

**THE PROBLEM OF COUNSEL REVISITED:
MORE, CASTIGLIONE AND
THE RESIGNATION OF OFFICE
IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY**

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Princely counsel, involving the courtier's precarious engagement of the ruler's affections for the hazardous task of guiding them, constitutes the veritable heart of sixteenth-century politics. Amidst the numerous contemporary manuals on the subject, one source has been largely overlooked: the first half of Book IV of Castiglione's *Courtegianno*, used here to illuminate by contrast the case of the conscience-driven counselor become councillor of a tyrant. Viewed in this context, John Guy's representation of More as "Reluctant Courtier" takes on greater depth. In More's two different processes of resignation, further light is cast upon his dilemma and the dilemma of politics in general. This article seeks thus to apply the contemporary mirror afforded by Castiglione's *Courtegianno* to Thomas More's political career.

Key-words: politics, counselor, councillor, courtier.

Conseiller un prince, ce qui oblige le courtisan à gagner son affection afin de pouvoir guider celle-ci, tâche hasardeuse s'il en est, constitue l'essence même de la politique au XVI^e siècle. Parmi les nombreux manuels écrits sur ce sujet à l'époque, une source a été en grande mesure négligée. Il s'agit de la première moitié du Livre IV du *Courtier* de Castiglione. Nous l'utilisons ici pour mettre en valeur par contraste la situation d'un conseiller, fortement guidé par sa conscience, qui devient membre du conseil auprès d'un tyran. Vue dans ce contexte, la représentation de More comme

* As ever I want to thank Peter Kaufman and Melissa Bullard for their reading of and suggestions for the present paper. But I also want to express my gratitude to Father Marc'hadour and the editors of *Moreana* for their further suggestions as well as to the Italian Castiglione scholar who together conspired to remind me of the quite relevant passage regarding the royal lion in Roper which should have been included in the first place.

“courtier malgré lui” offerte par John Guy gagne en profondeur. De même, dans le cas des deux processus de démission vécus par More, ce contexte éclaire le dilemme de ce dernier ainsi que celui de la politique en général. Cet article cherche donc à démontrer comment la carrière politique de Thomas More se reflète dans le miroir de la société contemporaine présenté dans le *Courtisan* de Castiglione.

Mots-clés : politique, conseiller, membre du conseil, courtisan.

Ser consejero de un príncipe implica que el cortesano tenga que ganarse la afección del soberano para poder guiarlo, una tarea arriesgada que es la esencia de la política del siglo 16. Entre los numerosos manuales escritos sobre el tema, existe una fuente que no ha sido contemplada: la primera mitad del Libro IV del *Cortesano* de Castiglione. Utilizaremos esta fuente para ilustrar por medio del contraste el caso del consejero, guiado por su conciencia, quien se convierte en miembro del consejo de un tirano. En este contexto, la representación que de Moro hace John Guy como el “Cortesano Renuente” cobra una mayor profundidad. En ambos procesos de renuncia de Moro, este contexto aclara el dilema en el que se encuentra y el de la política en general. El objeto de este artículo consiste en mostrar cómo el espejo contemporáneo presentado por el *Cortesano* de Castiglione influenció la carrera política de Tomás Moro.

Palabras clave: política, consejero, concejal, cortesano.

Over twenty years ago J. H. Hexter published a paper in *Albion* on the question of More and princely counsel. Therein he tightened the focus on what amounted to being possibly the greatest single achievement of his professional career: namely, the reconstruction of the first book of *Utopia* as the Dialogue of Counsel in terms of More’s personal development, its originality stemming from a unique conjunction of events, problems and opportunities in More’s own life so that the book becomes a sort of internal dialogue.¹ Hexter reminded us of the paramount importance that the counseling of one’s prince represents the very marrow of political life at the beginning of the sixteenth century, that it brings into focus the persisting riddle of

¹ J. H. Hexter, “Thomas More and the Problem of Counsel,” *Albion*, 10 (1978): 55-66, esp. 59-61.

attempting to square private ideals with public service. Two further points of relevance here emerged from the article: first, that the existential situation of counsel requires the forsaking of the declamatory for the persuasive—“not the way of declamation but the way of calculation”;² secondly, that the Dialogue of Counsel leads not to “a problem solved but a dilemma made explicit and a paradox identified (...) the paradox that generates the dilemma, it just sits there staring back at us.”³ It would seem therefore an act of folly, or arrogance, to attempt to add anything to such a beautiful analysis of the historical import and existential drama created by the problem of counsel. Nevertheless for any historian of sixteenth-century Europe the problem haunts—and inspires.

In his generous reconstruction of More in the world of princely counsel Hexter included within his effective orbit of consideration such contemporaries as Fortescue, Commynes and in greater detail Machiavelli along with Claude de Seyssel.⁴ In his 1973 monograph, *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation: More, Machiavelli and Seyssel*, Hexter made two points which assume importance for our argument here: first, that while the councillor as defined by Hythlodæus may in his competence and conscientious pursuit of duty be “job-oriented,” most councillors are in contrast “status-oriented” in seeking merely job security or self-advancement, thereby creating a tension for the conscientious councillor;⁵ secondly, that Hexter perceptively recognized the abnormality of the *Prince* and of *Utopia*, thereby throwing into relief the normality expressed by Seyssel in his prosaic, less dilemmatic analysis of the French

Almost without exception historians have failed to include within the compass of discourse concerning counsel More’s

² Ibid., 63.

³ Ibid.; 65.

⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁵ J. H. Hexter, *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation: More, Machiavelli and Seyssel* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 86.

immediate contemporary, Baldassare Castiglione.⁶ Yet in two respects the author of *The Book of the Courtier* would seem to qualify: that if the mini-states of northern and central Italy have in the course of the fifteenth century gone over to princely government, in keeping with the larger, northern European monarchies, then the immediate milieu of the monarch, the court, becomes the social, cultural as well as political vortex of activity and its activities, no matter how apparently trivial, quintessentially political in their meaning; secondly, in a very specific and particular sense Castiglione comes to encounter and attempts to resolve the very problem of counsel that would lead his contemporary More to the block in Henrician England. Thus our task here will be first to broaden our focus and draw the work of Castiglione's *Courtier* within the political orbit of princely counsel, where it both historically and properly belongs; then to reconsider More's career in the contrastive and reflective glass thereby provided.

But first let us review and consolidate our understanding of Thomas More's treatment of counsel prior to his becoming a councillor. If the raw material of a princely councillor is the inevitable courtier, we can begin by attending More's earliest perception of this creature. As a lad of twelve at the table of Cardinal Morton, he had early noted and would later report on the flatterers and trimmers, courting the approval of the great lord.⁷ In More's epigrams the courtier is represented as one overly confident in what is actually a precarious relationship with his king: fun with tamed lions can suddenly turn fatal, when the lion roars in rage. Here anxiety outweighs pleasure; better to remain safe and apart.⁸ In his construction of the death bed speech of Edward IV in his *Richard III*, More endows the dying king with the awareness that when dissension prevails, partisan interests displace any efforts for the truth, and advice becomes what is pleasant, not profitable, in order to advance one's

⁶ An exception is Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1978), I, 116-19; 122-23.

⁷ All references to More's works are to *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963-1997); *Utopia*, CW4, 80-81: 19-23.

⁸ *The Latin Poems*, CW3/II, no. 162.

own faction in the favor of the prince.⁹ A violent instability distinguishes the political. There is no law so certain, no counselor so trustworthy that can be ultimately relied upon--not even Cardinal Morton for all his prudence.¹⁰

By 1516 the remove from counsel and court that More had earlier advocated was beginning to wear thin. He experienced the tugs both subtle and unsubtle drawing him to the vortex of advancement. Yet in embarking upon the problem of royal service and the existential reality that would lead to the creation of the *Utopia*, More lost none of his caution and distrust, his anxiety and inner distance. In his masterpiece and especially in its first book, the *Dialogue of Counsel*, the profoundly dilemmatic nature of counsel and courtly survival would be played out in all its tensions and ironies. In the context of the court only a single fragile syllable stands between service and servitude to the king.¹¹ More allows Hythlodæus from an imaginary situation to depict the typical formation of policy in the privy council of the King of France: here chicanery, self-seeking, military interests dominate; here the counsel to remain with what one has and nurture it, has no place before the machinations to obtain Milan or some other prize city.¹² And in the intense discussion and exchange between Hythlodæus and Morus, Hythlodæus seems to prevail with his consistent abstention from and distrust of royal service, checking Morus at every point. In one instance, however, the latter manages to trump the argument of the learned stranger: namely, if Hythlodæus' favorite philosopher, Plato, enjoins that only when philosophers become kings or *vice versa* will commonwealths be properly ruled, then what prospect of such rule when philosophers will themselves not condescend even to impart their counsel to kings?¹³ From this

⁹ *Historia Richardi Tertii*, CW15, 330-31.

¹⁰ Gerard Wegemer, *Thomas More on Statesmanship* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America, 1996), 70-71.

¹¹ *Utopia*, CW4, 55.

¹² *Ibid.*, 87-97.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 87.

position Morus will later conclude that the ship is not to be abandoned in a storm just because one cannot control the winds; what cannot be turned to an ideal or absolute good must be made as little bad as possible.¹⁴ With that pronouncement Morus becomes Thomas More, who now chooses to enter royal service despite its perilous shoals. The fateful decision attained after long intense inner debate would determine the rest of his life.



In the same year that saw on the continent the *editio princeps* of More's *Utopia*, Baldassare Castiglione completed the first redaction of his *Il libro del Cortegiano*. Concomitantly Budé's drafting of his *De l'Institution du prince* and the publication of Erasmus' *Institutio principis Christiani* made 1516 something of an *annus mirabilis*: Princes, their instruction, and instructors seemed to be on the mind of Europe. Here Erasmus appears to have introduced a new concern into the literature of the *speculum principis*: rather than simply endowing the prince with a series of virtues and skills, at the very outset he turns to providing for the specific educator of the prince. For if there is no opportunity to choose one's prince, all the more care should be taken in choosing the tutor of the prince. And he proceeds to consider the endowments of his teacher.¹⁵ In a further respect, the court and its courtiers as the most immediate context of the prince and the new recognition of his power called for a re-education of Europe's nobility; from their military practices and hunting they would need also to engage the new rhetorical culture stemming from Renaissance Italy. It would no longer be sufficient for a great noble only to be able to toot his hunting horn when the king needed an immediate response to an ambassador's oration.¹⁶ For this

¹⁴ Ibid., 99-101.

¹⁵ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, tr. & ed. Lester K. Born (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 140-44.

¹⁶ Richard Pace, *De fructu qui ex doctrina percipitur: The Benefit of a Liberal Education* (New York: Renaissance Society of America, 1967), 23. See also the

decisive correction of the European aristocracy the work slowly maturing in northern Italy would provide the most elegant remedies. It would meet a major social/ political need of the European nobility, which helps to account for its immense currency and influence and argue for its real political import. It would impart to the North not only the distillation of Italian Renaissance culture but also, howsoever fragile and precarious, the fulfillment of the High Renaissance.

In order to appreciate the development of the book's political dimensions we need to consider the genesis of the work and the education of its author. At the age of sixteen Castiglione began in the course of 1494 to receive his courtly training at the preeminent court of the Italian Renaissance, that of Ludovico Sforza and Beatrice d'Este, together with exposure to the humanist schools of Milan. Constrained by the French, Ludovico had to abandon Milan in September 1499, thereby causing Castiglione to return to his feudatory lord, the duke of Mantua. In June, 1504 the young courtier obtained the duke's permission to enter the service of Guidobaldo, duke of Urbino, and it was essentially during the next four years that he incorporated that experience of its court and courtiers providing the substance of that charmed world that would perdure timelessly in the later pages of his masterpiece. Castiglione had the good sense not to include himself among the participants of the dialogue--an absence that serves to remind us that a good part of his duties as a courtier took him on diplomatic and on military missions, the most famous being his trip to England in 1506 to receive for his master, Duke Guidobaldo, the Order of the Garter. With the death of the ailing duke in April, 1508 and the succession of his adopted son, Francesco Maria della Rovere, Castiglione remained in the service of the widowed duchess, Elisabetta Gonzaga and the new prince, who seemed to have some qualities of Henrician proportions in his murderous propensity to assassinate his enemies, one a cardinal, with his own hands. For the

classic article by Hexter, "The Education of the Aristocracy in the Renaissance" in *Reappraisals in History* (Aberdeen: Longmans, 1961), 45-70.

author of *The Book of the Courtier* was no innocent to the game of political survival and advancement in Renaissance Italy.¹⁷

Castiglione completed a first draft of his emerging scheme by 1514-15 with revisions added in early 1516. A subsequent version, constituting the *Seconda redazione*, matured during the years 1518 to 1520 and was transcribed in 1520-21. Up to this point the work assumed the form of three books, the fourth still undeveloped. What has been taken as the third and final version, to which has been hitherto credited the appearance of the decisively different Book IV, was concluded 23 May, 1524. By this time Castiglione had shifted to papal service, had entered minor orders as an ecclesiastic (9 June, 1521), following the death of his wife, and had been sent in early 1525 to represent the Papacy in Madrid. Most recently, the critical study and analysis by Amadeo Quondam convincingly establishes that essentially a fourth version, constituting the work's final form, developed in Spain, was sent to Venice in April, 1527. The manuscript amounted to a total transformation of everything following what is now Book IV.42, the introduction of radically revised or totally new material all in order to delineate a new and fourth book out of the *Seconda redazione*'s third, quite different in its tone from what had preceded, modelled now around two speakers--Ottaviano Fregoso and Pietro Bembo, the first presenting a distinctly political discourse and the second a religious one.¹⁸ In short, Castiglione's mature political thoughts on princely counsel stem from Spain in the last few years of his life; and in that he chooses to present them through Ottaviano Fregoso, who according to the prefatory letter to Don Miguel de Silva ranked almost next to the duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga in Castiglione's affections, he thus serves to reinforce the import of his presentation.

Having established the genesis of *Il Cortegiano* and the distinctiveness of its fourth book, we can proceed to assess its political

dimensions in the dialogue first and most briefly in terms of the great contemporary issue, the re-education of the European aristocracy and secondly, more immediately relevant to our task, the nature of princely counsel. The first, although of considerable import, can be quickly addressed. In Book One Castiglione handles the dialogue regarding the questions of the nobility and the education of the courtier in a way that prudently respects the interests of the traditional nobility: yes, it is best that he be of noble birth and that he be trained in arms, but the merits of a different sort of nobility, more individual and internal, together with the new learning provided by humanism, manage to weigh heavily and with due import. Beyond its humor Castiglione seems to be announcing a new age for Europe's nobility and the necessity of recognizing it or promoting it when he describes the lady who has invited a muscle-bound warrior to dance, only to have him announce that his one business is fighting. Whereupon she replies:

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.¹⁹

Faced with new demands and expectations the ludicrous incapacity of this crippled courtier is reminiscent of Richard Pace's helpless noble blowing on his hunting horn, unable to respond to the issue at hand.²⁰

The subject of the courtier as princely counselor first surfaces in Book II, when Federico Fregoso begins by urging that the courtier must bend every effort to loving, even adoring his prince, devoting himself only to his pleasure. Such conduct elicits the rejoinder that what results will merely be a noble flatterer, to which Federico counters that flatterers do not love their prince any more than their

¹⁷ Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, ed. Walter Barberis (Turin: Einaudi, 1998), lxxvii-xci.

¹⁸ Amadeo Quondam, 'Questo povero Cortegiano': Castiglione, *Il Libro, la Storia* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), 67-100; 221.

¹⁹ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, tr. Charles Singleton (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), 1.17, pp. 33.

²⁰ Pace, *Benefit*, 23.

friends, and in pursuit of pleasing the prince he must never be ill-humored or melancholy or appear self-seeking.

The dialogue takes a more subtle turn in treating the need to relax the prince especially when the courtier is councillor.

But if a Courtier who is accustomed to handling affairs of importance should happen to be in private with his lord, he must become another person, and lay aside grave matters for another time and place, and engage in conversation that will be amusing and pleasant to his lord, so as not to prevent him from gaining such relaxation.²¹

On the importance for the courtier/ councillor in being able to relax his ruler one inevitably thinks of the earlier relationship of Henry VIII to More as described by Roper, wherein the intellectual range, the irony, the humor of the royal councillor had so delighted the king; in learned, diverse discussion or in gazing from the rooftops on a summer's night at the operation of the heavens, More might draw the royal lion ever closer to himself. Yet quite innocently Roper represents More as in effect violating the game to be played by the avid, aspiring courtier: More prefers his freedom and family interests to royal attentions and possible favors, thus having to disengage himself by deliberately dissembling his talents.²² Contemporaneously one can contrast this relation on the matter of relaxing the prince to that between the Emperor Charles V, a far more predictable monarch, and his ageing Grand Chancellor; Gattinara seems with his exhortations and didacticisms to have quickly wearied his master for the more pleasing Francisco de los Cobos whose natural lubricity

²¹ Castiglione, *Courtier*, II.19, pp. 112.

²² William Roper, *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, ed. R. S. Sylvester in *Two Early Tudor Lives* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1962), 202.

would not have necessitated any reading of Castiglione's *El Cortesano*.²³

Roper affords us another opportunity to observe More's caution and restraint with respect to the relation to his ruler. Any other councillor would surely share Roper's unguarded elation on seeing his father-in-law walking at length in the garden accompanied by the king with his royal arm around the neck of his favorite councillor. But More, himself supremely conscious of the caprices of Power, will soberly respond that if his head could win for the king a castle in France, it would be whisked off in a trice.²⁴

Thus amidst the apparent trivialities, Castiglione's discussion has managed to reveal a vital issue operative at such dizzying heights in the relation between councillor and ruler: namely, the necessary capacity of the courtier/councillor to relax his prince by means of humor or diversion or some special emotional chemistry. Yet we find a Thomas More apparently choosing not to exploit his own unique gifts in this regard nor to pursue his unique opportunity in this respect. A reluctant Courtier? Certainly a diffident one.

As the argument of Book II of the *Courtier* threads its way between an unceremonious familiarity and the dangers of presumption, it culminates at this stage on the dilemma faced by the courtier in service to a wicked prince. For as one of the discussants ruefully observes, "once we have them, we have to endure them as they are."²⁵ While advocating duty before all other considerations, Federico suggests that one has the right to quit a service which is sure to disgrace him. Continuing, he explains that one's obedience persists in all things profitable and honorable to the prince, but for that which might bring him harm and shame, a councillor is duty-bound not to

²³ On the strained relationship between Gattinara and Charles V along with Francisco de los Cobos see my study, *The Emperor and his Chancellor: A Study of the Imperial Chancellery under Gattinara* (Cambridge, 1983), 40-58 and references therein.

²⁴ Roper, *More*, 208.

²⁵ Castiglione, *Courtier*, II.22, pp. 116.

minister to the shame of his prince. Skirting the obvious question here, Federico allows that in serving such masters "it is sometimes permitted to kill not just one man but ten thousand men." The vexed issue of the relation between *honestas* and *utilitas* abruptly emerges—the question of the compatibility of the moral and the expedient in political life; the ugly face of *raison d'état* momentarily surfaces. On the issue of sorting out one good from another, the really good from the apparently good, Federico demurs: finessing the request, he unaccountably breaks off the discussion and would leave the matter up to the courtier's proper discretion.²⁶ Thus the crucial question remains hanging as to the good courtier's proper reason for deliberately resigning and leaving the service of his prince. To have pursued the matter further would have undoubtedly upset the ludic harmony intrinsic to the discussion, reinforcing in the mind of the reader the fragile, delicate balance to be maintained. The political quickly becomes lost amidst the consideration of a medley of minor issues.

Although the subtle principles of *sprezzatura* as apparently the effortless ease of decorum and *misura* as the golden mean of moderation continue to be advanced, the first three books of *Il Cortegiano* enjoy an obvious internal unity within the larger unity of the total work. Ottaviano Fregoso's dramatic entrance at the outset of the fourth book will introduce the reader to a new seriousness that will allow for the sustained, coherent consideration of the two pre-eminent aspects of life—the political through the person of Ottaviano Fregoso himself and the philosophical/religious through the person of Pietro Bembo. This shift in tone and direction will allow Castiglione to transcend the problem of deception and triviality that dogged the first three books.²⁷ Indeed the greatest single contemporary indictment of Castiglione's work, *Le philosophe de court* of Philibert de Vienne, published in Lyons in 1547, criticized the book for promoting an inherent hypocrisy, dilettantism, and servitude to fashion, thus

²⁶ Ibid., II.22-3, pp. 116-17.

²⁷ Wayne A. Rebhorn, *Masking and Festivity in Castiglione's Book of the Courtier* (Detroit, 1978), 180-83.

revealing the fragility of the courtly ideal.²⁸ Nevertheless it is worth noting that none of the polemicist's references derive from the fourth book. Without the final Spanish addition, what essentially the *Seconda redazione* constituted would amount to a most subtle instruction in elegant manners appropriate for survival and advancement at court but falling short of what Sir Thomas Hoby would claim for it as a total philosophy of courtly conduct and for princes and great men "a rule to rule themselves that rule others."²⁹

Almost by way of anticipating Philibert's criticism, the abruptness of Ottaviano, evident in his opening address, has the effect of removing the discussion from the ornamenting of a social game and yanking it with a new directional imperative to the pursuit of a goal and end, a moral and political purpose which now are introduced.³⁰ To revert to the sociologese boldly advanced by Hexter, the courtier now becomes job-oriented. If proper statesmanship is the good advising of the prince, then his job is the instruction, the education of the prince—veritably no mean task. Nor does Ottaviano minimize the difficulty, for he is fully aware that princes nowadays are beset with ignorance and self-conceit and, never hearing the truth, are naturally intoxicated with the power of their charge, although all too often ignorant of government. At a time when the shrewdest and most cynical of all his contemporaries, Francesco Guicciardini, begins to regret his failure to have equipped himself with artistic skills and civilities of courtly life,³¹ Castiglione through the person of Ottaviano now deliberately turns his back upon these same attributes earlier advanced by the discussion of his fellow courtiers. Ignorance of all those fine courtly skills hitherto proposed in the dialogue for equipping the courtier has never hurt anyone; but ignorance of the

²⁸ Philibert de Vienne, *Le philosophe de court* (Geneva: Droz, 1990), 156-59.

²⁹ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, tr. Sir Thomas Hoby (London: David Nutt, 1900), 6-7.

³⁰ Castiglione, *Courtier*, IV. 3-4, pp. 287-89; cf. Rebhorn, *Masking*, 191.

³¹ Francesco Guicciardini, *Maxims and Reflections of a Renaissance Statesman (Ricordi)*, tr. Mario Domandi (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row, 1965), no. 179, 86.

capacity to govern brings terrible woes. Yet ignorant princes here carelessly indulge. If such princes would chance upon a strict philosopher or anyone who attempted artlessly to expose him to the harsh face of virtue, he would be treated like an asp.³² Thus our courtier, our would-be statesmen by way of educator, must be able to enchant, beguile, attract his prince in order to win his favor so that he can always tell him that truth about everything he needs to know without fear or risk of displeasing him. This leading of the prince along the austere path of virtue indeed requires a very special sort of *sprezzatura*, a beguilement by means of salutary deception. Aesthetics seems to be pushed to its limits. In the very precarious potentiality and indefinable delicacy of such a personal relationship with unmitigated power, Ottaviano's fashioning of his courtier at this point bears comparison and finds its equivalent with Bembo's pending description of the Neoplatonic ascent of the soul to just short of the pleroma. In trying to express this very special relationship of what by the early seventeenth century will be recognized as the royal favorite, Juan Boscán, the Catalan translator into Spanish (1534) of *Il Cortegiano*, will describe this ultimate goal of the courtier as that of gaining "the love of his prince and by doing so become his *privado*."³³ The use of this loaded term evokes the later figures in Spanish history of the great *privados*, the favorites of Philip III and IV respectively, Lerma and Olivares, as well as the world of the Favorites realized in the early seventeenth century and presented here as the natural outcome, the *telos* of what Ottaviano foreshadows.

In the course of the discussion, Castiglione will allow Ottaviano to advance his own preference for government and his understanding of society that interestingly disagrees with the more reasonable and coherent notion being minted by Machiavelli. For it would seem reasonable, as the Florentine argues, that the republican form of government best coheres with the social support of a broad middle class, while princely government looks to a nobility for its

³² Castiglione, *Courtier*, IV. 6-8, pp. 290-93.

³³ Antonio Feros, *Kingship and Favoritism in the Spain of Philip III, 1598-1621* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 36.

support.³⁴ In contrast Ottaviano affirms his preference for a prince over that of a republic, while advocating that the greater part of the citizenry should be neither very rich nor very poor. Nevertheless, he has already managed to temper the royal will by recommending forms of collective advising. Drawing heavily upon Aristotle's notion of mixed polity and specifically upon *Politics* IV.vii, Ottaviano elaborates a council of nobles and a popular council to advise the prince and thus form a state exercising the three good modes of government: namely, monarchy, optimates and people.³⁵ Such an institutionalization of collective advice bears comparison with More's own effort as Speaker of the House of Commons in 1523 to request from the king the veritable realization of humanism's picture of the realm itself as a community of counsel:³⁶ namely, that the advice and counsel necessary to a king should be free and unhindered by any doubt or fear on the part of the realm's "most discreet persons" within the High Court of Parliament.³⁷ For Castiglione his complex resolution also echoes the Aristotelian aesthetic prevailing with the courtier: "it is salutary to observe a mean in all things."³⁸

Nothing better suggests the temporal setting of the Book's discussion in 1506 than the fact that despite the later redactions, we stumble upon a passage regarding the future rulers of Europe--Francis I, Henry VIII and Charles V as young princes before their attaining power. Indeed Ottaviano, claiming to draw upon reports from Castiglione, at that time in England, represents young Henry, Prince of Wales, as well endowed with all virtues like a great fruit bearing

³⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Discourses* (New York: Modern Library, 1950), *Disc.* I.55, pp. 252-57.

³⁵ Castiglione, *Courtier*, IV.31, 315; cf. Lawrence Ryan, "Book Four of Castiglione's *Courtier*: Climax or Afterthought," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 156-79 at 162.

³⁶ J.G.A. Pocock, "The History of British Political Thought: The Creation of a Center," *Journal of British Studies* 24 (1985): 283-310 at 285-86.

³⁷ Roper, *More*, 202-05.

³⁸ Castiglione, *Courtier*, IV.19, pp. 303-04; IV.33, pp. 316-17.

tree--a prince of extraordinary promise assuredly.³⁹ The laudatory inclusion of the future emperor here, which happens to be lacking in the *Seconda redazione*,⁴⁰ would seem to derive from Castiglione's association with the emperor during his last years in Spain. It appears all the more ironic as being introduced into the manuscript so shortly before the news of the Sack of Rome.⁴¹

Having earlier argued that virtues are not necessarily natural or pre-existent but can be taught the prince,⁴² Ottaviano exposes himself to the accusation that in his fashioning of the very personal relationship to the prince he has created the perfect schoolmaster rather than the perfect courtier.⁴³ More serious is the accusation that he has placed the courtier above the prince. The goal has become so difficult, even impossible, that he ought no longer to be called a Courtier. For as the source of the prince's excellence, he must need be more excellent than the prince--a situation most awkward. In a passage that again stems from the author's last Spanish years, the issue of age discrepancy surfaces: namely, the awkward relationship of the prince being young and the Courtier old, a situation actually being played out before Castiglione in the case of Charles V and his Grand Chancellor, Gattinara. In pushing the limits of courtiership Ottaviano then admits that "whatever instructs the prince should not be called a Courtier but deserves a far greater and more honored name."⁴⁴ We approach the frontiers of first minister, premier, *privado*.

As Ottaviano's argument culminates, we seem to be treated to the exposition of the most precarious ideal that will for its difficulty, if

³⁹ Ibid., IV.38, 321-22.

⁴⁰ Baldassarre Castiglione, *La seconda redazione del Cortegiano di Baldassarre Castiglione*, ed. Ghino Ghinassi (Florence: Sansoni, 1968), 225.

⁴¹ Ryan, "Book Four," 167.

⁴² Castiglione, *Courtier*, IV.12, pp. 296-97.

⁴³ Ibid., IV.36, pp. 319-21.

⁴⁴ Ibid., IV.44, pp. 327-29.

not impossibility, be duplicated shortly by Bembo's definition of the soul's ascent to the divine. For not only must the virtuous Courtier make the prince virtuous, but he must also not allow him to be deceived, always make known to him the truth about political matters, and set himself against flatterers and those who would corrupt the mind of the prince to unworthy pleasures. Just as the physician's aim must be his patient's health, so the Courtier's ought to be his prince's virtue.

Having driven his job description of the ideal Courtier to such heights, its very severity, solemnity, and supreme dignity transcending quite consciously all the trivial and frivolous in the construction of the ideal courtier, Ottaviano now admits that the goal of the Courtier had been all along to become his prince's instructor. At this point in readdressing the fundamental issue of the philosopher as ruler or more realistically the best philosophy in the service of princely governance, Ottaviano advances the idea to the reassembled company that neither Aristotle nor Plato would have scorned the name of Courtier, for each performed such appropriate works of courtiership to the same end--one with Alexander the Great, the other with the Kings of Sicily. Apart from the beauty of this last connection there are considerable difficulties with this picture, difficulties not limited to the protest of one discussant, who proffers the uncooperative doubt, even disbelief, that Aristotle and Plato ever danced or made music or performed any acts of chivalry.⁴⁵ Rather the greater difficulty arises from the fact that Castiglione attributes to Aristotle a universal world order that his politics never possessed and would have been lost on his wayward pupil, Alexander the Great. And secondly, both Aristotle and Plato in their courtly counsel were failures. Nevertheless Ottaviano does draw upon Plato's failure for what becomes the overriding import of this entire discourse that occasions our consideration here. Like Plato, when the courtier realizes that all his arts prove useless and the prince is of so evil a nature as to be addicted to vice, then "he ought to escape from such bondage in order not to incur blame for his prince's evil deeds and not to feel the affliction which all good men feel who serve

⁴⁵ Ibid., IV.48, pp. 333-34.

the wicked.”⁴⁶ The problem of the virtuous courtier/councillor in service to the wicked prince, the demands for his complicity and support of programs that violate his moral integrity, the ethical individual and the political evil had been broached in Book II but the issue had been dodged or obscured. Now it is met head on and provided with the historical example of the supreme philosopher of classical Antiquity, Plato himself. One resigns.



In his recent biography of Thomas More, John Guy observes ominously: “One simply did not ‘resign’ in the Renaissance” and certainly not suddenly.⁴⁷ In assessing the magnitude of More’s decision to enter royal service and its commitment in 1516, Hexter would seem to agree: “To take a post at court meant no partial or temporary commitment; it was usually for keeps (...) they kept on until they dropped.”⁴⁸ Of course it depends upon the political context of the courtier/councillor. Amidst the myriad of princes in the highly fragmented Italian peninsula, the opportunities and expectations of shifting to the service of another lord and his court constituted the very substance of political existence in the early sixteenth century. Castiglione had been in the service of Guidobaldo’s successor, Francesco Maria della Rovere, for twelve years of military and diplomatic commissions, when in the early summer of 1521 he entered papal service and formally assumed clerical status in minor orders.⁴⁹ It would appear to be, in modern terms, a ‘career move.’ One only marvels that Castiglione lasted so long in the service of a lord who possessed some of the monstrous features of Henry VIII but lacked the English king’s abilities.

⁴⁶ Ibid. IV.47, pp. 331-33.

⁴⁷ John Guy, *Thomas More* (London: Arnold, 2000), 162-63.

⁴⁸ *Utopia*, CWA, xxxiv.

⁴⁹ Barberis, *Il libro*, lxxxiv-lxxxv.

When on 16 May 1532, Thomas More laid down the office of Lord Chancellor and withdrew apparently into private life, pleading ill-health and the need to prepare for death, his resignation inevitably resounded in a very different context from that of Castiglione--and one undergoing revolutionary change. To More the former highest civil official of the most consolidated and discrete territorial kingdom in Christendom, a kingdom soon to define itself apart in terms of an empire or a sovereign state, a distinguished member of that same kingdom peculiarly self-defined by its insularity, its own distinct law, its unique emerging language, and even national identity, a conspicuously gifted lawyer and magistrate with profound and extensive commitments to the administration and life of that national kingdom, and now, one who had just experienced the trauma of Chapter One of Magna Carta having been scrubbed and the Ecclesia Anglicana juridically, administratively, financially having been swallowed up by the monarchy, with all these matters prevailing, then resignation represented the only possible response, not to an individual moral issue of personal honor, but rather to a political assault, the collapse of one’s entire world. More’s options were few, indeed next to zero, and his context did not allow him any simple shift to another prince’s service. Nor would resignation afford any quiet withdrawal.

It is not our task here to rehearse More’s activities in giving aid and comfort to the Opposition and his service to the Aragonese party. It seems that he had taken to heart his own Utopian counsel of 1516 that you do not desert the ship in a storm, that you make a bad situation as little bad as you can. But his actions now are outside the royal council and thus responding to a different drummer and committed to a different agenda, the old order and the kingdom’s proper place within Latin Christendom. In what has been nicely called politics by other means, More, if John Guy’s critical analysis of the *Debellation of Salem and Bizance* is correct, knew Christopher St. German to be his opponent here as well as in his own *Apology*, but feigned ignorance in order that he might enter into defense of the ecclesiastical courts in their detecting heretics and conducting trials, although in full knowledge that he was here defying current royal

propaganda and royal policy. Thus he daringly came to the defense of the already stricken clergy and traditional order.⁵⁰ Resignation from England's highest civil office had led More to define a new politics by other means, a politics of covert opposition that would lead him to the scaffold. In the different Italian context of greater flexibility and fluidity, however, Castiglione would go on to represent his new master, the pope, before the emperor.

In the days immediately following More's "resignment of his office" William Roper provides us with a valuable report on an encounter between his father-in-law and Thomas Cromwell, who apparently visited the former Lord Chancellor at Chelsea. In his advice to the new minister More recovers the earlier image of the royal lion:

"Master Cromwell," quoth he, "you are now entered into the service of a most noble, wise, and liberal prince. If you will follow my poor advice, you shall, in your counsel-giving unto his grace, ever tell him what he ought to do but never what he is able to do. So shall you show yourself a true faithful servant and a right worthy counsellor. For if a lion knew his own strength, hard were it for any man to rule him."⁵¹

Indeed, less than a decade earlier Castiglione had reason to observe the dangerously fragile relation between the ideal and the actual: "when the prince can do whatever he desires, then there is great danger that he may not desire what he ought."⁵²

Before dismissing the contemporary mirror afforded by Castiglione's *Courtier* for More's political career, we may find that the contrastive glass throws into relief a feature beyond the present

issue of resignation. For More's own deportment as royal councillor from the very beginning seems too riven with inner conflict, misgivings, and detachment for him ever to enter into the opportunity of proximity to one's prince with the artfulness, the finesse and above all the gusto that Ottaviano recommends. More lacked the relish, the enjoyment, the almost animal-like fervor for the political that Thomas Cromwell possessed. Yet how could he ever be so single-minded, if we allow for a certain reserve and diffidence that made even of the English kingdom a most transient affair in the light of a higher, spiritual kingdom. From the first news of the king's willingness to consider divorce, More was set upon a different trajectory. All the *kairoi*, all the opportunities of the age, lay with Cromwell. The uniquely extra dimension to More's life, while it preserved his integrity, served to blunt his abilities for political initiative or any intense pursuit of royal favor and the quest for influence that would seem to become a successful courtier. If we are to credit Roper, More at one point prefers his family obligations to pressing his opportunities for further advantage with the king. He would subdue, smother, renounce those qualities important for the relaxation of and thus the more immediate personal, engagement with his king. All those wonderful qualities of irony, honor, rhetorical device militated to a detachment that from the beginning did not permit More's ever becoming totally enthralled with the political. In this sense he decisively parted company from Machiavelli, nursing his own political demon – the contemporary master first to construct and to trumpet the autonomy of politics – indeed, a transcendent autonomy now being realized in England.



⁵⁰ Guy, *More*, 172; *CW*10, xxii-xxviii.

⁵¹ Roper, *More*, 228.

⁵² Castiglione, *Courtier*, IV.24, pp. 308.