**Renaissance and Reformation**
**Renaissance et Réforme**

# Olga Zorzi Pugliese. Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier (Il Libro del Cortegiano): A Classic in the Making

Michael J. Redmond

Volume 33, numéro 1, hiver 2010

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1106635ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v33i1.14645

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

CRRS, Victoria University

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)
2293-7374 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

Redmond, M. (2010). Compte rendu de [Olga Zorzi Pugliese. Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier (Il Libro del Cortegiano): A Classic in the Making]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, *33*(1), 138–140. https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v33i1.14645

**Olga Zorzi Pugliese**
***Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier (Il Libro del Cortegiano): A Classic in the Making***
Viaggio d'Europa 10. Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2008. Pp 382.

The five extant manuscripts of Baldassare Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano,* documenting what Olga Zorzi Pugliese terms his "propensity for endless revision," offer an unique opportunity to trace the stylistic and ideological development of one of the most influential books of the entire early modern period. For the fifteen years prior to its publication in 1528, as Castiglione's own career path intersected with the trajectory of the crises of the Italian peninsula that culminated in the Sack of Rome, the courtier and diplomat continuously rewrote his ambitious treatise. An invaluable addition to Amadeo Quondam's recent work on the textual history of the *Cortegiano,* Pugliese's stimulating monograph is the fruit of a research project that exploited modern database technology to collate and search all five manuscripts. The extent of the divergences between consecutive drafts, a corollary of the manner in which Castiglione excised, shifted, revised, and reinstated individual passages over a series of manuscripts, has made it difficult for past scholars to track the complexity of his writing process. Vittorio Cian established the basic chronological order of the manuscripts in the first half of the twentieth century, but the identification and analysis of specific variants remain an ongoing concern. Given the limited access provided by Castiglione's descendants in Mantua to the autograph material in the family archive, comprising fragments of the first draft, the starting point of most contemporary criticism has been Ghino Ghinassi's 1968 edition of the so-called *seconda redazione* that records the intermediate stage in the evolution of the treatise. While scholars like Umberto Motta have taken full advantage of such published material, identifying significant differences in the political perspectives of the intermediate and the 1528 texts, Pugliese's study makes manifest that there was no definitive version of the *Cortegiano* up until the time of its publication. Indeed, even after the Aldine Press reluctantly accepted Castiglione's final manuscript, the Venetian printers imposed a series of linguistic changes to his use of the Italian vernacular.

With her extensive research background in the development of the Renaissance dialogue form, Pugliese provides a convincing account of the stylistic evolution of the *Cortegiano.* What comes to the fore is Castiglione's pursuit of refinement. Consistent with his emphasis on *sprezzatura,* the seemingly effortless brilliance of an accomplished courtier, he took care to downplay the self-conscious erudition and the vulgar jests found in the initial drafts. Alongside his rhetorical improvements to the dialogue structure, as Pugliese shows in her first chapter, Castiglione removed the

names of classical authorities and sought to efface any obvious literary allusions. One of the passages excised prior to publication, betraying persistent anxieties about his own reputation as author, was the complaint in the Mantua drafts about pretentious writers who try to "insert too much (history or stories) material or unusual words to show that they are very learned." Aesthetic considerations are also the focus of the third chapter, dealing with the changes to Castiglione's approach to humour. While the treatise's theory of joke-telling seems to have remained constant, the off-colour examples Castiglione introduced in the early stages of the composition process had little to do with his own precepts of gentility and decorum. Pugliese presents all nineteen of the deleted *facetiae,* translated into English for the first time. The need to remove such material was imperative in the case of the suspect witticisms attributed to Pietro Bembo, a court figure in Urbino who had gone on to become an influential cardinal by 1528.

As Castiglione revised inappropriate jests, he devoted particular attention to the elimination of almost every disparaging reference to Spanish policy, language, and culture. By the time that his manuscript went to the Venetian printers, Castiglione was papal nuncio to Spain and had been responsible for some of the failed diplomatic efforts to avert the Sack of Rome. The author's personal and professional experiences underlie many of the revisions to the portrayal of Italian and other European cultures at issue in the second chapter. For although his grievances about the humiliation of Italy at the hands of foreign invaders did not abate, ensuring that each of the four books opens with praise of the Italian court traditions once exemplified in Urbino, the changed political circumstances led Castiglione to make significant alterations to the frequency and tone of his references to the fate of the peninsula. In removing some of his more bitter references to French and Spanish military superiority, Pugliese argues, Castiglione's self-censorship serves to militate against giving umbrage to the vanquished Italians. Here, it is a measure of the value of Pugliese's research that one begins to wish she had gone on to consider the ideological criteria governing the revision of more central arguments like the relationship of the ideal courtier to the prince.

The desire to avoid offence is one of the primary motives Pugliese identifies for the extensive alterations in Castiglione's portrayal of the *donna di palazzo,* where the tone, arguments, and interlocutors of the debate about women were all changed. Notwithstanding frequent critical claims that Castiglione attenuated the misogyny of his initial drafts, Pugliese's fourth chapter presents many examples of variants where "a number of strong declarations that a few characters uttered in support of women and on their roles and beneficial influence are made to disappear in the

later stages of composition." The involvement of the Duchess of Urbino herself does not prevent Castiglione's speakers from betraying a discourteous attitude towards the ostensible mistress of the court. In all of the manuscript versions, it is striking that the poet Unico orders the duchess to be quiet. Yet the revisions to the printed text change only the form and courtesy of the injunctions for female silence. Castiglione's "ban on direct and substantial participation by the women continues to be imposed."

With its detailed philological and critical analysis of the five manuscripts of the *Cortegiano,* Pugliese's monograph is sure to become an essential volume in Castiglione studies.

MICHAEL J. REDMOND, *University of Palermo*