeeding letter, F. J.'s reference to "this endles Laberinthe" (p. 54) may be applied to the affair itself and to the complicated paths of communication that the would-be lovers follow. The notes and messages that occupy these early stages of the affair are all "a doubtfull shewe" and "written in counterfeit" (p. 53), so that in each case the true message is buried under one or more possible misprisions.⁶

F. J. proves his mastery of deceptive utterance at Elinor's sickbed (p. 57). In the same series of actions, he deceives the audience of other attendants, furthers his suit with Elinor, secures her consent – and cures her nosebleed. Finally, he achieves such expertise that he can declare his love aloud, albeit in covert form, before the company, by singing an impromptu tinteriel that Elinor can hear through the closed door of her chamber (p. 62). Having once mastered such deception, F. J. uses it consistently to confuse others or to

obscure their understanding of his intentions and actions. His lending a bugle to Elinor's husband, for example, is the occasion of a bawdy poem in which puns on *seed* and *horns* imply cuckholdry (pp. 78-79). Direct communication, however expedient it might be, is no pastime for the castle's denizens. They occupy themselves instead with indirect or evasive utterances so that the pastime of love is drawn out by the necessity of sorting "into some good order" all the apparent messages that they send back and forth. F. J.'s mastery of this duplicitous style of communication allows him to become a real player of the pastime, no longer forced by his inexperienced directness to retreat in a huff so as to sort out his confusion. By the middle of the *Adventures*, one sees that the pastime itself holds the community together, making the consummation of an affair almost incidental to the elaboration of the deceptions it requires.

If all this business is nothing more than a pastime, and if that pastime has priority over other kinds of activity, then F. J. – not Elinor – is the villain of this story. As long as the players recognize the pastime and accept its rules, all goes well. F. J. can enjoy Elinor's favors without penalty as long as he takes the affair merely as a pastime. When his jealousy grows beyond bounds (that is, when he fails to recognize others' claim to pastime), he breaks the rules.⁷ At the end of the affair, as G. T. foretold, "his hap was as heavie, as hitherto he had bene fortunate" (p. 78). Frances tries one last time to correct F. J.'s misunderstanding of the game (p. 104) before Elinor flatly rebuffs him. Having overheard "the parting of his Mistresse and hir Secretary, with many kind words: wherby it appeared that the one was very loth to departe from the other," F. J. confronts her with "this despitefull trechery:"

and she as fast denied it, untill at last being still urged with such evident tokens as he alleged, she gave him this bone to gnawe uppon. And if I did so (quod she) what than? (p. 104)

In the end, the importance of the pastime makes its rules absolute. If once a player breaks them, he must be excluded or the pastime is destroyed. "What than? Whereunto *F. J.* returned none answer, but departed ..." (p. 104). The moral of the tale, such as it is, seems direct and blunt: play the game or get out. F. J. departs to the cold comfort of his muse, getting what revenge he can by passing on the tale of the affair to his understanding friend.

F. J.'s unhappy experiences form the first level of the reader's adventures with this text, adventures that, although usually treated as a literary excursion, have also important social – or, perhaps more accurately, political – significance. F. J. resembles those courtly *arrivistes* whose careers and talents have been subject to recent scrutiny. As presented by G. T., F. J. is, first of all,

without antecedents. G. T. begins his story *in medias res* – “The said *F. J.* chaunced once in the north partes of this Realme to fall in company of a very fayre gentlewoman” (p. 51) – but never returns to fill in the background, leaving his hero with a biographical lacuna as blank as the earlier history of *F. J.*’s many real contemporaries at the center (and the edges) of political power. Plunked down in a rule-bound court, *F. J.* is ignorant of the rules, apparently because he is without the social or familial foundations that should have prepared him for the situation. Like his counterparts, he has filled up the gaps in his past by recourse to books, tools newly available to his class, that both undermined the stability of the old order and reshaped the avenues to power. Unlike those real counterparts, however, he chose mistakenly from the texts available. The faults of the old chivalric-romance rules lie in the damage they do to persons, as *F. J.* learns to his sorrow, although without awareness of the humanist alternative that seems to shape the motives of the larger work. In sum, *F. J.*’s liabilities are ironically captured in the characterization of Elyot’s ‘governor’ as “a gentleman, a fluent denizen of the urban court, whose textual hero was not Lancelot but Cicero.”⁸ *F. J.* is in the wrong place (“the north partes of this Realme,” not the central urban court) with the wrong literary guide and textual hero, and – in his choice of Elinor over Frances – with the wrong object in view. A successful affair with Frances might at any rate have meant greater access to the unnamed lord of the castle, where adultery with Elinor provided nothing permanent at all. Even though life at the central court was hardly a pleasant or assured avenue to power, contemporary courtiers might easily find even their poor lot in London superior to *F. J.*’s troubles.⁹

Finally, as *F. J.*’s technical competence and fluency increase, his misprision of the game at hand is made ironically more obvious. Rather than using his adultery as a means of moving to the center of power, *F. J.* takes the affair as an end in itself; he realizes the ideals of his literary models, only to be told that those models no longer obtain in his world. And to compete primarily with a secretary who had been lately to London, “though his absence were unto [*Elinor*] a disfurnishing of eloquence” (p. 58): as *F. J.* is a diminished Lancelot, so his competitor is a partial, reductive avatar of those whose practice of the *ars dictaminis* led eventually both to eloquence and to power in the central court.

Much of this very broad critique of *F. J.*’s behavior is expressed or implied by G. T., although that narrator is ultimately shown to be mistaken as well. G. T. makes *F. J.*’s romance a comedy, a conversion of genre that betrays G. T.’s appearance of sympathy with the young man.¹⁰ To *F. J.*,

G. T. has at least seemed sympathetic enough to be entrusted with the poems that he wrote during his affair, some account of its course and perhaps a general sense of the company at the castle (pp. 50-51). It is G. T.'s re-creation of the affair, however, that the reader follows in the *Adventures*, which G. T. augments with information unavailable to F. J. (e.g., his comparison of Elinor and Frances [pp. 66-67], and his characterization of Pergo [p. 87]). Occasionally G. T. lets the reader see the distortion that F. J.'s perspective creates, as in the description of the secretary's appearance:

to make my tale good, I will (by report of my very good friend *F. J.*) discribe him unto you. Hee was in height, the proportion of two *Pigmeys*, in bredth the thickenesse of two bacon hogges, of presumption a *Gyant*, of power a Gnat, Apishly witted, Knavishly mannerd, & crabbedly favord, what was there in him to drawe a fayre Ladies liking? Marry sir even all in all, a well lyned pursse, wherwith he could at every call, provide such pretie conceytes as pleased hir peevish fantasie, and by that means he had throughly (long before) insinuated him self with this amorous dame. This manling, this minion, this slave, this secretary, was nowe by occasion rydden to London ... (p. 58).

Here the reader, warned by the initial parenthesis, has the unedited F. J. telling his story to G. T. The hyperbolically unflattering description is F. J.'s own style, contrasting sharply with G. T.'s. In the steady declension from *manling* to *secretary*, however, G. T. modulates back into his own plainer, less rancorous style that makes F. J.'s 'report' of the secretary doubtful: G. T.'s parenthetical note of the source of the description implies that the describer might not be entirely credible – the secretary may be no ugly pigmy after all. G. T.'s mixture of sympathy and criticism (and, perhaps, envy) is the response of Pygmalion: F. J. as presented in the text is the creation of the older narrator, and the two coexist for the reader as father/son and as old/young manifestation of the same essential being. G. T. is both paternal and patronizing, however, and his complex attitude is finally the reductive source of the reader's detachment not only from F. J. himself but also from the choices and preferences (including that for chivalric romance over courtly eloquence) that he expresses. G. T.'s contribution requires from the reader a critical movement from F. J.'s choices and a displacement of F. J.'s pastimes with another game of interpretation, parallel to but on a different level from the chivalric-romance pastime that is the object of criticism.

The quality of G. T.'s contribution to F. J.'s adventures is partly revealed by the texture of verbal play in his re-creation. In many places, G. T. imposes metaphors of pastime on the basic narrative. Elinor, for example, receiving

one of F. J.'s poems in the form called *terza sequenza*, is said to have "retossed every card in this sequence" (p. 57) as if sorting through a hand at cards to find its value. On a larger scale, whole passages are based upon verbal play that arises from G. T.'s reticence and unwillingness to make every joke explicit: recognizing and resolving the ambiguities present the reader with a more difficult problem of interpretation. Thus, when F. J. takes his sword to his first night-time tryst with Elinor (p. 69), G. T. delivers his account with an apparently decorous circumlocution that ironically emphasizes the peculiarity of F. J.'s behavior. At one level, F. J. is merely imitating the courtly Lancelot, who carries his sword to a similar tryst with Guinevere in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (Book XIX, chap. 6). At another, Elinor's response to the sword, qualified by G. T.'s parenthetical remarks, intimates a sexual double meaning that remains ambiguous through Frances' discovery of F. J.'s stealthy return to his chamber:

the ladie *Fraunces* being no lesse desirous to see an issue of these enterprises, then *F. J.* was willing to cover them in secresy, did watch, & even at the entring of his chamber doore, perceyved the poynt of his naked sworde glistring under the skyrt of his night gowne: wherat she smyled & said to hir selfe, this geare goeth well about (pp. 69-70).

G. T.'s re-creation of events goes beyond the information that F. J. could have provided, even in retrospect, to include Frances' remark to herself, in which the salient *geare* carries a secondary signification of 'organs of generation;' significantly, only Frances seems to be aware of the double meaning she invokes. When G. T. tells how Frances stole F. J.'s actual sword out of his chamber (p. 70), the ambiguous usage appears to be resolved, but only until Frances' later joke on F. J. (pp. 72-74), during which she hints that she knows of the tryst.¹¹

The construction of the various episodes, their articulation with the poems, and a series of structural parallels show the subtlety of G. T.'s invention. G. T. uses the license of hindsight to enlarge F. J.'s chronicle of the affair. Besides beginning the story *in medias res*, he places the various poems so that they reveal F. J.'s state of mind at the time of composition, rather than their effect upon Elinor. Thus the occasion of the first poem in the text, "Fair Bersabe, the bright" (p. 52), is Elinor's apparent rejection of F. J.'s suit during the 'braule,' but "before [F. J.] coulde put the same in legible writinge, it pleased the sayd Mystresse *Elinor* of hir curtesie thus to deale with him" (p. 52), by passing her own letter to him in the garden. In the form that G. T. gives the affair, 'legibility' is for awhile a major concern. F. J. tears

her letter to bits but reconstructs it, only to set himself a problem in literary criticism: "For as by the stile this letter of hers bewrayeth that it was not penned by a womans capacitie, so the sequell of her doings may discipher, that she had mo ready clearkes than trustie servants in store" (p. 53). He answers this problem by setting Elinor one of his own: "he thought not best to commit the sayde verses [i.e., 'Fair Bersabe'] willingly into hir custodie, but privilie lost them in hir chamber, written in counterfeit" (p. 53). In G. T.'s construction of events, F. J. and Elinor afford each other complementary problems in 'decipherment': the right hand but the wrong style, and the right style but the wrong hand. The question of legibility resolves itself at the moment when written communication becomes moot, with F. J.'s acceptance as an acknowledged lover (pp. 54-55). The lovers do not part, however, until Elinor secures F. J.'s letter ("these blabbing leaves"), seemingly as a 'bottom' for winding her silk. F. J. is free to construe her meaning as the desire for yet another love-token, and the reader to see it retrospectively as the desire for another trophy in her collection of fools' works. G. T. himself merely records the exchange, passing over its interpretation in silence.

At a larger structural level, G. T. uses repeated narrative motives and parallel incidents to bind the narrative together. The midnight tryst, for example, in which the characters' nightgowns play a role both as costume and as bedding (p. 69), is foreshadowed by a martial simile also involving apparel:

[F. J.'s] chaunce was to meete hir alone in a Gallery of the same house: where (as I have heard him declare) his manhood in this kind of combat was first tryed, and therein I can compare him to a valiant Prince, who distressed with power of enemies had committed the safeguard of his person to treaty of Ambassade, and sodenly (surprised with a *Camnassado* in his own trenches) was enforced to yeeld as prisoner. Even so my friend *F. J.* lately overcome by y^e beautifull beames of this Dame *Elynor* ... was at unwares encountered with his friendly foe ... (p. 54).

In its immediate context, this simile shows G. T.'s ironic support of F. J.'s romance fiction. Given F. J.'s general behavior and his conduct of the affair, the only way by which he can be considered a 'valiant Prince' is by a forced comparison; rather than demonstrating how ineffective F. J. is as a romance hero, G. T. chooses this unlikely comparison as a means of ironic deflation. The parenthetical addition to the simile seems excrescent in the immediate context, but in the sequel its appropriateness is evident. The *camnassado* – or, as one editor has it, *camisado* – is literally "an attack in one's shirt" ... a fairly common Renaissance military term meaning a surprise night attack in which the attackers wore shirts over their armor to recognize each other."¹²

As forecast by this simile, the seduction scene is an actual *camisado*, except for the ironic detail that both parties wear nightshirts, obscuring the roles of seducer and seduced.

Likewise, in the earlier part of the *Adventures*, F. J. visits Elinor to heal her of “a great bleeding of the nose” (pp. 56-57). After F. J. falls into his jealous illness, a parallel situation occurs when Elinor attempts to cure him with perfume (p. 86). When this comedy fails, she attempts another: “Yes servaunt (quod she) I will see if you can sleepe any better in my sheets: and therewith commaunded hir handmayd to fetch a paire of cleane sheetes” (p. 90). The obviously provocative remark is passed over, but later the lady herself arrives to share the sheets with F. J. in his bed (pp. 91-92). Elinor miscalculates the efficacy of her remedy, however, and the seduction she had apparently planned turns into a rape, which G. T. once again describes in military terms (p. 92). These parallel incidents are landmarks in the course of the affair, and show the shifting roles of the two principals in the pastime of love.

The wealth of verbal play, the repeated narrative motives and parallel incidents, especially those that rest of G. T.’s own invention, appear in the narration with little evidence that the narrator is aware of them, but this apparent blindness is intentional. At the outset, G. T.’s letter to H. W. expressed his design. His re-creation of F. J.’s affair is also a recreation: the *Adventures* is itself a kind of pastime for him, and he intends it to be used by H. W. for “recreation” (p. 51) – in the same double sense. This recreation requires of H. W. (and other readers) the same intellectual activity that occupies characters within the story. The gossip and voyeurism that occupy the characters within the story become, albeit at two removes, the pastime of G. T.’s readers. They must re-create (and to some extent, re-order) the relationship of the poems to the story, and they must recognize the structural parallels and repetition in order to comprehend the pattern of the narrative. Finally, the deceits practiced by Elinor and F. J., which include gaining possession of and interpreting written works, are manifestly compounded by G. T.’s passing his narrative to H. W. G. T. makes pastime for himself and his readers by betraying F. J., just as Elinor does, and in comparison, Elinor’s use of F. J.’s ‘telltale paper’ seems a petty treachery. Since G. T.’s parade of learning proves to be riddled with error and ignorance, it is a trap for the unwary or unlearned reader who embraces G. T.’s doctrines too uncritically.¹³ Finally, the reader’s game lies in the search for a reliable direction to take in judging the sometimes contradictory voices in the text. F. J.’s affair and G. T.’s narration are but the first two of several

competing interpretations through which the reader moves in the elaborate critical pastime constructed by George Gascoigne.

This pastime of criticism is both formal and substantial. From the 'valiant Prince' metaphors and the *questioni d'amore*, the reader learns to class the *Adventures* with chivalric romances, even though the work itself ironically revises their conventions. Italian influences – Petrarch's *rime*, Boccaccio's *novelle*, Ariosto's epic, and (at a further remove) Castiglione's dialogue – reveal vistas of the literary tradition that reader and author share and make not only the *Adventures* but also its formal models the objects of fun. Criticism also adds substance to the pastime of the work. Within the *Adventures*, the most fervent critic is G. T., who can hardly restrain his commentaries on the poems, even though he is not a particularly apt student of Gascoigne's critical theories, set out in "Certaine notes of Instruction" (1575).¹⁴ At the expense of detaining the narrative, G. T. follows the poems with sometimes obtuse criticisms of their invention, appropriateness, diction or occasion. As long as the plot is taken as primary, these commentaries are vexatious, just as the inset stories told by Frances and Pergo seem to be (pp. 87-94, 97-101). Like the storie, however, the relevance of which F. J. ignores to his loss, these critiques are notes of instruction for the reader – who must beware that they sometimes act as cautionary examples of what *not* to do. These apparent digressions are disruptive only as long as the reader mistakes the pastime that Gascoigne has constructed, for to mistake the pastime is to judge it by the wrong rules. By the rules that Gascoigne follows, the apparent digressions enrich the text by enlarging the pastime it represents.

Although G. T. and Gascoigne evidently speak with different voices and different ideas, the role of the one and the action of the other blend in this pastime, which thus becomes critical in another sense. The sorting out of human relationships and motivations – which is only dimly perceived by G. T. and scarcely recognized in his critiques – becomes the vital necessity that Gascoigne forces on the reader. To do what Gascoigne requires, the reader must himself undertake the pastime that occupies the narrative's characters in such various ways. F. J.'s reassembling a shredded letter, Elinor's retossing every card in a poetic sequence, G. T.'s re-ordering and re-creating the documents and the history of an affair – all are models within the text of the reader's activity outside it.

What the reader learns, therefore, although central to the text, achieves importance also through its extratextual applications. Such potentially dangerous applications may partly explain the bowdlerized version, *The pleasant Fable of Ferdinando Jeronimi and Leonora de Valasco, translated out of the*

Italian riding tales of Bartello, published in the 1575 *Posies*. In addition to considerable alteration of the story itself, the revision omits the original parerga and the character of G. T.,¹⁵ which together account for “an ingenious and almost too successful hoax on the 1573 reader,” who is led in stages to a “self-induced acceptance of the ‘discourse’ ... as a disguised form of historical reality – perhaps autobiographical.”¹⁶ Gascoigne’s 1575 prefaces demolish this original complex structure of fictional compilers, placing the work explicitly with the cautionary “Weedes to be avoyded” in the three-part moral division of the *Posies* (p. 17) and claiming that the alterations are necessitated by the bawdiness of the original. These nominally offensive elements, however, are scarcely altered in the 1575 version. Instead, Gascoigne redefines the relationship between the central character and the narrator, an adjustment that finally says more about the broadly political implications of the original than about the proper conduct of love affairs or the moral decorum of the text.

In 1575, the full expansion of the central character’s name implicates the fictional world created in the text. The scene is translated from the anonymous English castle to an Italy where local habitations and names are both exotic and insistent. F. J. himself is transformed from the unpedigreed youth of 1573 to “a yong gentleman of *Venice*, and was come into *Lombardie* to take the pleasures of the cuntry” – a man of sufficient parts to merit Lord Valasco’s consideration as a possible spouse for his elder daughter (p. 383). Through virtually the same series of incidents, Ferdinando and his companions come to far more specific ends than the 1573 version proposed: Ferdinando to a dissolute life, Frauncischina to a languishing death, and Elinor to “long continuance ... of hir accustomed change” (p. 453).

If this story is, as the narrator claims, a “pleasant and profitable” but cautionary “Fable” of lust’s excesses (p. 453), it is oddly unimproving. Elinor, the most flagrantly lustful character, suffers not at all, while the constant, virtuous Frauncischina dies, her heart broken by an inept, self-centered and finally stupid boy. Rather than correcting the bawdy story, then, the 1575 revisions alter the salient political elements of the fiction. The central figure is not an *arriviste* in courtly circles but a “yong gentleman” already accepted and entertained; the connection between Lord Valasco and Ferdinando is explicitly related to the marriage of the Lord’s elder daughter, changing the young man from a chance vagrant into a dynastic satellite; and the scene is shifted from northern England – with its obviously and dangerously local application – to Italy, where people were notoriously reputed capable of any depravity.

Changes in the fictional framework accompany these alterations in the story. Most obviously, the fallible voice of G. T. is replaced by a virtually

omniscient (but still chatty and critical) anonymous narrator, whose voice is itself the construct of 'Bartello,' the putative author of the 'Fable' that Gascoigne allegedly translates for the *Posies* (pp. 384, 453). This shift in narratorial stance has a complex effect that might be reckoned as an inverse proportion between the locale of the action and Gascoigne's willingness to be associated with the text: when the story is set in England, Gascoigne obscures his presence behind the parerga, as if to sanitize his relationship to a doubtful show, but the shift to Italy allows him to be more explicit about his own presence in the work (although this presence is also obscured by his claim to serve merely as translator). This changed fictional frame is announced in the changed genre-marker of the title – from 'discourse' to 'fable' – which implies also a change in the quality of the reader's work. The former title implies the discursive, evaluative reading that is required to sort out and judge the many speakers (the printer, H. W., G. T., F. J.), whereas the latter suggests a much less demanding program: a 'fable,' insofar as it is accepted at all, is accepted all of a piece on the authority of the central character. The 1575 version thus flattens the discursive ridges that run through the 1573 text, in which readers are asked to reconcile contradictions between competing textual voices. The early description of Elinor's secretary, for example, which G. T. carefully and conspicuously notes as F. J.'s rather than his own [the parenthetical "by report of my very good friend *F. J.*" (p. 58)], is differently qualified in 1575 ["by the same words that *Bartello* useth" (p. 392)]. The change implies Gascoigne's awareness of the different truth-claims made by the respective remarks. Where G. T. ironically diminishes F. J.'s rhetoric from his own, the 1575 narrator asserts the accuracy of his translation: the former asserts independence of, the latter announces submission to another authority over the text.

If these, then, are the various pleasures of the text, wherein lies the profit asserted by the 1575 narrator's concluding Horatian formula (p. 453)? F. J.'s failure in 1573 is, at least superficially, a warning against even the attempt to break into a superior social class on the presumption of one's learning. If F. J. had been truly educated, he would have known to choose Cicero over Lancelot. The 1573 version holds out some comfort to courtly readers that their established power is proof against the incursions of upstart nonentities. The 1575 version, however, removes the implied tension between the classes: Ferdinando, Elinor, and Frauncischina are already social equals, and the story conveys little comfort for those whose established power was perceptibly threatened by actual persons who challenged tradition with the new learning – more intelligent versions of F. J., that is, and more ambitious secretaries.

At the plot level, then, the two versions point similar if not identical morals that reinforce – or, at any rate, leave unchallenged – the security of the class order.

As a whole, however, the pastimes of the text are subversive, and in their subversiveness is their profit. To better qualified readers – that is, to the aspiring secretaries – the full range of pastimes exercise exactly those skills of rhetorical and cultural interpretation that promise promotion and success in the slippery world of the court. Gascoigne's achievement in the story of Master F. J. is to point out for those who can see how they may actualize their potential according to their capacities *as interpreters*, independent of pedigree or rank. The competence of the reader thus shapes the work, making it – regardless of the explicit label – either a comfortable 'fable' for the established or a 'discourse' for the aspiring, depending upon the self-consciousness of the mind that works through the intricate pastimes of Master F. J.

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Notes

1. See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 3rd ed. (Basel, 1938), and Hugo Rahner, "Der spielende Mensch," *Eranos-Jahrbuch 1949* (Zurich, 1949).
2. The two principal lines of criticism are well-represented by Walter R. Davis, *Idea and Act in Elizabethan Fiction* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 94-109, who concentrates upon the romance influences; and by Arthur F. Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst, 1986), pp. 89-117, who discusses the humanist critique. Recent work in social history and rhetorical theory is brought to bear on the interpretation offered here: see Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley, 1984). Interested readers will also wish to consult these studies cited by Whigham: Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965), and "Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700," *Past and Present*, XXXIII (1966), 17-55; and Wallace MacCaffrey, "Place and Patronage in Elizabethan Politics," in *Elizabethan Government and Society*, eds. S. T. Bindoff, Joel Hurstfield, and C. H. Williams (London, 1961), pp. 95-126.
3. 'Institute' is a modern name given to that class of works, including courtesy books, that aim to instruct persons in the right behavior for access to power. The *Adventures* may be so considered if ironic inversion of the general form is allowed. See Whigham, *Ambition*, pp. 25-31, and Thomas M. Greene, "The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature," in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*, eds., Peter Demetz and al. (New Haven, 1968), pp. 241-64.
4. *George Gascoigne's A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers*, ed. with introduction and notes by C. T. Prouty, University of Missouri Studies, vol. 18, no. 2 (Columbia, 1942), p. 51.
5. Davis, *Idea*, pp. 104-07; and Frank B. Fieler, "Gascoigne's Use of Courtly Love Conventions in 'The Adventures Passed by Master F. J.,'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, I (1963), 26-32.

6. Jane Hedley, "Allegoria: Gascoigne's Master Trope," *English Literary Renaissance*, XI (1981), 148-64; and George E. Rowe, "Interpretation, Sixteenth-Century Readers, and George Gascoigne's 'The adventures of Master F. J.,'" *ELH*, XLVIII (1981), 271-89.
7. An alternative pastime is open to F. J. if he would take up the proper love that Frances offers, but he consistently rejects that course. In the oblique way typical of the castle's residents, Pergo and Frances offer the *questioni d'amore* that speak to his situation with Elinor, but he either refuses or is unable to see their application. See Richard A. Lanham, "Narrative Structure in Gascoigne's *F. J.*," *Studies in Short Fiction*, IV (1966), 44-45; Charles W. Smith, "Structural and Thematic Unity in Gascoigne's *The Adventures of Master F. J.*," *Papers on Language and Literature*, II (1966), 99-108.
8. Whigham, *Ambition*, p. 13.
9. For a graphic description of the anxieties and dangers of a courtier's life, see Lacey Baldwin Smith, *Treason in Tudor England: Politics and Paranoia* (Princeton, 1986), esp. pp. 36-71.
10. R. P. Adams, "Gascoigne's 'Master F. J.' as Original Fiction," *PMLA*, LXIII (1958), 315-26; Leicester Bradner, "Point of View in George Gascoigne's Fiction," *Studies in Short Fiction*, III (1965), 18-22. For a darker reading of G. T.'s role, see Gregory Waters, "G. T.'s 'Worthless Enterprise': A Study of the Narrator in *The Adventures of Master F. J.*," *Journal of Narrative Technique*, VII (1977), 116-27.
11. In the 'dream' Frances invents to intimate her knowledge of F. J.'s tryst, she transforms the actual sword into a decorative motif on the "tall Gentleman's" nightgown. The dream has a sexual significance, as Frances hints in the remainder: "he recomforted me saying, be not afrayd Lady, for I use this garment onely for myne own defence: and in this sort went that warlicke God *Mars* what time he taught Dame *Venus* to make *Vulcan* a hamer of the newe fashion" (p. 73). The close verbal correspondence between the dream-figure's remark and F. J.'s comment to Elinor is an instance of G. T.'s inventing a narrative link that a mere recorder of the affair could not have used. The mythological comparison points up the adultery of the affair, although its effect is ironic.
12. Merritt Lawlis, *Elizabethan Prose Fiction* (Indianapolis, 1967), p. 43, n. 18; and Prouty, ed., *Sundrie Flowers*, p. 244.
13. Kinney, *Poetics*, pp. 99-109.
14. In George Gascoigne, *The Posies*, ed. John W. Cunliffe (Cambridge, 1907), pp. 465-473. See also Penelope Scambly Schott, "The Narrative Stance in 'The Adventures of Master F. J.': Gascoigne as Critic of His Own Poems," *Renaissance Quarterly*, XXIX (1976), 369-77; but cf. Rowe, "Interpretation."
15. For an analysis of the differences between the two versions, see Prouty's biography, *George Gascoigne* (New York, 1942), pp. 189-212; Bradner, "Point of View," pp. 20-22.
16. Adams, "Original Fiction," p. 316; for an extended discussion of the hoax, see pp. 315-19. Adams's view, which directly contradicts Prouty's 'autobiographical' interpretation in *Gascoigne*, pp. 189-212, is the more useful and elegant interpretation, depending as it does on the idea that *The Adventures*, whatever their relationship to Gascoigne's personal life, is still an original fiction.