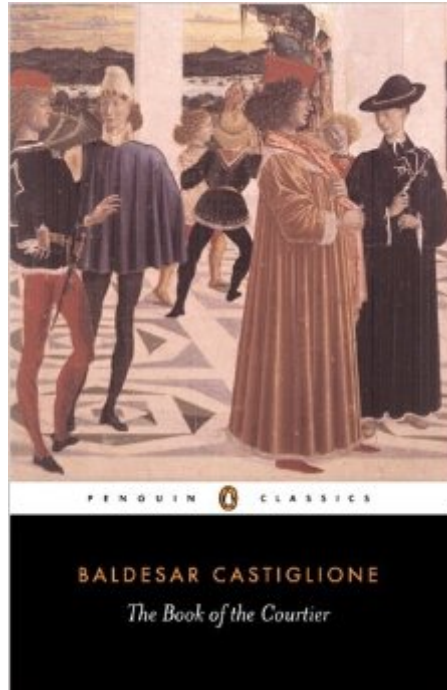


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The Book Of The Courtier (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

“The courtier has to imbue with grace his movements, his gestures, his way of doing things and in short, his every action” In *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), Baldesar Castiglione, a diplomat and Papal Nuncio to Rome, sets out to define the essential virtues for those at Court. In a lively series of imaginary conversations between the real-life courtiers to the Duke of Urbino, his speakers discuss qualities of noble behaviour – chiefly discretion, decorum, nonchalance and gracefulness – as well as wider questions such as the duties of a good government and the true nature of love. Castiglione’s narrative power and psychological perception make this guide both an entertaining comedy of manners and a revealing window onto the ideals and preoccupations of the Italian Renaissance at the moment of its greatest splendour. George Bull’s elegant translation captures the variety of tone in Castiglione’s speakers, from comic interjections to elevated rhetoric. This edition includes an introduction examining Castiglione’s career in the courts of Urbino and Mantua, a list of the historical characters he portrays and further reading. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Whether or not this work can be considered relevant in today's society is not a factor here. As a testimony to fifteenth century Italian Court Life it is unparalleled. This delightful four-part book at the social nobility of the Italian Renaissance opens with an apology by Baldesar on the quality of his writing. Something that was clearly debated after Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio as there is somewhat of a lengthier side discussion on the merits of using the vernacular in written speech partway through the first 'book'. The 'handbook' opens with the matriarchal Duchess ordering that a game be played and that signora Emilia decide the nature of it. It is first set to Count Lodovico to describe those qualities best attributed to a courtier with the rest of the 'players' questioning or discussing his points further. The Count states that a good courtier should possess charm, be handsome, be of noble birth, modest, physically fit, be good at sports, should both observe and imitate those good qualities of other courtiers, be a good dancer, have an appreciation of music, letters and art, not be affectatious, be an above average scholar in the humanities and that his first and truest profession be that of arms. Quite a long section is taken with a development on the theory of writing and letters which has many references to the desired quality of those in the ancient world. Indeed, Castiglione holds up those practices of the ancient world in high esteem as being worthy of the perfect courtier. The second book is to be continued by Duke Federico as to how and when the courtier should put the desired courtier qualities into practice.

Castiglione's "Courtier" is one of many books outlining protocol and proper behavior of the sophisticated elite. It might suffice to say that he was in some way the Emily Post of his era however, it seems that this work was more far reaching than this. The Courtier is a fascinating book that is actually more useful in studying the renaissance than Machiavelli's "The Prince" (which I do recommend as well) since its detail on why people should act as proscribed is directly taken from real events and people and it is less a work of philosophy and more a work centered about real action in living. I recommend this work highly to everyone wishing to learn more about this age. This version is far better than the one I first read and it offers decent commentary to help elucidate the reader. Castiglione was extraordinarily fond of Federigo the duke of Urbino with whom he fictitiously converses in this work. I am inclined to believe, though possibly naively, that the fictitious conversations outlined in this work, though not actual, may have been a summation of actual conversations that Castiglione and Federigo actually had. We should remember that Federigo was a model duke and Urbino was the model court of renaissance Italy. Federigo was a lover of learning and the arts and an able ruler willing to give audience to any of his subjects. He also was a more than able military commander who was just in to his men and equally just to those whom he fought

against. In short he was the finest example of a renaissance prince. Urbino, though far smaller than Florence, Venice, Genoa or Rome was a very well organized and lovely court that was a favorite place, not only for Castiglione, but also for many artists including Leonardo Da Vinci.

There really was a Camelot. But it was in Italy. Urbino in northern Italy to be exact, in the 1500s. Perched on top of a couple of hills in the region Le Marche, Urbino was ruled by the Montefeltro family. From 1444 to 1482 Federigo de Montefeltro skillfully steered his tiny domain through the rough storms of Italian Renaissance realpolitik. Federigo was a successful soldier of fortune yet maintained one of the largest libraries in Italy, spoke Latin, read Aristotle, helped orphans and in general earned the love of his people. He built a beautiful fairy-tale palace and had Paolo Uccello and Piero della Francesca decorate it. His less fortunate son Guidobaldo inherited this charming and well-run dukedom. Guidobaldo married the cultivated Elisabetta of the Gonzaga family from Mantua. He was an invalid and not made of his father's stern military stuff. A victim of the brilliant military campaigns of Cesare Borgia that so enchanted Machiavelli, Guidobaldo was temporarily deposed. When the Borgias (Cesare and his father Pope Alexander VI) died, the people of Urbino rose up, drove out Borgia's soldiers and cheered Guidobaldo and Elisabetta upon their return. For the next few years the court of Elisabetta and Guidobaldo was the most beautiful, enlightened, genteel place on earth. They attracted musicians, scholars and artists. Conversation was honed into a fine art. Into this paradise strode our Lancelot, Baldassare Castiglione, a diplomat descended from minor Italian nobility. He loved Elisabetta, but as far as we know the devotion remained platonic. It is because of Castiglione that we believe we have a sense of what the court of Montefeltro was like, or at least how they would have liked to have been remembered.

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