

Baldassare Castiglione was the Bishop of Avila and a well-known Venetian. His book of manners and polite society, *The Courtier*, was published in 1528 and was translated into several languages. A whole generation of young courtiers diligently followed his advice. In the selections on these two pages, Castiglione describes a courtly man and a courtly woman.

A Courtly Man

... Then coming to the bodily frame, I say it is enough if this be neither extremely short nor tall, for both of these conditions excite a certain contemptuous surprise, and men of either sort are gazed upon in much the same way that we gaze on monsters. Yet if we must offend in one of the two extremes, it is preferable to fall a little short of the just measure of height than to exceed it. For besides often being dull of intellect, men thus huge of body are also unfit for every exercise of agility, which thing I should much wish in the Courtier. And so I would have him well built and shapely of limb, and would have him show strength and lightness and suppleness, and know all bodily exercises that befit a man of war ...

Both for his own sake and for that of his friends, he must understand the quarrels and differences that may arise, and must be quick to seize an advantage, always showing courage and prudence in all things. Nor should he be too ready to fight except when honor demands it. For

besides the great danger ... he who rushes into such affairs recklessly and without urgent cause, merits the severest censure even though he be successful. But when he finds himself so far engaged that he cannot withdraw without reproach, he ought to be most deliberate, both in the preliminaries to the duel and in the duel itself, and always show readiness and daring. ...

The Courtly Woman

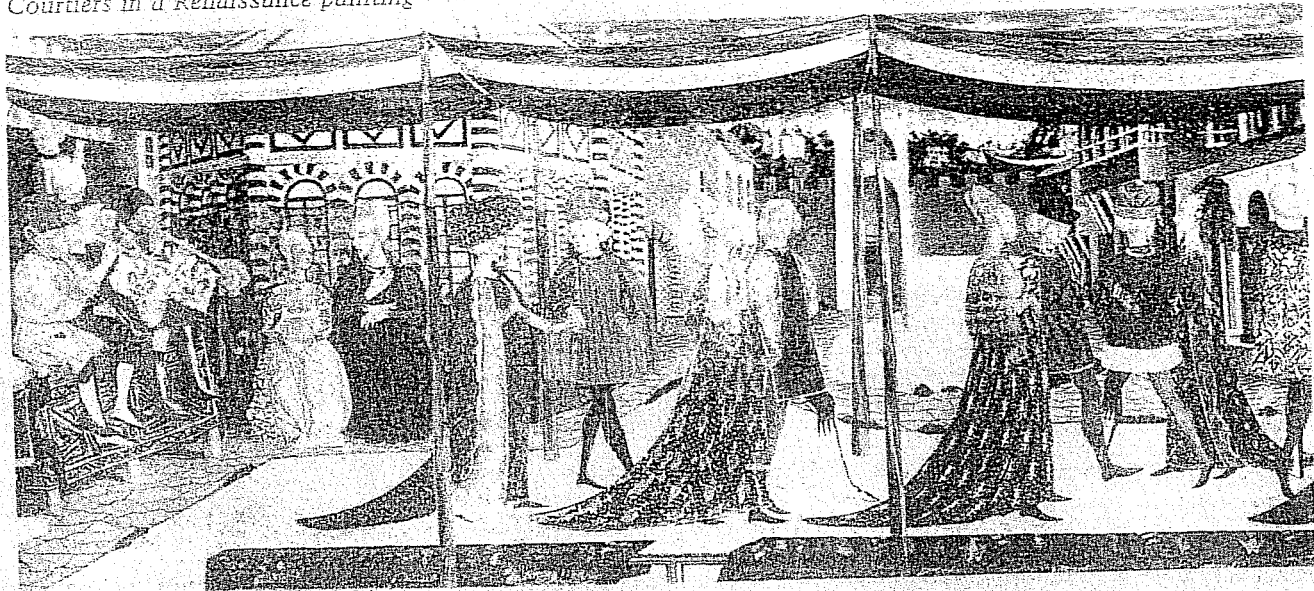
... Methinks it is also fitting to tell ... of the Court Lady and when I have done this, I shall think myself quit of the greater part of my duty. Laying aside, then, those faculties of the mind that she ought to have in common with the Courtier (such as prudence, magnanimity, continence, and many others), and likewise those qualities that befit all women (such as kindness, discretion, ability to manage her husband's property and her house and children if she be married, and all those capacities that are requisite in

a good housewife), I say that in a lady who lives at court methinks above all else a certain pleasant affability is befitting, whereby she may be able to entertain politely every sort of man with agreeable and seemly [solemn] converse, ...

And since words that carry no meaning of importance are vain, ... the Court Lady must have ... knowledge of many things, ... Let her not go about mingling serious matters with her playful or humorous discourse, or jests and jokes with her serious discourse. And let her not stupidly

pretend to know that which she does not know, but modestly seek to do herself credit in that which she does know, ... In this way she will be adorned with good manners, and will perform with perfect grace the bodily exercises proper to women. Her discourse will be rich and full of prudence, virtue, and pleasantness; and thus she will be not only loved but revered by everyone, and perhaps worthy to be placed side by side with this great Courtier as well in qualities of the mind as in those of the body.

Courtiers in a Renaissance painting



The Ideal of the Well-Rounded Man

The Greeks believed that a man ought to be well-rounded—that he should develop every aspect of his personality. Count Baldassare Castiglione, a sixteenth-century Italian diplomat, combined this ideal with Renaissance ideals in a book called The Courtier. As the title implies, Castiglione was writing for the people in the courts of the nobility, not for the merchants and craftsmen in the cities and towns.

For this evening's game, let us select someone to portray a perfect courtier. He should explain all of the conditions and special qualities that a courtier must have; if he mentions something that is not correct, anyone may correct him. . . .

Since doing the same thing over and over again is tiresome, we must vary our life with different occupations. For this reason, I would have our courtier sometimes take part in quiet and peaceful exercises. If he is to escape envy and appear agreeable to everyone, the courtier should join others in what they are doing. Yet he should always be careful to do those things that are praiseworthy. He must

use good judgment to see that he never appears foolish. But let him laugh, joke, banter, frolic, and dance, yet in such a way that he shall always appear genial and discreet. And in whatever he does or says, let him do it with grace.

I would have the courtier know literature, in particular those studies known as the humanities. He should be able to speak not only Latin but Greek, as well. Let him read and know the Roman and Greek poets, orators, and historians. Let him be proficient in writing verse and prose, particularly in our own, vulgar language. Besides gaining enjoyment for himself, the courtier will find that his writings will also entertain the ladies, who are usually fond of such things. If the courtier cannot attain perfection in this art, he should be careful to see that no one reads what he writes so that others will not laugh at him. Instead, he should show his writings only to a trusted friend. Even if he does not become perfect in the art of writing verse and prose, he should still practice it so that he will at least be able to judge the work of others.

My lords, you must know that I am not content with the courtier unless he is also a musician. Besides being able to read and understand the music, he must be able to play the different instruments. Music is the best relaxation or medicine for a troubled man. Moreover, it is a most becoming and praiseworthy pastime during leisure hours, especially in the court, where it relieves the boredom and pleases the ladies, whose tender and gentle spirits are affected by the harmony and are filled with sweetness. . . .

I wish to discuss another matter, which I think is very important and should not be overlooked by our courtier. He should know how to draw and paint.

Do not be surprised that I believe the courtier should know this art, which today seems to be practiced only by artisans and not by gentlemen. I remember having read that the ancients, especially in Greece, had the boys of noble birth study painting in school. They believed it was an honorable and necessary thing, and it was recognized as the first of the liberal arts. At the same time they forbade slaves to practice the art. Among the Romans, too, it was held in highest honor. . . .

And truly one who does not honor this art seems unreasonable to me. This universe that we see—the vast heaven so richly adorned with shining stars, the earth circled by seas, varied with mountains, valleys, and rivers and decorated with so many different trees, beautiful flowers, and grasses—is a great and noble picture, painted by the hand of nature and of God. Whoever is capable of copying the picture in his own painting seems to me to deserve great Praise.