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0521414806 - The Rhetoric of Courtship in Elizabethan Language and Literature -
Catherine Bates

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In the sixteenth century the modern meaning of courtship – ‘wooing someone’ – developed from an older sense – ‘being at court’. *The rhetoric of courtship* takes this semantic shift as the starting-point for an incisive account of the practice and meanings of courtship at the court of Elizabeth I, a place where ‘being at court’ pre-eminently came to mean the same as ‘wooing’ the Queen. Exploring the wider context of social anthropology, philology, and cultural and literary history, Catherine Bates presents courtship as a judicious, sensitive, and rhetorically aware understanding of public and private relations. Gascoigne, Lyly, Sidney, Leicester, Essex, and Spenser are shown to reflect in the fictional courtships of their poetry and prose the vulnerabilities of court life that were created by the system of patronage. These writers exploited the structural and semantic ambivalence of courtship in order to rehearse alternative experiences of failure and success, producing richly polyvalent and complex texts in which often conflicting strategies and devices are seen to compete and overlap with each other. *The rhetoric of courtship* thus makes an important contribution to Renaissance cultural history, exploring the multiple meanings of ‘courtship’ in the sixteenth century, and using the court of Elizabeth I as a test case for representations of the courtier’s role and power in the literature of the period.

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AND LITERATURE

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Illus. 1. George Gascoigne, 'The Tale of Hemetes the Heremyte' (c.1575), Royal MS 18 A xlviij, fol. 1, by permission of the British Library