

Renaissance Culture and Castiglione's *Courtier*

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Please Silence Cell Phones

Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529)

- Born in Mantua; Classical education at Milan
- Fought against Spaniards in 1503
- 1505 sent as envoy to Henry VII of England
- Made a Count and an ambassador to the Pope
- Sent by Pope as special envoy to Emperor Charles V, but could not stop sack of Rome in 1527

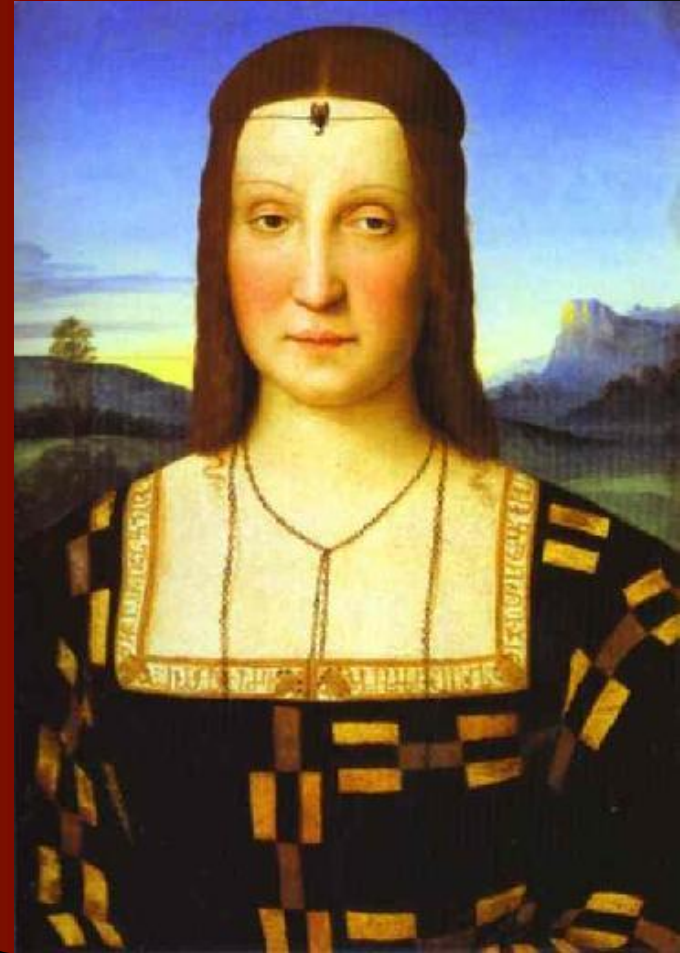


Raphael, 1514



The Book of the Courtier

- Begun in 1514; finished in 1518; published in 1528
- Four parts as a dialogue in the court of Urbino; Duke Federico of Montefeltro and son Guidobaldo
- Setting follows a visit by Pope Julius II; thus many nobles were assembled in Urbino
- Ladies choose a game for the day's entertainment (Similar to Boccaccio's *Decameron*)



Noble Birth

- Count Ludovico says Noble birth “because it is far less becoming for one of low birth to fail to do virtuous things than for one of noble birth...for noble birth is like a bright lamp that makes manifest and visible both good and bad, kindling and spurring on to virtue as much for fear of dishonor as for hope of praise.”
- Low born lack this spur to noble deeds and fear of dishonor

Signor Gaspar Pallavicino Questions Nobility as a Requirement

- “I would adduce instances of persons born of the noblest blood who have been ridden by vices, and, on the contrary, many persons of humble birth who, through their virtue, have made their posterity illustrious.”
- Fortune determines noble or low birth
- Nature does not differentiate

Count Ludovico Defends Nobility as a Requirement

- Concedes that the same qualities can be found in low born as in high born
- “Necessary to have him be of noble birth... because of that public opinion which immediately sides with nobility.”
- First impressions; how the low born must overcome low expectations, but high born begin with assumption of excellence by virtue of being a gentleman
- Class Attitudes in 16th century Italy?

Skills of Courtier: Soldier

- Above all, true profession of Courtier is Arms
- “bold, energetic, and faithful to whomever he serves.”
- Brave: if he once displays cowardice, like a woman who has lost her purity, he will never regain his good reputation
- Yet, not so fierce that he cannot behave like a gentleman when in the court; he should be harsh on the battlefield but gentle around friends

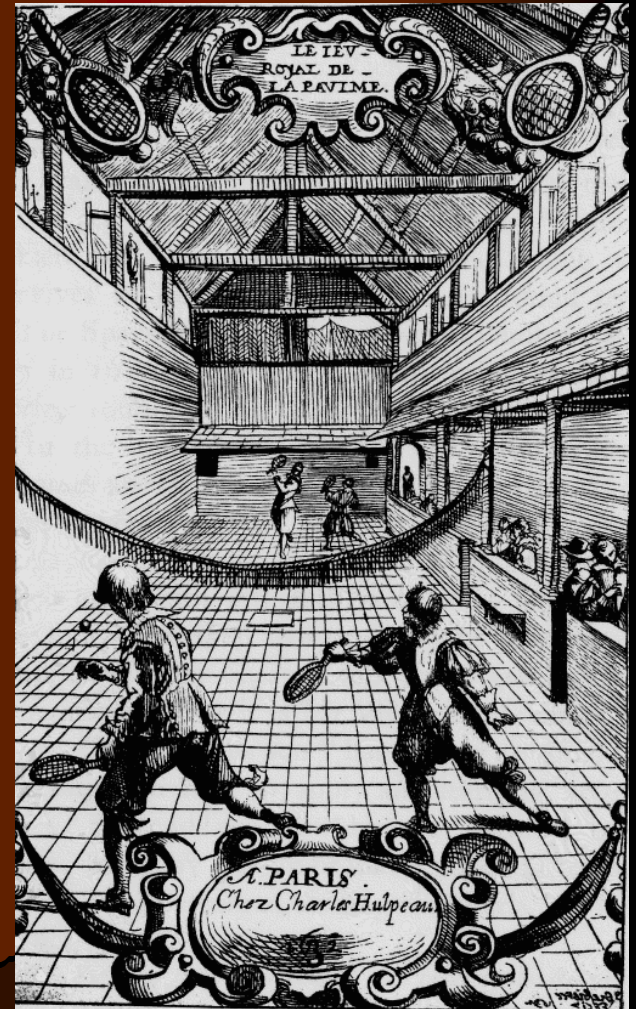
- Weapons and Wrestling
- Horse riding
- Hunt
- Swim, jump, run, throw stones
- Tennis—show off the body
- Does all these things with grace and ease

Knowledge and Skills



- “universal rule...to avoid affectation in every way possible...and to practice in all things a certain sprezzatura [nonchalance], so as to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it.”

Sprezzatura: the Art of Ease



Humane Skills

- “principal adornment of the mind...letters”
- Alexander the Great and Homer; Alcibiades and Socrates; Caesar as a writer
- Literature inspires Glorious deeds
- “Let him be conversant not only with the Latin language, but with the Greek as well ...poets ...orators and historians”



Letters vs. Arms?

- Alexander the Great tells Achilles how Achilles is more fortunate in that he had a Homer to write about him
- Does this mean that Alexander valued the deeds of Homer above his own?
- Alexander's deeds were no less than Achilles; but he lacked someone to record them and thus to properly attain honor for them

- Music, Dance, Drawing, Painting, Speaking, Writing
- Idea of the Renaissance man?
- Expands the notion of a Knight—not just a warrior but a man of culture and sophistication capable of diplomacy as well as war

Other Humane Skills



Painting as a Skill of the Courtier

- The Courtier should have “a knowledge of how to draw and an acquaintance with the art of painting itself.”
- Alexander the Great loved Apelles of Ephesus and had him paint one of his favorite women
- Appreciation of Art necessary for
Appreciation of Beauty and Women

Obedient?

- “Duty comes before all considerations”
- Yet, the good Courtier will disobey when a command is not truly in the interest of his Lord and would bring him disgrace and dishonor
- It is permitted to kill in service to the Lord, but only if it is profitable and honorable to him.
- Thus, the Courtier is not merely a Pawn

Perfect Lady: Book Three

- Are women capable of the same attainments as Courtier?
- Woman as defective and deceptive
- Magnifico Giuliano d' Medici defends women
- Proper to show them reverence



Women's Virtue Defended

- If Eve was the source of the Fall; Mary is the source of Salvation
- Plato assigned women same abilities as men in Republic; capable of ruling—Isabella of Spain
- Love inspires the Courtier to “be graceful or pleasing or brave or do any gallant deed of chivalry”

Ideal Lady

- Beautiful
- Moderate in pleasure
- Knowledgeable: necessary to discuss with the courtier
- Letters; music; painting; dancing
- Discourse and wit



Double Standard

- Responding to the claim that women must be held in chastity to guarantee paternity, Guiliano says: It wouldn't be necessary if men were virtuous, since women do not conceive by themselves
- "we men have arrogated to ourselves a license, whereby we insist that in us the same sins are most trivial and sometimes deserve praise which in women cannot sufficiently punished, unless by a shameful death, or at least a perpetual infamy."

Summary

- Courtier is Both a Warrior and a Diplomat
- The Medieval Knight is transformed into a humane man of letters and culture
- Ideal of Renaissance man who is master of everything
- *Sprezzatura* defines how he acts
- Medieval ideas of class and gender are questioned
- Importance of Lady in the Court is established
- Idea of the Human is Expanded and Ennobled