

THE BOOK OF THE
COURTIER
BALDESAR CASTIGLIONE



EDITED BY DANIEL JAVITCH

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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Baldesar Castiglione
THE BOOK
OF THE COURTIER
THE SINGLETON TRANSLATION



AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
CRITICISM

Edited by

DANIEL JAVITCH

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY



W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • *New York • London*

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Printed in the United States of America.

First Edition.

The text of this book is composed in Fairfield Medium
with the display set in Bernhard Modern.

Composition by Publishing Synthesis, New York.

Manufacturing by Courier, Westford.

Book design by Antonina Krass.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Castiglione, Baldassarre, conte, 1478–1529.

[Libro del cortegiano. English]

The book of the courtier : an authoritative text, criticism /
Baldesar Castiglione ; edited by Daniel Javitch.

p. cm.—(A Norton critical edition)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-393-97606-8 (pbk.)

1. Courts and courtiers. 2. Courtesy. 3. Castiglione, Baldassarre, conte,
1478–1529. Libro del cortegiano. I. Javitch, Daniel. II. Title.

BJ1604.C43 2002

170'.44—dc21

2001044867

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street,
London W1T 3QT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

The Duchess replied: "Nay, make the choice yourself, and take care lest you set others an example of not obeying, prompting them to refuse obedience in their turn."

[13] Then signora Emilia laughed and said to Count Ludovico da Canossa: "So, in order not to lose more time, you, Count, shall be the one to undertake this task in the way messer Federico has said; not indeed because we think you so good a Courtier that you know what befits one, but because if you say everything contrariwise, as we hope you will do, the game will be the livelier since everyone will have something to answer you; whereas, if another with more knowledge than you had this task, nothing could be objected to him because he would speak the truth, and so the game would be tedious."

The Count answered at once: "Madam, there could be no danger that anyone who speaks the truth would lack someone to gainsay him, so long as you are present." And when the company had laughed a while at this retort, he went on: "But truly I should be very glad to escape from this labor, since it seems too difficult for me; and I recognize as true in myself what you have affirmed in jest, namely, that I do not know what befits a good Courtier. Nor do I seek to prove this by any other witness than by the fact that since I do not perform the deeds of one such, it can be concluded that I do not have the knowledge. I believe that I may be blamed less in this, for it is surely worse not to wish to perform well than not to know how. Still, since it is your pleasure that I should have this charge, I cannot and will not refuse it, for I would not contravene our rule and your judgment, which I esteem far more than my own."

Then messer Cesare Gonzaga said: "As it is already rather late in the evening and we have many other kinds of entertainment ready at hand, perhaps it may be well to postpone this discussion until tomorrow; and this will give the Count time to think about what he is going to say, for truly it is a difficult thing to improvise on such a subject."

The Count replied: "I do not wish to be like the man who stripped to his doublet and jumped less far than he had done in his great-coat; wherefore it seems to me fortunate that the hour is late, for by the brevity of the time I shall be forced to say very little, and shall be excused by the fact that I have given no thought to this matter and so, free of censure, I shall be permitted to say whatever comes first to my lips. Therefore, in order not to bear this burden of obligation longer upon my shoulders, I will say that in all things it is so difficult to know what true perfection is that it is well-nigh impossible; and this is due to the diversity of our judgments. Thus, there are many who will welcome a man who talks a great deal, and will

call him pleasing. Others will prefer a modest man; others, an active and restless man; still others, someone who shows calm and deliberation in all things. And so everyone praises or blames according to his own opinion, always hiding a vice under the name of the corresponding virtue, or a virtue under the name of the corresponding vice: for example, calling a presumptuous man, frank; a modest man, dull; a simpleton, good; a rascal, discreet; and likewise throughout. Still I do think that there is a perfection for everything, even though it be hidden; and that this perfection can be determined by someone reasoning about it who has knowledge of the subject. And because, as I have said, the truth is often hidden, and I do not claim to have this knowledge, I can only praise the manner of Courtier that I most esteem, and can approve of what seems to me to be nearest the right, according to my poor judgment: which you may follow if it seems good to you; or you may hold to your own, should it differ from mine. Certainly I will not protest that mine is better than yours, for not only can you think one thing and I another, but I myself may sometimes think one thing and sometimes another.

[14] "Thus, I would have our Courtier born of a noble and genteel family; because it is far less becoming for one of low birth to fail to do virtuous things than for one of noble birth, who, should he stray from the path of his forebears, stains the family name, and not only fails to achieve anything but loses what has been achieved already. For noble birth is like a bright lamp that makes manifest and visible deeds both good and bad, kindling and spurring on to virtue as much for fear of dishonor as for hope of praise. And since this luster of nobility does not shine forth in the deeds of the lowly born, they lack that spur, as well as that fear of dishonor, nor do they think themselves obliged to go beyond what was done by their forebears; whereas to the wellborn it seems a reproach not to attain at least to the mark set them by their ancestors. Hence, it almost always happens that, in the profession of arms as well as in other worthy pursuits, those who are most distinguished are men of noble birth, because nature has implanted in everything that hidden seed which gives a certain force and quality of its own essence to all that springs from it, making it like itself: as we can see not only in breeds of horses and other animals, but in trees as well, the shoots of which nearly always resemble the trunk; and if they sometimes degenerate, the fault lies with the husbandman. And so it happens with men, who, if they are tended in the right way, are almost always like those from whom they spring, and often are better; but if they lack someone to tend them properly, they grow wild and never attain their full growth.

"It is true that, whether favored by the stars or by nature, some men are born endowed with such graces that they seem not to have been born, but to have been fashioned by the hands of some god, and adorned with every excellence of mind and body; even as there are many others so inept and uncouth that we cannot but think that nature brought them into the world out of spite and mockery. And just as the latter, for the most part, yield little fruit even with constant diligence and good care, so the former with little labor attain to the summit of the highest excellence. And take, as an example, Don Ippolito d'Este, Cardinal of Ferrara, who enjoyed such a happy birth that his person, his appearance, his words, and all his actions are so imbued and ruled by this grace that, although he is young, he evinces among the most aged prelates so grave an authority that he seems more fit to teach than to be taught. Similarly, in conversing with men and women of every station, in play, in laughter, in jest, he shows a special sweetness and such gracious manners that no one who speaks with him or even sees him can do otherwise than feel an enduring affection for him.

"But, to return to our subject, I say that there is a mean to be found between such supreme grace on the one hand and such stupid ineptitude on the other, and that those who are not so perfectly endowed by nature can, with care and effort, polish and in great part correct their natural defects. Therefore, besides his noble birth, I would wish the Courtier favored in this other respect, and endowed by nature not only with talent and with beauty of countenance and person, but with that certain grace which we call an 'air,' which shall make him at first sight pleasing and lovable to all who see him; and let this be an adornment informing and attending all his actions, giving the promise outwardly that such a one is worthy of the company and the favor of every great lord."

[15] At this point, without waiting any longer, signor Gaspar Pallavicino said: "So that our game may have the form prescribed and that we may not appear to esteem little that privilege of opposing which has been allowed us, I say that to me this nobility of birth does not seem so essential. And if I thought I was uttering anything not already known to us all, I would adduce many 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. And if what you said just now is true, that there is in all things that hidden force of the first seed, then we should all be of the same condition through having the same source, nor would one man be more noble than another. But I believe that there are many other causes of the differences and the various degrees of elevation and lowliness among

us. Among which causes I judge Fortune to be foremost; because we see her hold sway over all the things of this world and, as it seems, amuse herself often in uplifting to the skies whom she pleases and in burying in the depths those most worthy of being exalted.

"I quite agree with what you call the good fortune of those who are endowed at birth with all goodness of mind and body; but this is seen to happen with those of humble as well as with those of noble birth, because nature observes no such subtle distinctions as these. Nay, as I said, the greatest gifts of nature are often to be seen in persons of the humblest origin. Hence, since this nobility of birth is not gained either by talents or by force or skill, and is rather due to the merit of one's ancestors than to one's own, I deem it passing strange to hold that if the parents of our Courtier be of humble birth, all his good qualities are ruined, and that those other qualities which you have named would not suffice to bring him to the height of perfection; that is, talent, beauty of countenance, comeliness of person, and that grace which will make him at first sight lovable to all."

[16] Then Count Ludovico replied: "I do not deny that the same virtues can rule in the lowborn as in the wellborn: but (in order not to repeat what we have said already, along with many further reasons which might be adduced in praise of noble birth, which is always honored by everyone, because it stands to reason that good should beget good), since it is our task to form a Courtier free of any defect whatsoever, and endowed with all that is praiseworthy, I deem it necessary to have him be of noble birth, not only for many other reasons, but also because of that public opinion which immediately sides with nobility. For, in the case of two courtiers who have not yet given any impression of themselves either through good or bad deeds, immediately when the one is known to be of gentle birth and the other not, the one who is lowborn will be held in far less esteem than the one who is of noble birth, and will need much time and effort in order to give to others that good impression of himself which the other will give in an instant and merely by being a gentleman. And everyone knows the importance of these impressions, for, to speak of ourselves, we have seen men come to this house who, though dull-witted and maladroit, had yet the reputation throughout Italy of being very great courtiers; and, even though they were at last discovered and known, still they fooled us for many days and maintained in our minds that opinion of themselves which they found already impressed thereon, even though their conduct was in keeping with their little worth. Others we have seen who at first enjoyed little esteem and who, in the end, achieved a great success.

"And there are various causes of such errors, one being the judgment of princes who, thinking to work miracles, sometimes decide to show favor to one who seems to them to deserve disfavor. And they too are often deceived; but, because they always have countless imitators, their favor engenders a great fame which on the whole our judgments will follow. And if we notice anything which seems contrary to the prevailing opinion, we suspect that we must be mistaken, and we continue to look for something hidden: because we think that such universal opinions must after all be founded on the truth and arise from reasonable causes. And also because our minds are quick to love and hate, as is seen in spectacles of combats and of games and in every sort of contest, where the spectators often side with one of the parties without any evident reason, showing the greatest desire that this one should win and the other should lose. Moreover, as for the general opinion concerning a man's qualities, it is good or ill repute that sways our minds at the outset to one of these two passions. Hence, it happens that, for the most part, we judge from love or hate. Consider, then, how important that first impression is, and how anyone who aspires to have the rank and name of good Courtier must strive from the beginning to make a good impression.

[17] "But to come to some particulars: I hold that the principal and true profession of the Courtier must be that of arms; which I wish him to exercise with vigor; and let him be known among the others as bold, energetic, and faithful to whomever he serves. And the repute of these good qualities will be earned by exercising them in every time and place, inasmuch as one may not ever fail therein without great blame. And, just as among women the name of purity, once stained, is never restored, so the reputation of a gentleman whose profession is arms, if ever in the least way he sullies himself through cowardice or other disgrace, always remains defiled before the world and covered with ignominy. Therefore, the more our Courtier excels in this art, the more will he merit praise; although I do not deem it necessary that he have the perfect knowledge of things and other qualities that befit a commander, for since this would launch us on too great a sea, we shall be satisfied, as we have said, if he have complete loyalty and an undaunted spirit, and be always seen to have them. For oftentimes men are known for their courage in small things rather than in great. And often in important perils and where there are many witnesses, some men are found who, although their hearts sink within them, still, spurred on by fear of shame or by the company of those present, press forward with eyes shut, as it were, and do their duty, God knows how; and in things of little importance and when they think they can avoid the

risk of danger, they are glad to play safe. But those men who, even when they think they will not be observed or seen or recognized by anyone, show courage and are not careless of anything, however slight, for which they could be blamed, such have the quality of spirit we are seeking in our Courtier.

"However, we do not wish him to make a show of being so fierce that he is forever swaggering in his speech, declaring that he has wedded his cuirass,⁵ and glowering with such dour looks as we have often seen Berto do; for to such as these one may rightly say what in polite society a worthy lady jestingly said to a certain man (whom I do not now wish to name) whom she sought to honor by inviting him to dance, and who not only declined this but would not listen to music or take any part in the other entertainments offered him, but kept saying that such trifles were not his business. And when finally the lady said to him: 'What then is your business?' he answered with a scowl: 'Fighting.' Whereupon the lady replied at once: 'I should think it a good thing, now that you are not away at war or engaged in fighting, for you to have yourself greased all over and stowed away in a closet along with all your battle harness, so that you won't grow any rustier than you already are'; and so, amid much laughter from those present, she ridiculed him in his stupid presumption. Therefore, let the man we are seeking be exceedingly fierce, harsh, and always among the first, wherever the enemy is; and in every other place, humane, modest, reserved, avoiding ostentation above all things as well as that impudent praise of himself by which a man always arouses hatred and disgust in all who hear him."

[18] Then signor Gasparo replied: "As for me, I have known few men excellent in anything whatsoever who did not praise themselves; and it seems to me that this can well be permitted them, because he who feels himself to be of some worth, and sees that his works are ignored, is indignant that his own worth should lie buried; and he must make it known to someone, in order not to be cheated of the honor that is the true reward of all virtuous toil. Thus, among the ancients, seldom does anyone of any worth refrain from praising himself. To be sure, those persons who are of no merit, and yet praise themselves, are insufferable; but we do not assume that our Courtier will be of that sort."

Then the Count said: "If you took notice, I blamed impudent and indiscriminate praise of one's self: and truly, as you say, one must not conceive a bad opinion of a worthy man who praises himself modestly; nay, one must take that as surer evidence than if it came

5. A piece of close-fitting armor for protecting the breast and back [Editor].

from another's mouth. I do say that whoever does not fall into error in praising himself and does not cause annoyance or envy in the person who listens to him is indeed a discreet man and, besides the praises he gives himself, deserves praises from others; for that is a very difficult thing."

Then signor Gasparo said: "This you must teach us."

The Count answered: "Among the ancients there is no lack of those who have taught this; but, in my opinion, the whole art consists in saying things in such a way that they do not appear to be spoken to that end, but are so very apropos that one cannot help saying them; and to seem always to avoid praising one's self, yet do so; but not in the manner of those boasters who open their mouths and let their words come out haphazardly. As one of our friends the other day who, when he had had his thigh run through by a spear at Pisa, said that he thought a fly had stung him; and another who said that he did not keep a mirror in his room because when he was angry he became so fearful of countenance that if he were to see himself, he would frighten himself too much."

Everyone laughed at this, but messer Cesare Gonzaga added: "What are you laughing at? Do you not know that Alexander the Great, upon hearing that in the opinion of one philosopher there were countless other worlds, began to weep, and when asked why, replied: 'Because I have not yet conquered one'⁶—as if he felt able to conquer them all? Does that not seem to you a greater boast than that of the fly sting?"

Then said the Count: "And Alexander was a greater man than the one who spoke so. But truly one has to excuse excellent men when they presume much of themselves, because anyone who has great things to accomplish must have the daring to do those things, and confidence in himself. And let him not be abject and base, but modest rather in his words, making it clear that he presumes less of himself than he accomplishes, provided such presumption does not turn to rashness."

[19] When the Count paused here briefly, messer Bernardo Bibbiena said, laughing: "I remember you said before that this Courtier of ours should be naturally endowed with beauty of countenance and person, and with a grace that would make him lovable. Now this grace and beauty of countenance I do believe that I have myself, wherefore it happens that so many ladies, as you know, are ardently in love with me; but, as to the beauty of my person, I am rather doubtful, and especially as to these legs of mine which in truth do not seem to me as well disposed as I could wish; as to my

6. The anecdote is found in Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium* VIII, 14.

chest and the rest, I am quite well enough satisfied. Now do determine a little more in detail what this beauty of body should be, so that I can extricate myself from doubt and put my mind at ease."

After some laughter at this, the Count added: "Certainly such grace of countenance you can truly be said to have; nor will I adduce any other example in order to make clear what that grace is; because we do see beyond any doubt that your aspect is very agreeable and pleasant to all, although the features of it are not very delicate: it has something manly about it, and yet is full of grace. And this is a quality found in many different types of faces. I would have our Courtier's face be such, not so soft and feminine as many attempt to have who not only curl their hair and pluck their eyebrows, but preen themselves in all those ways that the most wanton and dissolute women in the world adopt; and in walking, in posture, and in every act, appear so tender and languid that their limbs seem to be on the verge of falling apart; and utter their words so limply that it seems they are about to expire on the spot; and the more they find themselves in the company of men of rank, the more they make a show of such manners. These, since nature did not make them women as they clearly wish to appear and be, should be treated not as good women, but as public harlots, and driven not only from the courts of great lords but from the society of all noble men.

[20] "Then, coming to bodily frame, I say it is enough that it be neither extremely small nor big, because either of these conditions causes a certain contemptuous wonder, and men of either sort are gazed at in much the same way that we gaze at monstrous things. And yet, if one must sin in one or the other of these two extremes, it is less bad to be on the small side than to be excessively big; because men who are so huge of body are often not only obtuse of spirit, but are also unfit for every agile exercise, which is something I very much desire in the Courtier. And hence I would have him well built and shapely of limb, and would have him show strength and lightness and suppleness, and know all the bodily exercises that befit a warrior. And in this I judge it his first duty to know how to handle every kind of weapon, both on foot and on horse, and know the advantages of each kind; and be especially acquainted with those arms that are ordinarily used among gentlemen, because, apart from using them in war (where perhaps so many fine points are not necessary), there often arise differences between one gentleman and another, resulting in duels, and quite often those weapons are used which happen to be at hand. Hence, knowledge of them is a very safe thing. Nor am I one of those who say that skill is forgotten in the hour of need; for he who loses his skill at such times shows that out of fear he has already lost his heart and head.

[21] "I deem it highly important, moreover, to know how to wrestle, because this frequently accompanies the use of weapons on foot. Then, both for his own sake and for his friends', he must understand the quarrels and differences that can arise, and must be alert to seize an advantage, and must show courage and prudence in all things. Nor should he be quick to enter into a fight, except in so far as his honor demands it of him; for, besides the great danger that an uncertain fate can bring, he who rushes into such things precipitately and without urgent cause deserves greatly to be censured, even though he should meet with success. But when he finds that he is so far involved that he cannot withdraw without reproach, he must be very deliberate both in the preliminaries to the duel and in the duel itself, and always show readiness and daring. Nor must he do as some who spend their time in wrangling and arguing over points of honor; and, when they have the choice of weapons, select those which neither cut nor prick, and arm themselves as if they were expecting to stand against cannonades; and, thinking it enough not to be defeated, stand always on the defensive and give ground to such a degree that they show extreme cowardice. And so they make themselves the laughingstock of children, like those two men from Ancona who fought at Perugia recently and made everyone laugh who saw them."

"And who were they?" asked signor Gaspar Pallavicino.

"Two cousins," replied messer Cesare.

Then the Count said: "In their fighting they seemed true brothers." Then he went on: "Weapons are also often used in various exercises in time of peace, and gentlemen are seen in public spectacles before the people and before ladies and great lords. Therefore I wish our Courtier to be a perfect horseman in every kind of saddle; and, in addition to having a knowledge of horses and what pertains to riding, let him put every effort and diligence into outstripping others in everything a little, so that he may be always recognized as better than the rest. And even as we read that Alcibiades⁷ surpassed all those peoples among whom he lived, and each in the respect wherein it claimed greatest excellence, so would I have this Courtier of ours excel all others in what is the special profession of each. And as it is the peculiar excellence of the Italians to ride well with the rein, to manage wild horses especially with great skill, to tilt and joust, let him be among the best of the Italians in this. In tournaments, in holding a pass, in attacking a fortified position, let him be among the best of the French. In stick-throwing, bull-fighting, in casting spears and darts, let him be outstanding among the Spaniards. But, above all, let him temper his every action with a cer-

7. See Cornelius Nepos, *Vitae Alcibiades*, ch. xi.

tain good judgment and grace, if he would deserve that universal favor which is so greatly prized.

[22] "There are also other exercises which, although not immediately dependent upon arms, still have much in common therewith and demand much manly vigor; and chief among these is the hunt, it seems to me, because it has a certain resemblance to war. It is a true pastime for great lords, it befits a Courtier, and one understands why it was so much practiced among the ancients. He should also know how to swim, jump, run, throw stones; for, besides their usefulness in war, it is frequently necessary to show one's prowess in such things, whereby a good name is to be won, especially with the crowd (with whom one must reckon after all). Another noble exercise and most suitable for a man at court is the game of tennis which shows off the disposition of body, the quickness and ligheness of every member, and all the qualities that are brought out by almost every other exercise. Nor do I deem vaulting on horseback to be less worthy, which, though it is tiring and difficult, serves more than anything else to make a man agile and dextrous; and besides its usefulness, if such agility is accompanied by grace, in my opinion it makes a finer show than any other.

"If, then, our Courtier is more than fairly expert in such exercises, I think he ought to put aside all others, such as vaulting on the ground, rope-walking, and the like, which smack of the juggler's trade and little befit a gentleman.

"But since one cannot always engage in such strenuous activities (moreover, persistence causes satiety, and drives away the admiration we have for rare things), we must always give variety to our lives by changing our activities. Hence, I would have our Courtier descend sometimes to quieter and more peaceful exercises. And, in order to escape envy and to enter agreeably into the company of others, let him do all that others do, yet never depart from comely conduct, but behave himself with that good judgment which will not allow him to engage in any folly; let him laugh, jest, banter, frolic, and dance, yet in such a manner as to show always that he is genial and discreet; and let him be full of grace in all that he does or says."

[23] Then messer Cesare Gonzaga said: "Certainly no one ought to interrupt the course of this discussion; but if I were to remain silent, I should neither be exercising the privilege I have of speaking nor satisfying the desire I have of learning something. And I may be pardoned if I ask a question when I ought to be speaking in opposition; for I think this can be allowed me, after the example set by our messer Bernardo who, in his excessive desire to be thought hand-

some, has violated the laws of our game by asking instead of gain-saying."

Then the Duchess said: "You see how from a single error a host of others can come. Therefore, he who transgresses and sets a bad example, as messer Bernardo has done, deserves to be punished not only for his own transgression but for that of the others as well."

To this messer Cesare replied: "And so, Madam, I shall be exempt from penalty, since messer Bernardo is to be punished both for his own error and for mine."

"Nay," said the Duchess, "you both must be doubly punished: he for his own transgression and for having brought you to yours, you for your transgression and for having imitated him."

"Madam," answered messer Cesare, "I have not transgressed as yet; however, in order to leave all this punishment to messer Bernardo alone, I will keep quiet."

And he was already silent, when signora Emilia laughed and said: "Say what you will, for, with the permission of the Duchess, I pardon both the one that has transgressed and the one that is about to do so ever so little."

"So be it," the Duchess went on, "but take care lest you make the mistake of thinking it more commendable to be clement than to be just; for the excessive pardon of a transgressor does wrong to those who do not transgress. Still, at the moment, I would not have my austerity in reproaching your indulgence cause us not to hear messer Cesare's question."

And so, at a sign from the Duchess and from signora Emilia, he began forthwith:

[24] "If I well remember, Count, it seems to me you have repeated several times this evening that the Courtier must accompany his actions, his gestures, his habits, in short, his every movement, with grace. And it strikes me that you require this in everything as that seasoning without which all the other properties and good qualities would be of little worth. And truly I believe that everyone would easily let himself be persuaded of this, because, by the very meaning of the word, it can be said that he who has grace finds grace. But since you have said that this is often a gift of nature and the heavens, and that, even if it is not quite perfect, it can be much increased by care and industry, those men who are born as fortunate and as rich in such treasure as some we know have little need, it seems to me, of any teacher in this, because such benign favor from heaven lifts them, almost in spite of themselves, higher than they themselves had desired, and makes them not only pleasing but admirable to everyone. Therefore I do not discuss this, it not being in our power to acquire it of ourselves. But as for those who are less endowed by

nature and are capable of acquiring grace only if they put forth labor, industry, and care, I would wish to know by what art, by what discipline, by what method, they can gain this grace, both in bodily exercises, in which you deem it to be so necessary, and in every other thing they do or say. Therefore, since by praising this quality so highly you have, as I believe, aroused in all of us an ardent desire, according to the task given you by signora Emilia, you are still bound to satisfy it."

[25] "I am not bound," said the Count, "to teach you how to acquire grace or anything else, but only to show you what a perfect Courtier ought to be. Nor would I undertake to teach you such a perfection; especially when I have just now said that the Courtier must know how to wrestle, vault, and so many other things which, since I never learned them myself, you all know well enough how I should be able to teach them. Let it suffice that just as a good soldier knows how to tell the smith what shape, style, and quality his armor must have, and yet is not able to teach him to make it, nor how to hammer or temper it; just so I, perhaps, shall be able to tell you what a perfect Courtier should be, but not to teach you what you must do to become one. Still, in order to answer your question in so far as I can (although it is almost proverbial that grace is not learned), I say that if anyone is to acquire grace in bodily exercises (granting first of all that he is not by nature incapable), he must begin early and learn the principles from the best of teachers. And how important this seemed to King Philip of Macedon can be seen by the fact that he wished Aristotle, the famous philosopher and perhaps the greatest the world has ever known, to be the one who should teach his son Alexander the first elements of letters. And among men whom we know today, consider how well and gracefully signor Galeazzo Sanseverino, Grand Equerry of France, performs all bodily exercises; and this because, besides the natural aptitude of person that he possesses, he has taken the greatest care to study with good masters and to have about him men who excel, taking from each the best of what they know. For just as in wrestling, vaulting, and in the handling of many kinds of weapons, he took our messer Pietro Monte as his guide, who is (as you know) the only true master of every kind of acquired strength and agility—so in riding, jousting, and the rest he has ever had before his eyes those men who are known to be most perfect in these matters.

[26] "Therefore, whoever would be a good pupil must not only do things well, but must always make every effort to resemble and, if that be possible, to transform himself into his master. And when he feels that he has made some progress, it is very profitable to observe

different men of that profession; and, conducting himself with that good judgment which must always be his guide, go about choosing now this thing from one and that from another. And even as in green meadows the bee flits about among the grasses robbing the flowers, so our Courtier must steal this grace from those who seem to him to have it, taking from each the part that seems most worthy of praise; not doing as a friend of ours whom you all know, who thought he greatly resembled King Ferdinand the Younger of Aragon, but had not tried to imitate him in anything save in the way he had of raising his head and twisting one side of his mouth, which manner the King had contracted through some malady. And there are many such, who think they are doing a great thing if only they can resemble some great man in something; and often they seize upon that which is his only bad point.

"But, having thought many times already about how this grace is acquired (leaving aside those who have it from the stars), I have found quite a universal rule which in this matter seems to me valid above all others, and in all human affairs whether in word or deed: and that is to avoid affectation in every way possible as though it were some very rough and dangerous reef; and (to pronounce a new word perhaps) 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. And I believe much grace comes of this: because everyone knows the difficulty of things that are rare and well done; wherefore facility in such things causes the greatest wonder; whereas, on the other hand, to labor and, as we say, drag forth by the hair of the head, shows an extreme want of grace, and causes everything, no matter how great it may be, to be held in little account.

"Therefore we may call that art true art which does not seem to be art; nor must one be more careful of anything than of concealing it, because if it is discovered, this robs a man of all credit and causes him to be held in slight esteem. And I remember having read of certain most excellent orators in ancient times who, among the other things they did, tried to make everyone believe that they had no knowledge whatever of letters; and, dissembling their knowledge, they made their orations appear to be composed in the simplest manner and according to the dictates of nature and truth rather than of effort and art; which fact, had it been known, would have inspired in the minds of the people the fear that they could be duped by it.

"So you see how art, or any intent effort, if it is disclosed, deprives everything of grace. Who among you fails to laugh when our messer Pierpaolo dances after his own fashion, with those capers of his, his legs stiff on tiptoe, never moving his head, as if he were a stick of

wood, and all this so studied that he really seems to be counting his steps? What eye is so blind as not to see in this the ungainliness of affectation; and not to see the grace of that cool *disinvoltura* [ease] (for when it is a matter of bodily movements many call it that) in many of the men and women here present, who seem in words, in laughter, in posture not to care; or seem to be thinking more of everything than of that, so as to cause all who are watching them to believe that they are almost incapable of making a mistake?"

[27] Here messer Bernardo Bibbiena said, without waiting: "Now you see that our messer Roberto has at last found someone to praise his style of dancing, as it seems that none of the rest of you esteem it at all. For if this excellence consists in nonchalance, in showing no concern, and in seeming to have one's thoughts elsewhere rather than on what one is doing, then in dancing messer Roberto has no peer on earth, because to make it quite plain that he is giving no thought to what he is doing, he lets his clothes fall from his back and his slippers from his feet, and goes right on dancing without picking them up."

Then the Count replied: "Since you are determined that I shall go on talking, I will say something more of our faults. Do you not see that what you are calling nonchalance in messer Roberto is really affectation, because we clearly see him making every effort to show that he takes no thought of what he is about, which means taking too much thought; and because it exceeds certain limits of moderation, such nonchalance is affected, is unbecoming, and results in the opposite of the desired effect, which is to conceal the art. Hence, I do not believe that the vice of affectation is any less present in a nonchalance (in itself a praiseworthy thing) wherein one lets his clothes fall of than in a studied concern for one's personal appearance (also, in itself, a praise-worthy thing), bearing the head so stiff for fear of spoiling one's coiffure, or carrying a mirror in the fold of one's cap and a comb in one's sleeve, and having one's page follow about through the streets with a sponge and brush; because such care for personal appearance and such nonchalance both tend too much to extremes, which is always a fault, and is contrary to that pure and charming simplicity which is so appealing to all. Consider how ungraceful that rider is who tries to sit so very stiff in his saddle (in the Venetian style, as we are wont to say), compared with one who appears to give no thought to the matter and sits his horse as free and easy as if he were on foot. How much more pleasing and how much more praised is a gentleman whose profession is arms, and who is modest, speaking little and boasting little, than another who is forever praising himself, swearing and blustering about as if to defy the whole world—which is simply the affectation of wanting

to cut a bold figure. And the same holds true in every practice, indeed in everything that is said or done."

[28] Then the Magnifico Giuliano said: "It holds true as well in music, wherein it is a great mistake to place two perfect consonances one after the other, for our sense of hearing abhors this, whereas it often enjoys a second or a seventh which in itself is a harsh and unbearable discord. And this is due to the fact that to continue in perfect consonances generates satiety and gives evidence of a too affected harmony, which is avoided when imperfect consonances are mixed in, establishing a kind of comparison, by which our ears are held in greater suspense, and more avidly wait upon and enjoy the perfect consonances, delighting in that discord of the second or seventh as in something that shows nonchalance."

"So, you see," replied the Count, "that affectation is detrimental in this as in other things. Moreover, it is said to have been proverbial with certain most excellent painters of antiquity that excessive care is harmful, and Protogenes is said to have been censured by Apelles for not knowing when to take his hands from the board.⁸

Then messer Cesare said: "It seems to me that our fra Serafino has this same fault of not knowing when to take his hands from the board,⁹ at least not before all of the food has been taken from it too."

The Count laughed and added: "Apelles meant that Protogenes did not know when to stop in painting, which was nothing if not a kind of reproach for his being affected in his work. Thus, this excellence (which is opposed to affectation, and which, at the moment, we are calling *nonchalance*), besides being the real source from which grace springs, brings with it another adornment which, when it accompanies any human action however small, not only reveals at once how much the person knows who does it, but often causes it to be judged much greater than it actually is, since it impresses upon the minds of the onlookers the opinion that he who performs well with so much facility must possess even greater skill than this, and that, if he were to devote care and effort to what he does, he could do it far better.

"And, to multiply such examples, take a man who is handling weapons and is about to throw a dart or is holding a sword or other weapon in his hand: if immediately he takes a position of readiness, with ease, and without thinking, with such facility that his body and all his members fall into that posture naturally and without any effort, then, even if he does nothing more, he shows himself to be

8. Pliny, *Nat. hist.* XXXV, 80.

9. The play of words is on the word *tavola*, which can mean either the *panel* used by a painter or a *dining table*.

perfectly accomplished in that exercise. Likewise in dancing, a single step, a single movement of the body that is graceful and not forced, reveals at once the skill of the dancer. A singer who utters a single word ending in a group of four notes with a sweet cadence, and with such facility that he appears to do it quite by chance, shows with that touch alone that he can do much more than he is doing. Often too in painting, a single line which is not labored, a single brush stroke made with ease and in such a manner that the hand seems of itself to complete the line desired by the painter, without being directed by care or skill of any kind, clearly reveals that excellence of craftsmanship, which people will then proceed to judge, each by his own lights. And the same happens in almost every other thing.

"Therefore our Courtier will be judged excellent, and will show grace in all things and particularly in his speech, if he avoids affectation: which error is incurred by many and sometimes, more than others, by our Lombards who, if they have been away from home for a year, come back and start right off speaking Roman, or Spanish, or French, and God knows how! All of which stems from an excessive desire to appear very accomplished, and so they put effort and diligence into acquiring a most odious fault. Certainly it would require no little effort on my part if in these discussions I attempted to use those antique Tuscan words which the Tuscans of today have already dropped from use; moreover, I believe you would all laugh at me."

[29] Then messer Federico said: "It is true that in discussing among ourselves, as we are now doing, it would be bad perhaps to use those antique Tuscan words, because, as you say, they would be irksome both to the speaker and to the listener, and many would understand them only with difficulty. But if one is writing, then I do believe it would be wrong not to use them, because they give much grace and authority to writing, and result in a diction of more gravity and majesty than is had with modern words."

"I do not know," replied the Count, "what grace or authority can be given to writing by words that ought to be avoided, not only in such talk as we are presently engaged in (which you yourself admit) but also in any circumstance whatever that one can imagine. For if any man of good judgment had to deliver an oration on weighty matters before the very senate of Florence, which is the capital of Tuscany, or had to speak privately about important business with some person of rank in that city, or yet about amusing things with some close acquaintance, or about love with ladies or gentlemen, or in jokes or jests at feasts, games, or where you will, whatever the time, place, or matter, I am sure he would take care to avoid using those