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Viaggio d'Europa Culture e letterature 10. Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2008. 382 pp. index. illus. bibl. €40. ISBN: 978-88-495-1492-6.

Until the studies of Vittorio Cian and, more concretely, of Ghino Ghinassi, little attention was given to the early development of *The Book of the Courtier*. Since Ghinassi's publication in 1968 of the third Vatican Library manuscript in its entirety (*La seconda redazione*), much headway has been made in the study of the text's evolution, in particular by Amadeo Quondam and Olga Pugliese herself.

Pugliese's new book is based on a close examination of Castiglione's five extant manuscripts: early autograph drafts presently in the private archives of the descendants of the Castiglione family in Mantua, three manuscripts in the Vatican Library that contain glosses and revisions by the author, and a final manuscript in the Medicea Laurenziana Library in Florence that was used for the first printed edition and which also contains the author's last-minute changes. Given that Castiglione devoted at least fifteen years to the elaboration and revision of his work before its publication in 1528, it may perhaps not be that surprising that there are 2,500 extant pages of manuscript text, but it is undoubtedly an extremely fortuitous and rare circumstance.

At the basis of Pugliese's research is the conviction that "by identifying the variants and tracing the evolution of the text through the various redactions, much more can be learned about the author's way of writing and about the meaning of a variety of aspects of the work" (7). Her diachronic philological analysis focuses in particular on four selected topics, each treated in a separate chapter: the structure of the literary dialogue, discussions on Italian and other national cultures, the treatment of humor, and the discourses on and by women.

In examining the development of the dialogue structure, Pugliese identifies several compositional tendencies, including Castiglione's progressive rejection of the culture of medieval chivalry, his increased narrative distance from the fiction of the text, and his reduction of military and legalistic language. In addition, she points out that in the course of revising his work, Castiglione lightened the debates by inserting more laughter and witty remarks, avoided an affected style by veiling erudite allusions (including explicit references to his sources), and created a more readable text by eliminating technical language, Latinisms, and precise data such as the names of various personages from literature and history.

In the second chapter Pugliese traces Castiglione's shifting assessments of the French and Spanish as well as his allusions to other cultures. While the increasingly positive references to Spain at the expense of France can be linked to Castiglione's own career and to the geopolitical situation in Italy, his reduction of references to other Europeans and to peoples from the East is attributed for the most part to a shift of focus from "a general global frame" to one of "sophisticated high culture" (187).

The third chapter treats Castiglione's developing formulation of a theory of humor as well as the various jokes and anecdotes that were deleted, revised, and

added along the way. Pugliese argues that in his choice of examples he was “ever more affected by criteria of political correctness, moderation, and decorum, as well as literary criteria, as he proceeded with the composition of his work” (191).

Turning in the final chapter to the representation of women, Pugliese finds that although Castiglione’s revisions attenuated or removed altogether some disparaging comments about women in general, at the same time they not only eliminated various positive remarks as well but also further reduced the already limited role assigned in the book to female characters (291). Concluding that “all in all the treatment of women and the idea of their power remain basically unchanged,” Pugliese suggests that Castiglione’s misogyny did not decrease during the course of the revisions but was simply expressed in a less direct manner (359).

Such a close examination of the drafts and various redactions was made possible by the transcriptions that the author and her assistants made of all the extant manuscripts and by the collation of the digitized texts with the aid of computerized word searches. The author announces, moreover, her intention to make these transcriptions available in searchable electronic format.

Although Castiglione circulated copies of his manuscript in different stages among his friends, he was reluctant to set to print a product he felt had not reached perfection. His prefatory letter to Miguel de Silva (and his personal correspondence) describes his anxiety upon discovering that Vittoria Colonna had passed around copies of his unfinished work without his consent. Since he was so opposed to revealing the text’s imperfections to anyone outside a small circle of friends and advisors, one wonders how he might react to finding that five centuries later the entire extant corpus of his work in its various stages has come under the scrutiny of literary critics and historians. Although he certainly may have preferred that his extensive revisions had remained hidden in order to adhere to his own precept of *sprezzatura*, I do not think he could have complained of recent scholarly endeavors to trace the history of his masterpiece any more than of Vittoria Colonna’s initial impulse to share it with others: while Colonna was the catalyst that compelled him to release a definitive version for publication, Pugliese’s efforts grant us, as she aptly puts it, “the rare privilege of seeing a classic in the making” (17).

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