

# 'A Gentlewoman of the Courte': Introducing and Translating the Court Lady



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*Abstract: Baldassarre Castiglione's Book of the Courtier was a bestseller of the Renaissance period, inspiring an English translation by Thomas Hoby. Both texts include an extended discussion of the Court Lady, cultivate a female readership, and claim to have been written in part due to the intervention of ladies. However, the introductory materials written by both the Italian author and the author of the English translation render the role of the Court Lady contradictory and unclear, illustrative of the ideal described in Book III that is impossible to achieve, much like the ideal of the Courtier himself. Ultimately a vassal of the prince, the Courtier is in a position in which he must gain power chiefly through persuasion, and the books too have an interconnected power relationship with the women behind their respective publications. Through this grounding that yields the accountability for the works to women, both Castiglione and Hoby are able to appeal to Ladies and instruct them within the bodies of their texts, simultaneously affording them power and tempering it. By acting on the implicit suggestions of women and mixing inflated commendation of them with slight and nuanced disparagement, Castiglione and Hoby are able to convey a complicated relationship between two disenfranchised groups trying to negotiate their authority by both granting and withdrawing power from the other.*

A bestseller of the Renaissance period, Baldassarre Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (*Libro del cortegiano*) and its subsequent English translation by Thomas Hoby, has claimed much critical attention, from Vittoria Colonna's analysis of Castiglione's text

in her letter to the author to recent scholarly classics in their own right, such as Peter Burke's *The Fortunes of the Courtier*.<sup>1</sup> Despite the significance of the Lady within the framework of the text (Castiglione devotes an entire book to the Lady of the Court), twentieth-century feminist critics, including Valeria Finucci and Carla Freccero, have argued that perhaps the role of the Court Lady in Castiglione was not as progressive as previous commentary had suggested — though the Ladies command a certain 'power', they do not engage much in the discourse, and serve as a mirror to the disenfranchised courtiers themselves, continuously negotiating authority in large part through acts of charm and submission.<sup>2</sup> There has not yet been much critical attention paid to how the role of the Lady is addressed in Hoby's translation, and with this essay I would like to begin this dialogue. In focusing on Castiglione's introductory epistle, Hoby's translation thereof, and the translator's own independent introduction, I intend to complicate the construction of the Court Lady, and the authors' views towards her, by analysing their words on their respective patrons (a term which I am using broadly): Vittoria Colonna and Elizabeth Parr. The introductions prove to be revealing portrayals of the authors' contradictory views of the Court Lady, and how they negotiate power held between themselves and the Ladies.

Responding to Castiglione's emphasis on the Lady throughout *Il cortegiano*, Valeria Finucci comments that the work is nevertheless centered around men. In her book *The Lady Vanishes*, she argues:

Originating in a woman's rooms, regulated by a woman embodying vaguely military features, [...] published because of the disobedience of a woman, Vittoria Colonna, [...] *Il libro del cortegiano* nonetheless remains peculiarly and at all levels an Oedipal and homocentric narrative.<sup>3</sup>

Her argument can be substantiated by Castiglione's introduction, which mentions two women, yet dwells more on issues relating to men. He starts his introduction discussing the two dukes before Colonna, and mentions a long list of deceased men

before addressing the woman he deems more worthy than everyone else, the Duchess. Much of the movement of the introduction deals with his own feelings rather than the particular women he honours: he feels a certain annoyance at Colonna, and sorrow over the Duchess's death, since he claims to have been more attached to her than to the others. Ultimately, he is more concerned with the Courtier than the Court Lady (after all, the title of the work is *Il cortegiano*, despite one book dealing almost exclusively with the Court Lady): 'it is so difficult, and well-nigh impossible, to find a man as perfect as I wish the Courtier to be'.<sup>4</sup> If the male Courtier is the focus of his book, why does Castiglione take pains to address the women important to its production, and why does he devote one quarter of his work to the Court Lady? And, when the text is translated, why does Hoby also frame his narrative with women, only to create a homocentric work?

Writing in vernacular Italian rather than Latin, and in a middle register — which would have been spoken by the Courtier himself — Castiglione purposely renders his text in a language accessible to many readers. Just as Boccaccio addresses (albeit in a manner that is tongue-in-cheek), the 'graziosissime donne' ('most gracious ladies'), his presumed readers of the Decameron, Castiglione shapes his dialogue around a framework of women, perhaps with less satirical intent. The reception of *The Cortegiano* seems to have some reliance on female readership, even if we do not take Castiglione's own words literally within his introduction. Discussing the reception of the book in Italy, Burke writes, 'we learn that Irene di Spilimbergo, a noblewoman from Friuli, had a copy of the Courtier as one of her constant companions [...] She was probably not alone in her tastes'.<sup>5</sup> Burke uses the publishing history of women's writings to support his statements, and — as the Courtier depicted women outside of the role of mother, daughter or wife — he suggests that Castiglione's dialogue gave women the 'courage to write and to publish', or at least publishers tried 'to appeal to a female market which the Courtier had helped to legitimate'.<sup>6</sup> W. R. Albury suggests that during the night that the Courtier takes place, the women in the Urbino court

were required to adhere to 'near-silence' due to the presence of the papal visitors, though on most nights without these visitors the women would have enjoyed more freedom to speak.<sup>7</sup> The authorial choice to use this specific night depicting a situation that is restrictive for the women present is an odd one if Castiglione has the female reader in mind, as he seems to be withholding power from the women. With this consideration, when Castiglione writes that he hopes his work will be read by 'nobili cavalieri e valorose donne' ('noble cavaliers and virtuous ladies'), does he genuinely anticipate women to be among the primary readers of his text, or is he merely situating himself by means of his relationships with women?

As Castiglione describes in his introduction to *Il libro del cortegiano*, his book may never have been published were it not for Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara, who began to circulate his book, compelling him to publish. Hoby's translation too, may not have materialized were it not for the entreaty of another woman — Elizabeth Parr, the Marchioness of Northampton — for whom Hoby undertook the self-contained translation of Castiglione's Book Three, on the Court Lady.<sup>8</sup> Although Parr did not play a role in the remainder of his translation, were it not for her initial request the project may never have been undertaken. With two women being touted by authors as responsible for the execution of both early modern books, the figure of the Lady is constructed in each as immediately significant and centrally located within the texts.

As noted in Finucci's argument, above, Castiglione is seemingly using the Ladies to situate himself within a certain context. By establishing himself as the reluctant author, at the mercy of Colonna, Castiglione is exemplifying the *sprezzatura* that he discusses in the book. His work is so exceptional that it circulates against his will (through what he considers to be the indiscretion of Colonna), and he has no choice but to oversee the publication of *The Cortegiano* himself. Hoby, too, does this in his own introduction, first by explicitly stating that the undertaking of the translation was due to patronage, then by showing his unwillingness to continue until another

translator dies. The rhetorical resignation of both authors to finally carry out their work is a means to show the effortless nature of their art: a Lady asks for a book, and they follow through with no difficulty, becoming bestsellers overnight. Still, this *sprezzatura* could have been accomplished without implicating women in the discourse; why does Castiglione, and subsequently Hoby, rely so much on the Lady when there is no known readership made up of Ladies of Letters prior to the circulation of this particular book?

In the Preface to his edition of *The Book of the Courtier*, Daniel Javitch writes on the disempowerment of the Courtiers and how — to uphold the ideal discussed by Castiglione — they must serve with dignity despite limitations. Javitch asserts that the dialogue genre allows for a ‘give and take’ and ‘tempering’ of the quintessential Courtier, mediating what someone in this position can actually achieve, and arriving at a somewhat realistic model.<sup>9</sup> Likening the Courtiers’ own disenfranchisement with the status of women, Finucci suggests that the courtiers ‘have to adopt “woman’s ways” in relation to their prince/patron, they also have to cancel, at the verbal level and specifically within their group, the possibility that they themselves have been feminized in their daily lives’.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the role of the Court Lady, within the context of *The Cortegiano*, is one that is discussed due to and developed through the realization of the similar disenfranchised position of both the Courtier and the women of the time. In contrast to Finucci, David Quint argues that the court lady is more aligned with the prince than the courtier, with ladies having the ‘last say’: ‘It is for women that the male courtiers of the Courtier — and, by implication, its author, too — perform, an audience that both makes possible and perhaps limits the book’s achievement’.<sup>11</sup> Both Quint and Finucci point to a complicated and multi-layered relationship between the court lady and the male courtiers, as both push and pull at their respected boundaries. By rhetorically submitting to women, who I maintain do not have the same status as the prince, Castiglione and Hoby are illustrating their own disempowered status. By showing women in the context outside of domestic

relationships (though not outside of patrilineal lines), they are also assigning some of the prince's authority to that of the Lady. The negotiating of the Ladies' power is a means of also negotiating the power of the Courtier himself, as the role of the Lady serves as a mirror to the Courtier.

Although we do not take the writers' words at face value, in terms of rhetoric both Castiglione and Hoby are still shifting the control behind the publications of these books to women by mentioning them both, and thus they are also humbly submitting as servants to their respective Lady's influence by undertaking to write or publish the books. Despite this, both authors present the Lady in complicated terms: Castiglione praises Colonna while writing in a negative tone, and Hoby further modifies the sense of the Italian for a different understanding of the Lady in English. Throughout both discussions on the Lady, the focus is nevertheless on the male subjectivity of the writer; he is the one who feels, thinks, perceives, only reacting to women's actions outside of the text. Though Castiglione and Hoby cultivate the subject of the Lady when introducing their respective works, perhaps in an effort to gain female readership, their lens presents a conflicting view of the Lady, and the books still ultimately address the male figure of the Courtier.

The first woman mentioned by Castiglione, as noted above, is Vittoria Colonna, who he claims began to circulate his book, subsequently compelling him to revise and publish. Castiglione writes:

signora Vittoria della Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara, to whom I had already given a copy of the book, had, contrary to her promise, caused a large part of it to be transcribed, I could not but feel a certain annoyance, fearing the considerable mischief that can arise in such cases. Nevertheless, I trusted that the wisdom and prudence of that lady (whose virtue I have always held in veneration as something divine) would avail to prevent any wrong from befalling me for having obeyed her commands.<sup>12</sup>

At once, he paints Colonna as an instigator in both negative and positive terms as she causes trouble by not keeping her word, while also upholding her for her wisdom and

prudence, trusting that she would not allow wrong to come to his work. Still, though he is troubled that Colonna distributed his unedited text, he notes, parenthetically, that she is a woman of divine virtue, whom he reveres. In this manner, the reader is immediately presented with a dichotomy in the views of the Lady: she is venerated yet causes annoyance, is trusted yet does not keep her promises. Within the first two paragraphs in the book, before the actual work begins, there is already a complication of the Lady, and Castiglione's (and perhaps the proverbial Courtier's in general) attitudes toward the Lady are at once gracious and hostile.

Though Castiglione only mentions Colonna in relation to his need to revise and publish his *Cortegiano* quickly, Peter Burke in his *Fortunes of the Courtier* notes that it was Colonna who may have initiated his writing of the book as well:

The immediate occasion of the dialogue seems to have been provided by Vittoria Colonna, marchioness of Pescara and niece of Duke Guidobaldo of Urbino. It was she who apparently encouraged Castiglione to write — he referred in a letter of 1525 to her 'implicit command' (tacito commandamento), a request from a lady which it would have been uncourtly if not downright discourteous to refuse.<sup>13</sup>

Colonna's status as the marchioness of Pescara, and niece of Duke Guidobaldo, situates her in a position of power, regardless of her status as a woman. As Castiglione writes himself, it is in the Courtier's best interest 'to win him universal favor with lords and cavaliers and ladies', and with such a well-connected woman, related to his esteemed Duke, it is all the more important for Castiglione to please her.<sup>14</sup> Burke therefore explains that Castiglione must not refuse Colonna's request within his own courtly terms. The letter that Burke mentions is one that congratulates Colonna for her husband's heroic victory, and was written from Madrid on March 21, 1525. He writes:

Just as you desired some one to write the 'Cortegiano', and I, in my eagerness to do your pleasure, understood and felt this without a word or sign from you, and became obedient to your unspoken command, so I am sure that your spirit must know what I feel but cannot say,

all the more because your divine genius is able to penetrate farther than other human thought and can attain to the knowledge of things that are hidden from common mortals.<sup>15</sup>

With only a silent command, and possibly a completely unspoken desire for Castiglione to obey, how is Burke substantiating a seemingly concrete command or piece of encouragement — that is, how could it be uncourtly or discourteous to refuse something that is not expressed? Still, the original idea may have been Colonna's, and she may have alluded to her desires enough for Castiglione to mention this in his congratulatory letter to her, as well as actually begin work on the project. However, if Colonna did suggest that Castiglione begin writing on the ideal courtier, or even on the Court of Urbino in general, why would Castiglione fail to address this in his introduction, especially when he has already mentioned her?

Though he counteracts his biting remarks with pleasant and respectful words about Colonna in the introduction, for Castiglione to make unkind mention in his dedicatory letter — rather than state that he discovered unauthorized transcriptions circulating in Naples without naming names — reveals the betrayal that he felt from Colonna. As Burke notes, 'Unlike nine other noble ladies of the author's acquaintance, Vittoria did not receive a presentation copy of the printed version'.<sup>16</sup> However, Colonna offers Castiglione such a praising review of his work that an author should not easily forget,<sup>17</sup> and also expresses 'her regret if her indiscretion with regard to his book had caused him any annoyance', though she suggests that 'his vexation [...] was slightly unreasonable'.<sup>18</sup> Despite this, Castiglione's response is a 'politely cutting letter to the marchioness, which speaks of "theft" and the "fragments of the poor Courtier" to be seen in the hands of various people in Naples', as he likens his book to his own ill-treated child that Colonna wronged.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, it is Amedeo Quondam's view that Colonna presented a real danger in her circulation of the text, as she would have had an earlier version than what Castiglione had intended to publish.<sup>20</sup> However, Colonna's intervention likely worked to encourage Castiglione to revise and print his book more promptly, which speaks to the interconnected dynamics of their respective

relationships to the text. Each of these letter writers offer each other a contradictory message of apology or praise combined with a complaint, and although a private letter may be an appropriate venue for airing disagreements with an individual, it seems unlike the ideal Courtier to speak so harshly (even when blended with compliments) about one person in a book printed for public consumption.

Perhaps Castiglione does make mention of Colonna's original desire for a book to be written on the ideal courtier, if we return again to what he wrote about her in his introduction: 'having obeyed her commands'.<sup>21</sup> What are these *comandamenti* that Castiglione is obeying? Are these the instructions (unspoken or otherwise) that Colonna gave (or implied) to Castiglione, for him to write *The Cortegiano*, as Burke suggests? If this is so, he states that he had confidence in Colonna's good judgment enough to undertake the task of writing, and therefore also hesitantly trusted whom she may have distributed copies to, not finding danger until various people in Naples were attempting to get it printed. Castiglione constructs himself as an unwilling author, seemingly only writing, revising and publishing his work because of Colonna's hints and less-subtle actions, on his behalf, to increase his fame and get his work into the hands of readers. Although Castiglione's words about her seem severe, he is perhaps subtly giving her credit for the impetus for the writing and publishing of the book, mentioning her before any other ladies, and only after the two esteemed Dukes of Urbino.

The English counterpart of Vittoria Colonna, for Thomas Hoby's translation, was Elizabeth Parr, whom Hoby fails to mention by name in his epistle, probably due to political reasons.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, he only affords her a parenthetical nod in this letter, writing: 'this imagination [of translating *The Courtier*] prevailed in me a long space after my duetie done in translating the thirde booke (that entreateth of a Gentlewoman of the Courte)', though he refers to her by title in the heading of Book III and by name in a journal entry of his dated 1552.<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Parr, the marchioness of Northampton and the wife of the courtier and politician William Parr, is not given quite the same

weight by Hoby that Castiglione affords to Colonna due to her being left unnamed in the introductory framing materials of the entire work, but the impetus of a female instigator is conveyed there.<sup>24</sup> Because of her status as a second wife, Parr wished to assume:

the role of literary patroness, requesting that a portion of one of the most celebrated works of her age be translated into English. If this was, indeed, atypical behaviour on her part, we can only suppose that the text possessed some special significance at this juncture in her career.<sup>25</sup>

In this manner, Parr was trying to allocate some respect for herself and to 'advertise her status as a luminary of civil [secular] society', and the book dealing with the Court Lady was obviously most relevant for her as the new marchioness.<sup>26</sup>

Though Hoby omits Parr's name in the introductory materials, he does mention that there was a reason for his initial writing, and notes that it is a woman who encouraged him to write, unlike Castiglione who does not explicitly state that Colonna inspired him to begin work. Hoby, however, makes note of several people before he mentions the urging woman, filling five pages before mentioning his translation of the Third Book, whereas Castiglione places Colonna in a prominent, though conflictive, position in his introductory epistle. Though both of these authors acknowledge that each respective woman played a role in the writing of their books within their respective introductions, Hoby affords Parr unattributed yet explicit credit, while Castiglione somewhat antagonistically recognizes Colonna's contribution to the publication of his book, yet makes no explicit reference to her request as fuelling his motivation to write.

Although neither author fails to mention the woman behind his work, neither gives a full uncontentious account of her respective role. If we consider Hoby's description of the previous translator working on an English version of *Il cortegiano*, we see how he can speak of an anonymous and politically-charged person while still affording deference by way of compliment: 'perswaded thereto [to finish *The Courtier*], in that I was enfourmed, it was as then in some forwardness by an other, whose wit

and stile was greatly to be allowed, but sins prevented by death he could not finish it'.<sup>27</sup> Partridge posits that this previous translator was William Thomas, and that it would have been controversial to include his name, yet Hoby still manages to honour him. Compared to the anonymous 'Gentlewoman of the Courte', though he does refer to her with due respect, he does not compliment her or say anything beyond her vague title.<sup>28</sup> Her parenthetical inclusion is also telling: rather than being honoured for her previous patronage and suggesting the beginning of this translation, she is taken out of the central discussion and relegated to the side, leading the reader to question whether Book Three, or its patron, is significant to the translator at all.

Castiglione's praise is not as uneven as Hoby's, as he commends everyone he speaks of in his dedicatory letter, including Colonna herself. However, there is no room for negative remarks for anyone except for Colonna, and the rhetorical disparaging remarks about his own ineptitude as a 'painter'. Guidobaldo possesses virtues, the general company is composed of 'eccellenti persone', Alfonso Ariosto is described as 'giovane affabile, discreto, pieno di sauvissimi costumi', Giuliano de' Medici has 'bontà e nobil cortesia', Messer Bernardo has an 'acuta e piacevole prontezza d'ingegno', and finally there is Ottaviano Fregoso who is 'magnanimo, religioso, pien di bontà'.<sup>29</sup> Nearly every name that Castiglione mentions (and there are many) is showered with unchecked praise, except for Colonna, who does please Castiglione but only while simultaneously causing vexation, and Duke Francesco Maria delle Rovere, with whom Castiglione also had some grievances. The only other woman that Castiglione writes about is the Duchess who is the last member of the court mentioned and who elicits the highest praise of everyone (see discussion below). Despite his commendation of all parties mentioned, Castiglione only reserves his negative tone for addressing Colonna and Duke Francesco Maria (who are incidentally the only people still alive at the time of publication), thus presenting the reader with a complicated view of Colonna in light of the other persons discussed.

Hoby's own introductory epistle also mentions Colonna, independent of his translation of Castiglione. In contextualizing his work, Hoby lists the significant authors of the Italian peninsula, and thus the importance of Italian translators. He writes:

In Italye (where the most translation of authors is) not only for Philosophy, Logicke, Humanitie and all liberall Sciences both in Greeke and Latine (leaving a parte Barbaru, Naugerius, Sannazarus, Bembus, Lazarus [...]) Genua, Tomitanus, Robertellus, Manutius, Piccolhomineus [...] renowned throughout all Christendome: but also for the same in the vulgar tunge with little or no sight at al in the Latin, Aretino, Gelli (a tayler in Florence) the L. Victoria Columna, the L. Dionora Sanseverina, the L. Beatrice Loffreda, Veronica Gambera, Virginea Salvi and infinite other men and women are most famous throughout Italy, whose divine woorkes and excellent stile both in rime and prose geve a sufficient testimonye, not onely of their profounde knowledge and noble wit, but also that knowledge may be obtained in studying onely a mannes owne native tunge.<sup>30</sup>

In exalting his profession and importance as a man who can translate Italian, he also highly commends many Italian-born writers, those writing in Greek and Latin in addition to, significantly for Hoby, the vulgar tongue (note that most of the writers are given Latin names). Thus, Vittoria Colonna appears on a list of illustrious men and women, among Pietro Bembo, Aldus Manutius, Pietro Aretino and Veronica Gambara. Hoby crafts the list in a very real hierarchy, with the Italian writers listed after the Latin writers, and the women listed after the men. Still, Colonna is the first female writer mentioned, giving her a position of prominence, and she is denoted respectfully as 'the Lady'. Since Hoby had the possibility to list 'infinite other men and women' (or at least he had some other writers in mind), Colonna's being named affords her special attention from the reader, while also contrasting (specifically in Hoby's own introduction) with the unnamed Gentlewoman who served as patron to Hoby's translation of Book Three.

The fact that Hoby is listing women at all reveals much about the construction of this work. As is noted on the title page, Hoby's Courtyer is 'Very necessary and

profitable for younge gentilmen and gentilwomen abiding in court, palaice or place', constructing the Lady as a prominent reader of the work (as he would have known to be true of previous versions of *Il cortegiano*), Hoby may well like to please his female readership by making note of numerous Italian female writers.<sup>31</sup> Even so, the mention of female authors would not have been absolutely necessary for Hoby, so his inclusion of Colonna and the others is a deliberate choice, whether to appeal to female readers, to accurately represent Italian writers, or to work in tandem with Castiglione's work, which places women in a very visible position. All of the mentioned writers are said to be 'most famous throughout Italy', but Hoby is not appealing to these writers, who are by the time of his writing mostly deceased.<sup>32</sup> Rather, he is trying to drop several names in the hopes that his English reader will recognize at least a few, in order to give weight to his words and his translation. By including Colonna, whose name readers will come across within a few pages (even if they do not know of her yet) he is claiming greater authority for his writing.

These famous writers are the authors of 'divine woorkes', suggesting the highly moral and supreme quality of their writings. The use of the word 'divine', relating to God, grounds Italian writing as not only being essential reading to cultivate the English mind, but also to nourish the English soul.<sup>33</sup> If Hoby's reader may have doubted the virtue of Italians (due to authors like Machiavelli for example), here he is assuring the reader that the works are indeed divine, and Colonna's works are counted among these. Their style of writing, in poetry and prose is 'excellent', and they have 'profoude knowledge and noble wit', including Colonna who is described in similar terms by both Castiglione and Hoby (see below), yet receives questioning and discourtesy regarding her actions by Castiglione in proliferating his texts.<sup>34</sup> In a final means of orienting his translation, and as a segue to discuss translation in general, Hoby notes that because the Italians have managed to write on all manner of subjects in the vernacular, their writing is evidence of the ability to be learned despite having access only to one's native tongue. Hoby's discussion of Italian authors is

designed to substantiate the value of his undertaking, but also further contextualizes his work within a realm that is concerned with women, and in part owes itself to women, for as Hoby proves his worth by mentioning women like Colonna, he is the debtor to their already established merit. In this way, the writers, including the women, are situated as the excellent makers of divine works, who should be revered, and who are presented as a context to strengthen Hoby's translation, and thus the first English version of *Il cortegiano*.

Immediately following Hoby's epistle in the first printing (1561) of *The English Courtyer*, is the translated text of Castiglione's introduction. When we read Hoby's rendering of Castiglione's lines on Vittoria Colonna, we see a lessening of both his charge against Colonna, as well as a weakening of the praise afforded to Colonna. In this discussion, I will be focusing primarily on diction through close reading and how that can shift tone, rather than taking a holistic view of the entire translation. Hoby writes:

At such time therefore as I was in Spayne, being advertised out of Italy how the Lady Vittoria Colonna Marquesse of Pescara, unto whom in foretime I had graunted a Copie of this booke, contrarie to her promise, had made a great part of it to be copied out: it greeved me somewhat whether I would or no, standing in doubt of the sundrie inconveniences that in the like cases may happen. Yet had I a hope that the witt and wisdome of that Lady (whose troth I have alwaies had in reverence, as a matter from above) was sufficient to provide, not to be harmfull unto me my beeing obedient to her commaundement.<sup>35</sup>

Translating Castiglione's 'non potei non sentirme qualche fastidio' as 'it greeved me somewhat whether I would or no', Hoby suggests a greater aimlessness, rather than the helplessness that Castiglione expresses, yet Hoby lends greater weight in his choice of 'greeved' which indicates more pain than displeasure on account of the annoyance that 'fastidio' conveys.<sup>36</sup> Castiglione's 'multi inconvenienti' becomes implicitly less in number with Hoby's 'sundrie inconveniences', and alliteration is

employed by Hoby in 'witt and wisdome' which creates a more pleasing and less serious air than 'ingegno e prudenzia'.<sup>37</sup>

Hoby's use of 'troth' to replace Castiglione's 'virtú' seems like his least precise word choice. 'Troth', if a type of virtue, can be defined as faithfulness, honesty, loyalty and a pledge of faith or confidence, but does not encompass the full range of meaning afforded to *virtú* or the English equivalent virtue (being used as early as 1250).<sup>38</sup> Derived from Latin's *virtus* and coming from the word for man, *vir*, the word is imbued with all the possible implications of honouring a woman with the title of man (especially during the Renaissance when Latin was every intellectual's second language). In J. Florio's 1598 Italian-English dictionary, *A Worlde of Wordes*, English words provided for *vertù* include the masculine words 'manlines' and 'manhood' alongside 'vertue', 'honestie', 'strength', and 'grace'.<sup>39</sup> While 'honestie' may be in a similar register to Hoby's 'troth', of Middle English origin, the diction here allows the full significance of what Castiglione writes to dissipate. That is, rather than describing her as a woman held in such high esteem as to be likened to a man, Hoby instead characterizes Colonna through qualities that are similar but with less historical tenor and power, thus preventing her from being fully appreciated in the English. Due to virtue's significant religious connotations, Castiglione's subsequent proclamation that he reveres Colonna's virtue as a 'cosa divina' seems only emphatic, perhaps causing Hoby to wish to lessen the overwrought praise. However, because 'troth' can mean a pledge of confidence, Hoby instead emphasises Colonna's broken promise to Castiglione, further shifting the blame onto her without reallocating her divine attributes.

Just a few lines before Castiglione acknowledges Colonna, he writes about the two dukes he served at Urbino, mentioning Duke Guidobaldo's virtue, and in his translation Hoby chooses to keep the word. Castiglione writes, 'nell'animo mio era recente l'odor delle virtù del duca Guido'<sup>40</sup>, which Hoby renders as 'whyle the savour of the vertues of Duke Guidubaldo was fresh in my mynde'.<sup>41</sup> Apparently, the Duke

can easily have virtues in both Italian and English, while Vittoria Colonna has virtue in Italian, but troth in English. Because both persons in question are Italian, the lack of virtue cannot be due to where they are from, but since one is a man and the other a woman, we can posit that virtue is reserved for a man, while nothing higher than 'troth' can be warranted for a woman. However, this cannot be the case because Hoby readily translates 'le virtù della signora Duchessa' as 'the vertues of the Dutchesse'.<sup>42</sup> When Hoby unhesitatingly employs the English cognate for the Italian *virtù*, his noting Colonna for her 'troth' seems particularly out of place. Is this because of Castiglione's emphasis of plural virtues (*le virtù*) of the Duchess as opposed to the singular virtue (*la virtù*) of Colonna, compelling Hoby to read a shift in tone (also note that Guidobaldo has plural virtues)? Though both the Duke and the Duchess are deceased at the time of Castiglione's writing, Colonna is also deceased at the time of Hoby's writing, so why did Hoby not choose to honour her in the same manner that Castiglione commemorates the dead? Perhaps Hoby is in fact responding to Castiglione's negative tone regarding Colonna, and therefore tempering the excellence of the Lady in order to more greatly capture Castiglione's original manner.

Further reducing Castiglione's reverence, Hoby substitutes 'as a matter of above' for the Italian 'come cosa divina'. Just as virtue has many sacred connotations, so does divina or the English divine, whereas 'a matter of above,' while it does convey a metaphoric heavenly implication (in Florio, English translations for 'divino' include 'divine' and 'heavenlie' ), it does not necessarily do so in a manner that directly and literally relates to God.<sup>43</sup> Notably, despite Hoby's reluctance to translate Castiglione's discussion of Colonna as 'the virtue of whom I always held in veneration as something divine', he has no difficulty in calling Colonna's writing to be among the 'divine woorkes and excellent stile'<sup>44</sup> represented from Italian writers (see discussion above).<sup>45</sup> Though Hoby, a Protestant, may have had some ideological misgivings with Castiglione's use of the word 'divine' to describe people, when he allows it for literary works he is not consistent in his scruples, as Castiglione, a Catholic, is describing both

lady and her output in metaphorical language. In his selective diction, Hoby suggests that Colonna's production is to be held at a greater esteem than the woman herself.

Regardless of intention, Hoby's choice of 'troth' for 'virtue' and 'of above' for 'divine' lessens the praise that Castiglione affords to Colonna, though he also seems to diminish Castiglione's harshness towards her, and therefore mitigates the contrast between Castiglione's conflicting emotions. By creating a less clear dichotomy between scorn and esteem towards the woman who may have suggested the project to Castiglione and who prompted the publication of his book, Hoby seems to be affording some of the nuance that Castiglione lacked in his introduction, ultimately having his book behave more like the ideal courtier, though at the expense of Colonna's divine virtues, which are diminished to a more earthly domain.

The next woman mentioned by Castiglione, and thus by Hoby, is the Duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga, who ruled the Urbino Court with her husband Guidobaldo da Montefeltro. As her husband is ill and enfeebled, the Duchess is vested with more power than she may have enjoyed otherwise, and Castiglione describes her as leading the company to her personal chambers after supper as a general rule, and also in particular on the nights that *Il cortegiano* takes place. Because of her position as wife to an illustrious but absent husband, she is in a similar position to Colonna, whose husband was away on military campaigns most of their marriage until his early death, leaving Colonna in a position of independence. Unlike Castiglione's description of Colonna that presents conflicting tones, his words for the Duchess are of indisputably high praise. However, for the book she has a similar function to Colonna, as she is one of the agents — though in a more passive sense — behind the writing of the text, for she and her friend Emilia Pia are responsible for bringing together the illustrious men and women in the Court and for facilitating their company in her chambers, whether or not the game in question actually took place.<sup>46</sup>

After listing the men of the Court, Castiglione writes of the Duchess:

But what should not be told without tears is that the Duchess, too, is dead. And if my mind is troubled at the loss of so many friends and lords, who have left me in this life as in a desert full of woes, it is understandable that I should feel sorrow far more bitter for the death of the Duchess than for any of the others, because she was worth more than all the rest. Therefore, in order not to delay paying what I owe to the memory of so excellent a lady, and to that of the others who are no more, and moved too by the threat to my book, I have had it printed and published in such form as the brevity of time permitted.<sup>47</sup>

Before even stating who she is, Castiglione explains that he cannot help but shed a tear when mentioning this late person, showing her place of importance in his life and in the court. Further, he explains that the loss of all the others does not match the sorrow he feels for her, for '[the Duchess] was worth more than all the rest', putting her value in almost monetary terms (see discussion below). He also feels more connected to the Duchess than the others, emphasising his relationship with arguably the most powerful person of the Court. Interestingly, the next line reiterates his need to publish the book quickly, and here we see that it is actually to '[pay] what I owe to the memory of so excellent a lady', though he adds that another cause of his publication is the 'threat to my book'.

Since the Duchess is so significant to Castiglione, as he clearly demonstrates to the reader, and because he wishes to honor her memory by publishing his book, we must question why he did not publish the book earlier, and why he does not open with this beautiful memorial to the Duchess, instead of with a somewhat antagonistic acknowledgement of Colonna. Moreover, rather than letting the matter of the problem with the circulation of the book drop as it had been previously addressed, he reiterates again that the book was in danger. As the introductory remarks are more focused on his textual production than on the Duchess, in this instance was Castiglione really looking to commemorate the Duchess, or was he more concerned with trying to save his own legacy by overseeing the editing and publication of his book himself? Why is not the memory of the Duchess sufficient enough for publishing the book, and why does he diminish her memory by again recalling the danger that his book was facing?

Regarding Castiglione's introduction of the Duchess in his epistle, Hoby remains fairly faithful to the text, while only altering the flavor of a few particular words. To convey the notion of 'una solitudine piena d'affanni', Hoby describes 'a wildernes full of sorrow' (note that Singleton also uses the image of a desert to communicate 'solitudine'), as the English language may not be able to accommodate life 'as a solitude', the idea of a place can give a sense of the meaning.<sup>48</sup> A wilderness, however, immediately implies a life without structure, suggesting that Castiglione has lost order on account of these deaths. Castiglione's 'ragion è che molto piú acerbamente senta il dolore della morte della signora Duchessa' becomes 'reason would it should with much more grief beare the heaviness of the Dutchesse death', revealing nothing of the bitter pain that Castiglione feels, and replacing it with 'grief', which could read as a pain during Hoby's time, but is not modified with the bitterness of 'acerbamente'.<sup>49</sup> Again, Hoby appears to be lessening the effect that women have on Castiglione, as he decreased the praise granted to Colonna, he decreases the strong-felt bitterness and pain for a general malaise with grief, and the idea of a burden with heaviness.

Concerning the Lady herself, Hoby retains similar words to describe her, but is inconsistent with his possible preference for non-Latin etymologies.<sup>50</sup> For '[La signora Duchessa] molto piú di tutti gli altri valeva' Hoby writes 'she was more woorth then all the rest', trading the Latin origins of 'valeva' for an English word. While both words connote a monetary value, the Italian verb *valere* comes from the Latin verb *valere* meaning 'to be strong, powerful' (as in 'valour') in addition to 'to be of value, worth', whereas the English worth implies that something is deserving of respect in relation to its monetary terms.<sup>51</sup> If Hoby wanted to maintain this same etymological tradition by giving the Duchess both strength and respect, he could have easily substituted Castiglione's *valere* with the English *value*, especially since he is changing the part of speech of the word. Hoby does keep the next descriptor of the Duchess —

using the English excellent for the Italian *eccellente* — again revealing that he does not always attempt to find a non-Latinate word.

The most substantial change that Hoby makes to this section of Castiglione's introduction is that he diminishes the vexation that Castiglione feels concerning the 'danger of the book'. Hoby translates the Italian 'indotto ancora dal periculo del libro' to the English 'provoked also by the jeopardye of the booke'.<sup>52</sup> Although the English word provoke comes from the Latin *provocare*, just as the Italian *indurre* is Latin-derived, he chooses to change the word by not using the English *induce*, or any of the other choices in Florio (including 'to seduce' and 'to deceive').<sup>53</sup> In this case, 'provoke' seems the stronger word, causing Castiglione to feel more intense emotions as a result of the copying of his book. However, the substitution of 'jeopardye' for *periculo* only serves to temper Castiglione's thoughts. Whereas 'peril' would be the obvious choice, 'danger' also would have connoted a similar response, but 'jeopardye', deriving from the French *jeu parti*, relating to the game of Chess, seems like a much less risky position.<sup>54</sup> Though Hoby heightens Castiglione's response from *induce* to *provoke*, the downgrading of *peril* to *jeopardy* seems to lessen the overall sentiment of Castiglione's statement. Just as Hoby diminished Castiglione's praise for Colonna, he is again working to decrease the overall impact of Colonna's felt actions upon Castiglione.

The last time Castiglione mentions the Duchess in his dedicatory letter is when he uses his inability to represent her as a means of excusing himself from possible shortcomings in his writing, but also to segue into his choice of language, and why he was not incorrect in writing in a non-Tuscan tongue. Castiglione writes:

And, although I have endeavored to show in these conversations the qualities and conditions of those who are named therein, I confess that I have not even suggested, let alone expressed, the virtues of the Duchess, because not only is my style incapable of expressing them, but my mind cannot even conceive them[...].<sup>55</sup>

Though he attests to the high esteem in which he holds the members of the court through the course of his *Cortegiano*, he singles the Duchess out as the one whose virtues his mind cannot even comprehend. He says he is not capable of expressing her virtues, again, using the plural to describe her virtues (suggesting that she has many virtues, contrasted with Colonna's singular virtue, as discussed above). Though he is using the Duchess's name and is praising her, he does this, as Finucci suggests, to call attention to himself indirectly: he is incapable of understanding her virtues, and is therefore incapable of expressing them. But, as he explains in the next paragraph, he intends to be guided by his natural genius and instinct (that is, since he is imitating Boccaccio's less learned style), and thereby will prove himself wrong through the text, by successfully conveying to his reader the virtues of the Duchess and the other members of the Court. And, even though Castiglione states that he cannot possibly describe the virtues of someone like the Duchess, he attempts to do so, suggesting that he actually believes himself to be capable.

This last passage of Castiglione's is rendered into English by Hoby as follows:

And wher I have enforced my self to setfurth together with the communication the properties and condicions of such as are named in it, I confess I have not only not fully expressed, but not somuch as touched the vertues of the Dutchesse. Bicause not onlye my stile is unsuficient to express them, but also mine understanding to conceive them.<sup>56</sup>

Because neither Castiglione nor Hoby state that they cannot convey Colonna's virtue (or troth), Colonna is put in a describable position that both the writer and the reader can understand (whereas neither Hoby nor Castiglione admit to being able to express the Duchess's virtues). Hoby renders this passage quite faithfully, not just in terms of the 'vertues', but also in keeping 'express' for 'esprimere', and 'unsufficient' for 'non è sufficiente'. Thus, as the Italian paragraph is ultimately about Castiglione instead of about the Duchess, Hoby's proximal English continues the authorial subjectivity while also keeping the rhetorical modesty intact.

Both Castiglione and Hoby grapple with describing women in the introductory remarks to their respective versions of *The Book of the Courtier*, and with real women implicated in the engendering of the respective texts they have an obligation to delicately appeal to propriety in their discussion. Subjected to an interconnected power relationship with real women who sometimes serve as patrons or instigators, and who may be related to men who are more powerful than the writers in question, the texts themselves become part of a larger economy that must both stake claims for and temper their own power. Through including these women, and in some ways yielding their own authority in the production of their own books, they are reflecting back at a female readership that must carefully negotiate their own power and lack thereof in the courts of the early modern period. By implicit suggestion on the part of women leading to action on the part of male authors, and the mix of hyperbolic commendation and reserved disparagement in describing women associated with the works, Castiglione and Hoby are able to convey a complicated relationship between two disenfranchised groups trying to stake a claim for mediated authority for themselves by both granting and withdrawing power from the other.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Julia M. Cartwright Ady, *The Perfect Courtier, Baldassare Castiglione: His Life and Letters, 1478–1529*, 2 vols (New York: Dutton, 1927); Peter Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier: The European Reception of Castiglione's Cortegiano* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Carla Freccero, 'Politics and Aesthetics in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*: Book III and the Discourse on Women', in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. by David Quint, Margaret W. Ferguson, Wayne A. Rebhorn, and G. W. Pigman III (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), pp. 259–79. In several instances, the women do assert power, as Emilia silences Federico in I.39 and the Duchess declares that Gasparo and Roberto are wrong at II.35 and III.60, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Finucci, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> 'essendo tanto difficile e quasi impossibile trovar un omo così perfetto come io voglio che sia il Cortegiano' from Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, ed. by Vittorio Cian (Firenze: Sansoni, 1929), p. 9. English translation in text above: of Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. by Daniel Javitch, trans. by Charles S. Singleton (New York: Norton, 2002), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Burke, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Burke, pp. 50–51.

<sup>7</sup> W. R. Albury, *Castiglione's Allegory: Veiled Policy in The Book of the Courtier (1528)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 44–45.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hoby, *The Book of the Courtier* (New York: AMS Press, 1967), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Javitch, 'Preface', in *The Book of the Courtier*, by Baldessare Castiglione (New York: Norton, 2002), p. xiv.

<sup>10</sup> Finucci, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> David Quint, 'Courtier, Prince, Lady: The Design of the *Book of the Courtier*', in *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. by Daniel Javitch (New York: Norton, 2002), pp. 352–65 (p. 354).

<sup>12</sup> 'la signora Vittoria dalla Colonna, marchesa di Pescara, alla quale io già feci copia del libro, contra la promessa sua ne avea fatto transcrivere una gran parte, non potei non sentirne qualche fastidio, dubitandomi di molti inconvenienti, che in simili casi possono occorrere; nientedimeno mi confidai che l'ingegno e prudenzia di quella Signora (la virtù della quale io sempre ho tenuto in venerazione come cosa divina) bastasse a rimediar che pregiudicio alcuno non mi venisse dall'aver obedito a'suoi comandamenti' from Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, p. 2. English translation in text above: Singleton, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Burke, p. 33.

<sup>14</sup> 'per acquistar quella universal grazie de'signori, cavalieri e donne' from Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, II.17. English translation in text above: Singleton, II.17.

<sup>15</sup> 'Che se, avendo Vostra Signoria avuto desiderio, che qualc'uno scrivesse il *Cortegiano*, senza ch'ella me lo dicesse, o pur'accennasse, l'animo mio, come presago, e proporzionato in qualche parte a servirla così, come essa a comandarmi, lo intese e conobbe, e fu obbedientissimo a questo suo tacito comandamento; non si può se non pensare, che l'animo suo medesimamente debba intendere quello ch'io penso, e non dico; e tanto più chiaramente, quanto che quelli sublimi spirit dell'ingegno suo divino penetrano più che alcun'altro intendimento umano alla cognizione d'ogni cosa, ancor'alli altri incognita' from Baldassarre Castiglione, *Opere volgari e latine* (Padova: Presso Giuseppe Comino, 1733),

p. 293. English translation in text above: *Baldassare Castiglione: The Perfect Courtier: His Life and Letters 1478–1529*, trans. by Julia Mary Cartwright Ady, vol. 2, (London: John Murray, 1908) pp. 268–269.

<sup>16</sup> Burke, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> '[...] io non ho visto mai, nè credo vedere altra opera in prosa meglio o similie, nè forse meritamente seconda a questa; perchè oltra el bellissimo soggetto et novo, la excellentia del stile è tale che con una suavità non mai sentita vi conduce in uno amenissimo et fruttifero colle, salendo sempre senza farve accorger mai di non esser pur nel piano dove entrasti [...]' from Vittoria Colonna, *Rime e lettere di Vittoria Colonna* (Florence: Barèra, 1860), p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Cartwright, vol. 2, p. 368.

<sup>19</sup> Burke, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Amadeo Quondam, "Questo povero Cortegiano": Castiglione, *il Libro, la Storia* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), pp. 505–7.

<sup>21</sup> Singleton, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion on this, see Mary Partridge, 'Thomas Hoby's English Translation of Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*' in *The Historical Journal*, 50.4 (2007), pp. 769–786.

<sup>23</sup> Hoby, p. 10. Text from the journal entry, quoted by Partridge, p. 772: 'the first thing I did was to translate into Englishe the third booke of the 'Cowntisan', which my Ladie Marquesse had often willed me to do, and for lacke of time ever differed it'.

<sup>24</sup> Partridge, p. 772.

<sup>25</sup> Partridge, p. 773.

<sup>26</sup> Partridge, p. 773.

<sup>27</sup> Hoby, pp. 8–9.

<sup>28</sup> Partridge, pp. 775–779.

<sup>29</sup> Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, pp. 1–3.

<sup>30</sup> Hoby, pp. 8–9.

<sup>31</sup> Hoby, title page.

<sup>32</sup> Hoby, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Hoby, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Hoby, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Hoby, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> 'Fastidious', referring to a feeling of unpleasantness or disgust, was a fairly new word, but in use, see *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED; "fastidious, adj.". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68445?redirectedFrom=fastidious>> (Accessed 10 November 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, p. 2.; Hoby, p. 15

<sup>38</sup> "virtue, n.". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. ><http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223835?rskey=611um2&result=1>> (Accessed 10 November 2016).

<sup>39</sup> J. Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes* (London, 1598) <<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/florio1598/>>, p. 446. (Accessed 26 January 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Modern English from Singleton, p. 3: 'as the savor of Duke Guido's virtues was fresh in my mind'.

<sup>41</sup> Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, p. 1, and Hoby, p. 14, emphases added.

<sup>42</sup> Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, p. 4, and Hoby, p. 17, emphases added.

<sup>43</sup> Florio, p. 110.

<sup>44</sup> My translation.

<sup>45</sup> Hoby, p. 8, emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion on how the women do not actually participate in the dialogue, see Valeria Finucci's 'The Production of Discourse or How to Be Left Out by Staying In' in *The Lady Vanishes*, p. 28–45.

<sup>47</sup> 'Ma quello che senza lacrime raccontar non si devría, è che la signora Duchessa essa ancor è morta; e se l'animo mio si turba per la perdita di tanti amici e signori miei, che m'hanno lassato in questa vita come in una solitudine piena d'affanni ragion è che molto piú acerbamente senta il dolore della morte della signora Duchessa, che di tutti gli atri, perché essa molto piú di tutti gli altri valeva, ed io ad essa molto piú che a tutti gli altri era tenuto. Per non tardare adunque a pagar quello che io debbo alla memoria di cosí eccellente signora, e degli alrti che piú non vivono, indotto ancora dal periculo del libro, hollo fatto imprimere e publicare tale qual dalla brevità del tempo m'è stato concesso' from Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, pp. 3–4. English translation in text above: Singleton, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Hoby, p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> "grief, n.". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/81389?rskey=3ysbUI&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> (Accessed 10 November 2016).

<sup>50</sup> 'Sir John Cheke, [...] who taught Thomas Hoby at Cambridge, advised him that "our own tongue should be written clean and pure, unmixed and unmangled with borrowing of other tongues"', in Burke, p. 66.

<sup>51</sup> Definitions from John C. Traupman's *The New College Latin & English Dictionary*.

<sup>52</sup> Hoby, p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Florio, p. 177.

<sup>54</sup> "jeopardy, n.". OED Online. September 2016. Oxford University Press. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/101063?rskey=FWoEpB&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> (Accessed 10 November 2016).

<sup>55</sup> 'E come ch'io mi sia sforzato di dimostrar coi ragionamenti le proprietà e condizioni di quelli che vi sono nominati, confesso non avere, non che espresso, ma né anco accennato le virtù della signora Duchessa; perché non solo il mio stile non è sufficiente ad esprimerle, ma pur l'intelletto ad immaginarle [...]'] from Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, p. 4. English translation in text above from Singleton, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Hoby, p. 17.



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