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Paragon/Paragone: Raphael's Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione (1514-16) in the Context of Il Cortegiano

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PARAGON/PARAGONE: RAPHAEL'S PORTRAIT OF BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE
(1514-16) IN THE CONTEXT OF IL CORTEGIANO

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

PARAGON/PARAGONE: RAPHAEL’S PORTRAIT OF BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE (1514-16) IN THE CONTEXT OF IL CORTEGIANO

By Margaret Ann Southwick, M.A.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2005

Major Director: Dr. Fredrika Jacobs
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This thesis argues that Raphael’s portrait, Baldassare Castiglione, is three portraits in one: 1) a “speaking likeness” of the subject, 2) a portrait of the “perfect” courtier, and 3) a “shadow” portrait of the Court of Urbino in the early sixteenth century. The formal analysis of the painting is presented in the context of the paragone of word and image expounded by its subject in his masterpiece, Il Cortegiano. Both author and artist demonstrate the concepts of sprezzatura (an artful artlessness) and grazia (graceful elegance) in the creation of their portraits, as well as avoidance of affezione (affectation).
It is concluded that Raphael’s response to the challenge of the text/image *paragone* in *Il Cortegiano* determined the formal choices he made as he painted his friend Baldassare Castiglione.
Introduction

This sweater is Bobo [bohemian bourgeois] all right, Ms. Albright murmured approvingly. “It works very hard at looking like it’s not trying too hard.’

Consensus holds that Raphael’s Baldassare Castiglione (1514-16) [Figs. 1 & 2] is an outstanding example of the High Renaissance portrait form. The assessment is often, and surprisingly, the sum and total substance of the critical interest it receives. I will argue that Raphael intended to produce not just a likeness of his friend, but also a response to the challenge of the paragone2 as elucidated in Castiglione’s own masterpiece, Il Cortegiano. This sixteenth-century dialogue purports to describe the perfect courtier, a paragon of grace, intelligence, wit and masculine virtù. Raphael conveys these elements of perfection in his portrait of the author, using his subject’s weapon of choice, the technique of sprezzatura. Sprezzatura is a word coined by Castiglione and defined as a way of acting “so as to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it.”3 The artist accomplished this so successfully that the

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2 An aesthetic debate current in the 16th century on the ability of rival arts (painting versus poetry, sculpture versus painting, and etc.) to produce the most “lifelike” portrayal of an individual. See Goffen, p.395, n.11 for a listing of citations discussing the variety of uses of the term.

subtle complexity of his creation, the innovative use of feminine norms in the portrait of a male subject, has been all but overlooked, or at least not consciously recognized, in succeeding generations. Nevertheless, it is instructive to examine the critical reception of the painting as it exists to date.
CHAPTER 1: Review of the Literature

Literature on Renaissance portraiture from Jacob Burckhardt’s 1860 seminal work *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, which was still influential through much of the twentieth century, presented the development of the portrait in Renaissance Italy as a natural consequence of the flowering of the idea of the individual. A century later, John Pope-Hennessey continued to echo this argument in his book on Renaissance portraiture. Eschewing the conventional organization of portrait by types (full-length, bust, etc.), he reframed the discussion “in terms of the ideas by which [the portrait] was inspired.”4 To this end, he includes Raphael’s *Baldassare Castiglione* in the section he terms “the painting of the mind,”5 thus indicating he views the work as not just physiognomically accurate, but also psychologically compelling. He discusses the painting in relation to Castiglione’s text, but only as an example of the spirit of the times, not as an integral influence on the artist. Implicit in Pope-Hennessy’s description is a recognition of Raphael’s innovative approach to his subject. He speaks of the artist’s “softer…affectionate” lighting system and the “filaments of sympathy that illuminate the

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5 Pope-Hennessy, xii.
sitter,"\(^6\) thus mirroring Raphael’s feminization of Castiglione with a feminized vocabulary. Yet, he never explicitly links the portrait of the real man to the portrait of the perfect courtier.

Lynn M. Louden asserts that examining Raphael’s paintings in the light of Castiglione’s text reveals “shared principles.”\(^7\) Although his title, “Sprezzatura in Raphael and Castiglione,” seems to indicate that he will make the link between text and image, he does not. Louden describes *sprezzatura* as a “straightforward attempt to mould human behavior,”\(^8\) whereas a careful reading of *Il Cortegiano* makes it clear that dissimulation, and an artful artlessness, is at the true heart of the work. Indeed, the concept of “straightforward” has no place in Castiglione’s book. Louden is focused on bending all his arguments to explain why the High Renaissance lasted such a short period of time. He never examines Raphael’s portrait in the context of Castiglione’s text with the exception of stating that it illustrates the proper dress for a courtier, “grave and sober.”\(^9\) This opinion is contradicted by John Shearman,

Castiglione is not, here, the reserved dresser he promotes in the *Cortegiano*, but more the dandy who writes bullying letters to his mother demanding the latest in Mantuan hairnets. He wears beaver and black velvet, and his jerkin is lined with red silk.\(^10\)

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6 Pope-Hennessy, 114.


8 Louden, 44.

9 Louden, 49.

Shearman recognizes the reality of interaction between artist and subject, and his
description of the portrait as the “result of richly disingenuous calculation” certainly
captures the essence of the concept of sprezzatura. Nonetheless, he too, fails to pursue this
idea and, in fact, does not use the word sprezzatura in discussing the portrait. Shearman is
intent upon accenting the sense of communication between subject and viewer, and the
only text that he discusses at length is the Elegy on the portrait written by Castiglione in
the voice of his wife Ippolita Torrello. Roger Jones and Nicholas Penny also mention the
Elegy and argue that its existence demonstrates that the portrait “served a specifically
domestic purpose.” Like the portrait, the Elegy is complex. Its authorship, an artful
fiction, will be considered in the later discussion of the painting.

Lorne Campbell approaches Baldassare Castiglione from yet another perspective.
For him it is an example of how an artist affects the viewer’s reception of the image by use
of specific painterly techniques. Campbell’s underlying assumption is that everything we
see is deliberate. “Great artists do not make mistakes in drawing.” He observes that
Raphael achieved mobility of expression by “contrasting the sizes and shapes of the
eyebrows and eyes and the differing placing of the catchlights and pupils within the
irises.” He wishes to advance an argument that Castiglione’s poem about the portrait (the
Elegy) gives evidence that he was “conscious of the variability of expression in the

11 Shearman, 135.
12 Roger Jones and Nicholas Penny, Raphael (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 162.
13 Lorne Campbell, Renaissance Portraits – European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th
14 Campbell, 30.
portrait" since the poem has Ippolita sensing that her husband is about to speak to her. For my purposes, the import of Campbell’s observations lies in the recognition of subtle, deliberate choices (artful artlessness) made by Raphael that created a nuanced portrait of his friend, and inspired the author to pen the poem.

Konrad Oberhuber also argues for the importance of the eyes in the portrait. His thesis echoes Burckhardt’s. “Without being consciously aware of it, we feel the birth of modern man.” Oberhuber, however, extends the interpretation much farther than did Burckhardt. “[We feel the sitter’s] loneliness and his deep need of love and inner strength in order to survive.” It is not necessary to agree with Oberhuber’s overly romantic interpretation to note that he recognizes the portrait acts on his subconscious, thus affirming that Raphael has effectively employed the principle of sprezzatura.

In her book Renaissance Rivals, Rona Goffen traces Leonardo’s influence on Raphael. Her discussion touches two important points. First, she identifies the Mona Lisa (Fig. 3) as the source for Raphael’s portrait of Castiglione, an image she (following Shearman) also sees as having exerted a strong influence on Raphael’s marriage portraits of Agnolo Doni (Fig. 4) and his bride Maddalena Strozzi (Fig. 5). She notes, however, that in Agnolo’s portrait the artist applied “compositional variations that are bound to gender distinctions.” Having advanced this notion, Goffen then links Raphael’s Baldassare

15 Campbell, 30.
Castiglione to the same source, asserting, “...arguably Raphael never left La Gioconda: she remained the point of reference for a number of his later portraits, including...Baldassare Castiglione...”18. Goffen does not make any further comment on the Castiglione portrait, but she does make a second significant observation on gender slippage. In a discussion related to Raphael’s portraits of Bindo Altoviti and Pope Julius II she observes, “...Raphael had interpreted Bindo Altoviti with the sensuality usually associated with women...” and

Raphael’s ability to bend or abandon traditional presuppositions about gender and demeanor helps explain one of his most admired portraits, treating a male subject with the kind of emotionalism and psychological vulnerability that might have been more expected of a woman. Raphael’s portrait of Pope Julius II has no real precedent in this regard...19

Goffen’s contention puts an art historical foundation under Pope-Hennessey’s observations written some 35 years earlier. It brings us full circle in the limited published discussion of this portrait masterpiece. Clearly, there is some recognition, if only implied, that Raphael’s Baldassare Castiglione contains a complex sub-text. To strengthen the plausibility of this assertion, I turn next to an examination of what can be established about the friendship between Raphael and Castiglione.

18 Goffen, 190.

19 Goffen, 192. The portrait of Julius II is dated to 1512, about 3 years before Baldassare Castiglione.
CHAPTER 2: The Friendship Between Baldassare Castiglione and Raphael

In his discussion of Baldassare Castiglione, Pierluigi De Vecchi asserts that the portrait “conveys… the profound spiritual concord between artist and subject.” 20 What evidence exists for this assertion? The initial intersection of the lives of Raphael Santi and Baldassare Castiglione most likely occurred at Urbino in 1504. Raphael was born there in 1483, the third child of Gabriel Santi, a painter and factotum to the court. 21 Although documentation of Raphael’s early training is scant, records place him in the city in 1504, 1506 and 1507. 22 By that time Urbino hosted a “sophisticated court.” 23 The ducal palace, originally built by Federigo da Montefeltro in the 1470’s, was embellished by him with collections of fine art and books. After some initial political setbacks, Federigo’s successor, Guidobaldo, was able to establish a successful rule in 1503. It was then that the court became the setting for a circle of humanists (notably including Pietro Bembo and Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena) fostered by Elisabetta Gonzaga, Guidobaldo’s duchess.

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22 Jones and Penny, 5.

Prior to 1503, Baldassare Castiglione had served the Marquis of Mantua, but he procured a release from this service and an appointment to command fifty men-at-arms under the Duke of Urbino. In this capacity he arrived in Urbino in September of 1504, and it is reasonable to suppose that he could have met Raphael at this time. The artist was not the court painter, but Rona Goffen maintains that Raphael was “well known and well liked at the ducal court of Urbino.” This assertion is supported by the fact that Giovanna da Montefeltro (daughter of Federigo) acted as his patron. In October 1504, she wrote a letter recommending Raphael to Piero Soderini, the head of the government in Florence. The time between Castiglione’s arrival in Urbino and Raphael’s departure for Florence was brief but it does not preclude the probability that the year marked the first meeting of the twenty-one-year-old artist and the courtier five years his senior.

Lynn M. Louden declares, “the most dramatic linking of Castiglione’s career as a courtier with Raphael’s as an artist occurs in 1505…” Louden asserts that Raphael’s St. George and the Dragon (Fig. 6) was commissioned by Guidobaldo as a present for King Henry VII. The Duke had been awarded the Order of the Garter, and Castiglione was appointed to travel to England to accept the honor in his place, ostensibly carrying the painting as a gift for the king. Writing twenty years after Louden, L. D. Ettlinger takes

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25 Goffen, 182.

26 Beck, 15, 19. Both Cartwright (I: 108) and Jones and Penny (5) state that it was the Duchess, Elisabetta Gonzaga who wrote this letter. This would strengthen the claim of intimacy at court, but it holds in either case.

27 Louden, 43.
issue with this point. "The story that [the St. George] was painted as a gift for the king of England is a modern legend unsupported by any historical evidence."28 Yet, in the same volume with Ettlinger, Germano Mulazzani affirms Louden’s contention, describing the painting as, “…the St. George in Washington, which Guidobaldo sent with Baldassare Castiglione as a gift to Henry VII…”.29 Castiglione’s biographer may be the source of the “modern legend.” Cartwright writes at some length about the preparations for sending Castiglione to England, claiming, “Guidobaldo determined to give the English monarch a present which should gratify his well-known interest in the art of Italy.”30 Not only does Cartwright insist that Raphael’s St. George was intended to go with Castiglione, she suggests that the subject of the painting may have been Castiglione’s idea. The tale Cartwright tells is suspect, for although she documents much of her work from Castiglione’s letters, no source is listed for this speculation. There is complete agreement, however, that Raphael did paint the St. George (probably for Guidobaldo) during 1505-1506, and during this same period Castiglione was usually in residence at the Court of Urbino. He began his trip to England in August of 1506, arriving at the English court in November of that year, and returning to Urbino in February of 1507.31 The supposition


31 Cartwright, I: 173, 182.
that the two men met and interacted at Urbino during 1505-1506 is plausible, but there is no substantive proof, only circumstantial evidence.

It is also likely that Raphael and Castiglione encountered one another a little later in Rome. Raphael left Florence for that city sometime in 1508. Jones and Perry note that he was in Florence in April of 1508, but by January of 1509 he was receiving payment for work done for Pope Julius II in the Vatican Palace.\textsuperscript{32} Concurrently, Castiglione’s career underwent significant change as a result of the death of Duke Guidobaldo in April of 1508.\textsuperscript{33} This event brought to an end the court life he memorializes in \textit{Il Cortegiano}. Although it would be twenty years before his work was published, the first extant autograph draft was written within a year of Guidobaldo’s death.\textsuperscript{34} He remained in Urbino to serve the Duke’s successor, Francesco della Rovere, but service to the new Duke involved a significantly more active life, including a military campaign against Venice in 1509.\textsuperscript{35} At the end of that year, however, the young Duke married, and the wedding journey included a trip to celebrate the Carnival season in Rome. Accordingly, Castiglione found himself in Rome in February of 1510, as Raphael was at work on the frescoes in the \textit{Stanza della Segnatura}, most probably the \textit{School of Athens}. Cartwright suggests that Castiglione provided advice to the painter about the program for this work, supporting this allegation with the statement that he included Castiglione’s portrait in the work as

\textsuperscript{32} Jones and Penny, 49.

\textsuperscript{33} Cartwright, I: 232.


\textsuperscript{35} Cartwright, I: 265.
Zoroaster.\textsuperscript{36} (Fig. 7) Although this is not mentioned by other critics discussing the fresco, a comparison of this figure to a portrait of Castiglione (Fig. 8) indicates it is possible that the Zoroaster figure was modeled after Castiglione. Though intriguing, the possibility does not provide proof that Castiglione provided the philosophical schema for the work. It does reinforce the supposition that the two did meet in Rome at this time. It would also be reasonable to assume that members of the Urbino entourage would want to view (and would be allowed to see) the work of an increasingly successful “native son.” At any rate, this visit was very brief, as the wedding party was back in Urbino by April. By June of 1510 Castiglione was in Bologna on business for the Duke.\textsuperscript{37}

Castiglione’s fortunes generally prospered under his new prince, and by 1513, he had attained the title of Count of Novillara. He was sent to Rome as the ducal representative to the funeral of Pope Julius II. For the next three years he was frequently in the city in that capacity to the new pope, Leo X.\textsuperscript{38} It is during this time that Raphael painted \textit{Baldassare Castiglione}, (1514-16) [Fig. 1]. Jones and Perry state, “There can be little doubt that Raphael painted Castiglione’s portraits out of friendship…”\textsuperscript{39} At last, there is more than circumstantial evidence to support the contention that the two men were friends with one another, and with a group of humanists, some from the early days in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Cartwright, I: 280.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Cartwright, I: 283.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Cartwright, I: 345, 383
\item \textsuperscript{39} Jones and Penny, 162.
\end{itemize}
Urbino. A letter from Pietro Bembo to Cardinal Bibbiena dated April 19, 1516, speaks of Raphael’s prowess as a portraitist, and of Castiglione as a subject,

Raphael, who asks respectfully to be remembered to you, has made a portrait of our friend Tebaldeo which is so lifelike that the painting is more like him than he is himself. For my part I have never seen a likeness more perfect. You can judge for yourself what Messer Antonio [Tebaldeo] is saying and thinking about it — and he is quite right. The portrait of Messer Baldassare Castiglione, or the one of our Duke of hallowed memory, to whom may God grant peace — these would seem to be by the hand of one of Raphael’s garzoni, if they are compared in point of likeness with that of Tebaldeo. I am most envious and think I, too will have my own portrait painted one day.40

It is possible that the portrait referred to here is not the painting under consideration in this thesis, but an earlier one, now lost. (of which Fig. 8 may be a copy). If that is the case, the fact that Raphael painted two portraits of Castiglione would only reinforce the claim that there was a strong connection between the two men. Another letter by Bembo in the spring of 1516, describes an expedition to visit antiquities in the Campagana that included Raphael, Castiglione, Bembo, Andrea Navagero and Agostino Beazzano.41 (The last two are subjects in another of Raphael’s portraits at this time.) If the friendship did not develop earlier, it certainly existed by 1516. Additional evidence for this comes from Castiglione’s writing. Second and third drafts of his book were written between 1515-1516. Raphael is mentioned four times in the published work, but most importantly for my argument, he is cited in a discussion of the paragone between Count Ludovico da Canossa and Gian

40 Jones and Penny, 155.

41 Shearman, Only Connect, 132.
Cristoforo Romano where he is acclaimed as the ideal model of a painter.\textsuperscript{42} In his intricate exposition on the history of the text \textit{Il Cortegiano}, Shearman states that lengthy discussion of the \textit{paragone} was not incorporated into the text until 1515-1516, and that initially the argument did not name Raphael as the artist,

To summarize: Raphael is given the role of paragon of Painting, in an argument complete without him in its version of about 1513, and it happens in two stages, in about 1516 and in 1518-19; and at both those points he is represented as Canossa’s protégé.\textsuperscript{43}

This fact suggests that an initial acquaintance between the painter and writer developed into a fuller friendship at this time.

Another indication that the two were close friends appears in the discussion surrounding humor, where an anecdote is told of Raphael and two Cardinals. The latter find fault with the redness of the faces of St. Peter and St. Paul in a painting by the artist, only to receive a barbed reply,

\textit{Gentlemen, you must not wonder at this, for I have made them so quite on purpose, since we must believe that St. Peter and St. Paul are as red in heaven as you see them here, out of shame that their church should be governed by such men as you.}\textsuperscript{44}

This is an anecdote that could only have been related by Raphael himself to Castiglione, and the artist surely must have given his permission to use the example. If the cardinals were not close friends who could “take a joke”, the resulting embarrassment would certainly have caused a scandal, and worse, endangered future patronage.

\textsuperscript{42} Castiglione, 58.

\textsuperscript{43} Shearman, “Castiglione’s Portrait,” 74.

\textsuperscript{44} Castiglione, 126-7.
Two other texts are of interest for dating the friendship and for giving us an idea of the character of the relationship. In 1515 Raphael was given responsibility for a survey of Rome's antiquities by Leo X. Baldassare Castiglione, using information provided by Raphael, is generally accepted as the author of the report to the Pope.\textsuperscript{45} This extensive collaboration bespeaks a close relationship based on common interests. The second text is a letter ostensibly authored by Raphael, but now accepted as the work of Castiglione. Despite the absence of dates, internal evidence places the letter around 1514, as Castiglione is addressed as “Count,” and mention is made of Raphael’s appointment as architect for St. Peter’s, replacing Bramante who died in March of 1514. The missive is very short, and aside from the news of the appointment contains a description of Raphael’s approach to figuring beauty,

\begin{quote}
I tell you that to paint one beauty, it is necessary for me to see several beauties, with this condition, that Your Lordship be with me to make the selection of the best. But there being a dearth of good judges and of beautiful women, I make use of a certain Idea that comes to my mind. Whether this has any excellence in it, I do not know; though I push myself to get it.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

Shearman gives the most cogent argument for assigning actual authorship of this “letter” to Castiglione, rather than Raphael. He dates the work to 1516 based on linguistic arguments.\textsuperscript{47} Neither date conflicts with the biographical information previously noted. As for authorship, if the letter was actually written by Raphael it declares the existence of a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[45] Oberhuber, 184.
\item[47] Shearman, “Castiglione’s Portrait,” 85.
\end{footnotes}
trusting, confiding, friendship. Shearman argues that it was a tribute, Castiglione's
“portrait” of his friend Raphael. If it was ghosted by Castiglione to himself, as Shearman
contends, then it does not negate the former possibility, but may be evidence of a
somewhat more complex dynamic. It raises the possibility that Raphael and Castiglione
may have been engaged in a friendly competition revolving around the paragone of text
and image, and also that they may have been engaged in a reciprocal attempt to enhance
each other’s reputation. Both men were ambitious. Raphael, writing to his uncle in 1514,
expressed satisfaction that he had avoided marriage to that date, intimating that the
position and property he possessed in Rome (specified as being worth 3000 ducats) would
not have been his if he had succumbed to his uncle’s wishes in the matter.48 Castiglione’s
letters to his mother, quoted extensively by his biographer, make it clear that he, in contrast
to Raphael, was pursuing marriage, harboring the hope that it would secure social
advancement. Like all courtiers, the pair was dependent upon the patronage of princes and
high-ranking clergy to further their careers. Both men employed sprezzatura to advance
their ambitions. The “spiritual concord” discerned by De Vecchi may indeed have existed,
but a practical alliance, based on complimentary abilities and the self-interest of each party
should not be ruled out. An examination of Il Cortegiano will shed further light on this.

CHAPTER 3: Il Cortegiano

This chapter will explore the three facets of Castiglione’s masterpiece, Il Cortegiano, that are necessary to fully understand Raphael’s portrait of the author. The first of these is a discussion of the three portraits that Castiglione creates within the frame of his text. Next is an explanation of the concept of sprezzatura, a critical tool that both the artist and author employed in fashioning their respective portraits. Thirdly, we examine the normative gender attributes and roles promulgated in the dialogue, noting the tension between them and the adjustments required to achieve the image of the “perfect” courtier.

Il Cortegiano (The Book of the Courtier) was first published in 1528, but its author, Baldassare Castiglione, began writing the tract while in residence at the Court of Urbino in 1508. It can be appreciated as an exceptional example of a Renaissance book of manners and as a sympathetic commemoration of a lost society. Neither of these circumscribed views fully encompasses the complex purpose that Castiglione intended. I argue that the author crafted his work as an example of superiority of text over image and, moreover, that he succeeds in “painting” three portraits: 1) a nostalgic portrait of the Court of Urbino; 2) a portrait of the “perfect courtier;” and finally, 3) a portrait of himself as the image of the

ideal. Raphael’s portrait of Castiglione (Fig. 1) reflects an awareness of Castiglione’s achievement and is, in turn, a response to this achievement.

The text is presented as an account of discussions among the court gentlemen and ladies in attendance on Elisabetta Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, over the course of four evenings. During the first evening (Book I), the speakers introduce the main theme of the work, a listing of all the attributes; physical, mental, and spiritual, which must combine to make a “perfect courtier.” In Book II, the second evening, variations on this theme are amplified as those assembled consider the context of actions and words, and evaluate just how a courtier should behave in certain circumstances. On the third evening (Book III), we are presented with a counter theme, a consideration of the necessary attributes of a perfect Court Lady. Book IV returns to the Courtier, reviewing his relationship to his Prince and reviewing his obligation to provide guidance and a positive influence. This fourth discussion closes with Pietro Bembo’s lyric exposition of Platonic love.

What was Castiglione’s purpose in writing *Il Cortegiano*? In his prefatory dedication to the Bishop of Viseu, written almost twenty years after he first began the work, he describes his offering as

...a portrait of the Court of Urbino, not by the hand of Raphael or Michelangelo, but by that of a lowly painter and one who only knows how to draw the main lines, without adorning the truth with pretty colors or making, by perspective art, that which is not [real] seem to be.50

50 Castiglione, 4.
He claims the work as a memorial portrait of the court in accordance with Leon Battista Alberti’s axiom that portraits make the absent present and give life to the dead. Yet it is much more than that. His declaration signals his interest in the paragone, a comparative evaluation of word and image that is couched in Horace’s dictum “ut pictura poesis.” This self-deprecating statement is also an ideal example of the dissimulation and modesty recommended to the reader aspiring to become a “perfect” courtier. Indeed, Castiglione has one of the interlocutors in his discourse, Count Ludovico da Canossa, initially recommend this course of action in Book I;

... in my opinion, the whole art consists in saying things in such a way that they do not appear to be spoken to that end, but are so very apropos that one cannot help saying them; and to seem always to avoid praising one’s self, yet do so.

Castiglione has carefully crafted the dedication to suggest that his offering, in being more truthful, is a more worthy possession than works of art by two of the greatest artists of his time. In these few words, we can see that the author is indeed a master of the art of self-praise and self-presentation. He is the exemplar of grazia and sprezzatura, the two interlocking attributes required of those who would become a “perfect courtier.” With an air of dissimulation, he claims the work to be a simple memorial portrait, all the while


54 Castiglione, 26.
asserting his creation is more “real” even as he modestly emphasizes his authorial ineptitude in the face of actual artists. The author’s self-fashioning has begun.

At the beginning of Book I, Castiglione has one of the party, Federico Fregoso, describe another purpose:

...the task of forming in words a perfect Courtier, setting forth all the conditions and particular qualities that are required of anyone who deserves this name...55

Thus we would have two portraits: a laudatory ritratto of Urbino’s noble company and an imitatio of the “perfect Courtier.”56 Vincenzo Danti’s explication of the verb form of these terms clarify their meanings as they would have been understood by Castiglione,

By the term ritrarre, I mean to make something exactly as another thing is seen to be; and by the term imitare I similarly understand that it is to make a thing not only as another has seen the thing to be when that thing is imperfect but to make it as it would have to be in order to be of complete perfection.57

But, there is also evidence within Il Cortegiano that the work was intended to provide a third portrait, that of Castiglione himself as the perfect courtier.

David Rosand, accepting at face value the implications of the term ritratto as it appears in Castiglione’s preface, begins his discussion of Il Cortegiano with a consideration of Castiglione’s analogy of textual portrayal to visual representation. He declares it is “more than a rhetorical figure...[the work is] a group portrait representing the image of a society

55 Castiglione, 19.


described in all its complexity, with all its ambiguities and contradiction.” Rosand thus firmly places Castiglione’s work within the Lucian tradition, suggesting the superiority of text over images. More importantly, he argues that the creation of a successful, lifelike, commemorative portrait affirms the existence of the artist and the power he wields in bringing a subject to life. The subtle ability to affirm presence, existence, and authorship, while not appearing to do that, in fact, by overtly denying it, pervades Castiglione’s text. His dedicatory epistle serves as the textual equivalent of the parapet that appears in portraits of the period, (for example Giovanni Bellini’s Portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan, 1501 (Fig. 9). Rosand has explicated the role of the parapet, derived from Roman funerary images, as a signifier of commemoration and a link to the concept of eternal life. The stark reality that most of the company is dead is presented just as the ledge or parapet is presented to the viewer of memorial portraits, as a barrier that separates the viewer from the depicted subject and distinguishes the living from the dead. How much more glory redounds to the author/artist, then, who can convince us that these subjects live. Castiglione has done just that with the structure of his work. The dialogue form bestows immediacy and vitality.

Castiglione uses the dialectic as a device to bring the courtiers and court ladies alive in our mind’s eye. At the beginning of each night’s discussion, we move slowly from a distance into the group settling for the evening. As the discussion begins, Castiglione uses the oppositional flow of the conversation and the counterpoint of the dissenting voice to bring us quickly into a close-up focus. Peter Burke describes the role of Gasparo Pallavicino

as objector or interrupter, stating, “His function is to bring the discussion down to earth.”60

This might be restated as refocusing the discussion from the ideal to the real. The function of Pallavicino and other participants interrupting the speaker’s flow of conversation (Cesare Gonzaga, the Duchess Elisabetta, and Lady Emilia Pia) is to move the textual image from the ideal “portrait” of the perfect courtier and court lady to the real world of sixteenth-century Urbino. Not only does Castiglione make these people real to us, he confers on them eternal life.61 At the end of Book IV, the courtiers and ladies leave each other at dawn’s break with the anticipation of continuing their “game” again that night. The description of the coming dawn is almost as lyrical as that of Bembo’s address.

Then the windows were opened on the side of the palace that looks toward the lofty peak of Mount Catria, where they saw that a beautiful rosy dawn had already come into the east, and that all the stars had disappeared except the sweet mistress of the heaven of Venus that holds the border between night and day; from which a soft breeze seemed to come that filled the air with a brisk coolness and began to awaken sweet concerts of joyous birds in the murmuring forests of the nearby hills.62

The members of the court are transported by this view of perfect natural beauty, but they are not allowed to remain in that heady atmosphere for long. The disagreement between Gasparo Pallavicino and Giuliano de’ Medici over women’s capacity for divine love is the agreed upon topic for the next evening’s discussion. As the assemblage starts to drift away, the author allows Signora Emilia’s verbal sally to the misogynist Gasparo Pallavicino to end

59 Rosand, 97.
60 Burke, 26.
61 Cranston, 84.
62 Castiglione, 260.
the narrative on a note of satirical anticlimax: "...if signor Gasparo wishes to accuse and slander women further, as is his wont, let him give bond to stand trial, for I cite him as a suspect and fugitive." Thus, Castiglione ends his dialogue with a panoramic view of a new day rising and a promise that the evening's society will go on forever. He has given the members of his group portrait eternal life, for the narrative will never end.

Robert W. Hanning cautions us against interpreting Castiglione's metaphor too narrowly as one of commemoration for a society that has passed away. He argues that Castiglione deliberately modeled his discourse on the structure of Plato's Symposium because it "enabled him to build into his framed dialogue key elements of the theory and practice of High Renaissance portraiture." These key elements include the commemorative purpose of portraiture previously explored, the engagement with the paragone, and, thirdly, the interlocking relationships amongst the artist, patron/viewer, and subject that are the hallmark of this period. As we have seen, Castiglione adroitly signaled his engagement with the paragone in his opening dedication, in which he ostensibly praises both Raphael and Michelangelo (with what modern vernacular would describe as a "left-handed" compliment) while managing to imply that textual description is more truthful, more honest, and more valuable. Then in Book II, Castiglione has Federico Fregoso use painting as a metaphor to explain just how a courtier would go about using the attributes ascribed to him:

Hence, he must know how to avail himself of them [all the virtues] and, by the test and, as it were, the opposition of the one, cause another to be more manifestly known; as good painters who, by their use of shadow, manage to throw the light of objects into relief, and likewise, by their use of light,
to deepen the shadows of planes and bring different colors together so that all are made more apparent through the contrast of one with another; and the placing of figures in opposition one to another helps them achieve their aim.  

This statement also describes Castiglione’s method in *Il Cortegiano* for breathing life into his figures—“by contrast of one with another, and the placing of figures [speakers] in opposition one to another.” He describes the artist’s technique for fashioning figures (including portraits) and he describes the technique he uses in the text to compose the portrait of the company of Urbino. Moreover, this is an instruction in how to self-fashion an identity as a “perfect courtier” that equates this act with the artist’s act of creation. The artist constructs an ideal image on the canvas and the disciple of *Il Cortegiano* constructs a living image of the ideal, *ut pictura habitas*.

Hanning affirms this concept when he describes Castiglione’s book as “the portrait, formed in words, of the perfect courtier, who is both artist and his own work of art.” Seeing the text in this way focuses attention on agency. Who, exactly, is the artist responsible for creating our “perfect” courtier? By figuratively distancing himself from the assembled, Castiglione would have his readers believe that the participants in the discussion are the active agents. The courtiers and court ladies fashion themselves. They are the “artists” who produce the image of ideality. The author’s conceit of having Ottaviano Fregoso describe him as writing to the Court of Urbino from England, “…for, as our

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65 Castiglione, 71.
66 Castiglione, 71.
67 Hanning, 134.
Castiglione writes us from there and promises to tell us more fully on his return..." is a potent example of how the author distances himself from the authorial voice. The work is described as a record of the conversations as reported to Castiglione by a participant. At the same time, his “recording” of the report comes with its own point of view. This layering of viewpoints mimics the physical layering of paint by an artist. Each layer provides a different surface from which the light is reflected. Castiglione carefully and deliberately distances himself from responsibility for creating the courtier’s image, yet he is in full control of what appears on his textual canvas. Moreover, by insisting that this is a simple transcription of a recorded conversation, he removes himself from the suspicion of self-description and self-praise, whilst raising the fleeting thought that the work could, in fact, be a self-portrait of Baldassare Castiglione. So, in fact, there is yet a third portrait being “painted” by the text, that of Baldassare Castiglione as the personification of the perfect courtier. It is a tour de force performance. The author has reflexively employed all the essential attributes necessary for the ideal: grazia, sprezzatura, and the avoidance of affetazione.

At this point, it would be instructive to examine the trinity of grazia, sprezzatura, and an absence of affetazione more closely. The elements of grazia and sprezzatura, and their complex relationship, are described by Count Ludovico da Canossa in Book I, Chapters 26 and 27. Grazia, according to the Count, can be possessed by some few fortunates as a gift “from the stars,” but those who attempt to acquire it must scrupulously avoid affectation.

68 Castiglione, 233.
69 Castiglione, 31-33.
70 Castiglione, 32.
(affettazione) and practice sprezzatura in all things. Sprezzatura is described as a “new word” and it clearly characterizes a way of acting “so as to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it… [for “…art, or any intent effort, if it is disclosed, deprives everything of grace.”]

Daniel Javitch suggests that sprezzatura is a “rehearsed spontaneity.” Harry Berger, Jr. defines the term as “an art that hides art, the cultivated ability to display artlessness…” Eduardo Saccone has discussed grazia, sprezzatura and affettazione at length in his study of the same name. His elucidation of the concept of sprezzatura argues that it is a coded performance; a performance that only the Courtier’s peers can decipher correctly. He makes an important point about the form of the Book of the Courtier in his discussion of the exchange between Cesare Gonzaga and Ludovico da Canossa in Book I:

I am not bound, ‘said the Count,’ to teach you how to acquire grace or anything else, but only to show you what a perfect Courtier ought to be… So I, perhaps, shall be able to tell you what a perfect Courtier should be, but not to teach you what you must do to become one.

Saccone comments that this “is perhaps analogous to the author’s choice for the book of a dialogue or portrait form (emphasis mine) in preference to the catechistical form of a
treatise." All these explanations of the term incorporate the idea of action, and also acting, or artifice. Fredrika Jacobs forges an even stronger link between the concept of *sprezzatura* and deception. In her discussion of the concept of *grazia* in relation to *Hermaphrodite Sleeping* and the physical merging of the masculine and feminine, Jacobs emphasizes the role of "circumspect dissimulation," an ability required of the courtier who would always give the appearance of ease and grace. Her paper argues that Renaissance artists responded to the challenge of this statue from classical antiquity by dissolving the binary of masculine/feminine, and concludes,

In accordance with Castiglione’s rule for ‘una certa avvertita dissimulazione,’ the piacebolissimi inganni (pleasurable deceptions) of these works mask but do not obscure the brilliance of their makers’ artifice. Indeed, the play of dissimulation and deception reaffirms the truth about what we see.

Castiglione well knows that his carefully crafted description of how a courtier can praise himself without seeming to do so smacks of deceit, and he never attempts to turn attention from the weakness in his argument by evasion. Instead, he has a member of the assembly protest directly. In this case, Gasparo Pallavicino addresses Federico Fregoso frankly, “This seems to me to be not an art, but an actual deceit; and I do not think it seemly for anyone who wishes to be a man of honor ever to deceive.” Federico’s response is a virtuoso

76 Saccone, 53.
78 Jacobs, 63.
79 Castiglione, 101.
display of sprezzatura as he attempts to convince the company that deception is not deception,

...if you have a beautiful jewel with no setting, and it passes into the hands of a good goldsmith, who with a skillful setting makes it appear far more beautiful, will you say that the goldsmith deceives the eyes of the one who looks at it? Surely he deserves praise for that deceit, because with good judgment and art his masterful hand often adds grace and adornment to ivory or to silver or to a beautiful stone by setting it in fine gold....

Neither is it unseemly for a man who feels he has talent in a certain thing adroitly to seek the occasion for displaying it and in the same way to conceal what he thinks would deserve little praise – doing this always with circumspect dissimulation."80

Castiglione also uses Pallavicino to express anxiety about gender roles. He has him protest that the courtier is in danger of being thought womanish. For example, in the discussion of music as a fitting interest for the Courtier, he says,

I think that music, along with many other vanities, is indeed well suited to women, and perhaps also to others who have the appearance of men, but not to real men; for the latter ought not to render their minds effeminate and afraid of death.81

This concern that the description of the Courtier veers toward feminine norms is not only addressed by Gasparo. In the initial discussion of physical attributes, the Count is very careful to insist on the masculine ideal,

I would have our Courtier’s face be such, not so soft and feminine as many attempt to have who not only curl their hair and pluck their eyebrows, but preen themselves in all those ways that the most wanton and dissolute women in the world adopt; and in walking, in posture, and in every act, appear so tender and languid that their limbs seem to be on the

80 Castiglione, 101.

81 Castiglione, 55.
verge of falling apart; and utter their words so limply that it seems they are about to expire on the spot.\footnote{Castiglione, 27}

The topic is also addressed in the discussion of the Courtier's voice, "...in speaking some things are required that are not needed in writing: such as a good voice, not too thin or soft as a woman's..."\footnote{Castiglione, 40.} In Book 3, again, the gender divide is clearly demarcated by the Magnifico (Giuliano de' Medici) in addressing the qualities befitting the Court Lady,

...in her ways manners, words gesture, and bearing, a woman ought to be very unlike a man; for just as he must show a certain solid and sturdy manliness, so it is seemly for a woman to have a soft and delicate tenderness, with an air of womanly sweetness in her every movement, which ...shall always make her appear the woman without any resemblance to a man.\footnote{Castiglione, 150.}

Yet, in fact, when the duties of a Courtier are considered, rather than just his physical attributes, we see that Gasparo's anxiety is not misplaced. Fregoso's summation of the discussion on conversation in Book II could easily read as instructions for a cortegiana (a courtesan),

Hence, as to what I desire in the Courtier, let it suffice to say (beyond what has already been said) that he should be one who is never at a loss for things to say that are good and well suited to those with whom he is speaking, that he should know how to sweeten and refresh the minds of his hearers, and move them discreetly to gaiety and laughter with amusing witticisms and pleasurtries, so that, without ever producing tedium or satiety, he may continually give pleasure.\footnote{Castiglione, 102.}

82 Castiglione, 27
83 Castiglione, 40.
84 Castiglione, 150.
85 Castiglione, 102.
The tension between the masculine and feminine is addressed by Berger. He observes that the Courtier’s profession has become, not arms, but pleasing the Prince. Stated another way, he is not an active aggressor but a suppliant servant to his lord. Nevertheless, he argues, “The performance of sprezzatura is … a figuration of power.” His argument here is intricate. Because the Courtier serves at the pleasure of his Prince, the “threat or actuality of disempowerment” is a constant concern, and thus, a show of effortless unconcern or sprezzatura, “is depicted as a source and sign of manly inner strength rather than of effeminacy.” His explication of this issue makes it clear, as does Castiglione’s text, that having the appearance of a talent or virtue is as important, or perhaps more important, than actually having the virtue or talent. For example, Fregoso says,

And in everything that he has to do or say, let him, if possible, always come prepared and ready, but give the appearance (emphasis mine) that all is done on the spur of the moment.

Elsewhere he states,

Therefore, in all he says, let him be always careful not to exceed the limits of verisimilitude, and not to tell too often those truths that have the appearance (emphasis mine) of falsehoods...

The Courtier then, may find himself presenting an “appearance” to his Prince, to his peers, and finally, to himself, rather than a reality. Berger states that sprezzatura is an “art of behaving as if always under surveillance… an art that aims to ward off danger by

86 Berger, 298.
87 Berger, 298.
88 Castiglione, 99.
89 Castiglione, 102.
appearing dangerous.  This art-starts to sound suspiciously like the performance ascribed to females under the term “wiles.”

What other, less complex, traits must the perfect courtier possess? Considering the bellicose nature of the age, some of these are to be expected. Prowess in the use of arms is mentioned six times in Book I, and receives mention in Books II and IV. Admonitions to be bold, agile, courageous, and to engage in appropriate bodily exercises, such as jousting, occur in all four books. Likewise, the requirement of noble birth is stipulated in every book. There are some very specific directions about appropriate color and style of dress for the “perfect” courtier, although this discussion takes place only once, in Book II. Along with these physical characteristics, there are conversations every night about the tone and character of the Courtier’s speech, including many warnings against rancorous, malicious, and obscene speech. The virtues of modesty, prudence, good judgment and discretion all receive multiple mentions, while the Courtier is cautioned against self-praise and affectation several times as well. Acquisition of knowledge is considered a priority, and this includes specific knowledge of languages, the arts, and music. It also includes self-knowledge. In Book II amidst talk about how a courtier might go about winning favor from his Prince, Federico Fregoso cautions against unthinking imitation of successful courtiers,

To receive favors of princes, then, there is no better way than to deserve them. And when one sees another man who is pleasing to a prince for whatever reason, he must not think that, by imitating such a one, he too can attain to that same mark, for not everything is suited to everybody... Thus, everyone must know himself and his own powers, (emphasis mine) and

90 Berger, 299.
govern himself accordingly, and consider what things he ought to imitate and what things he ought not.91

Fregoso is not presenting one man’s opinion, here (whether it be his or Castiglione’s). Peter Burke emphasizes the humanist concern with self-knowledge during this period, and asserts that the presentation of self to others was just as important.92 Berger’s exposition of sprezzatura noted above concludes, “The ultimate aim of the acquisition [of all these attributes and talents] is to convert painting and writing to living self-portraiture and self-textualization: ut picutra habitus.”93 The attainment of the appearance of the ideal in art and life is conflated with the attainment of the ideal. There is yet another consideration. The Courtier is enjoined to practice sprezzatura, that is, to avoid the appearance of affectation, and the success of this practice depends not just on the Courtier himself, but on the perception of his peers, or as Saccone states, “From the start, the fashioning of the Courtier depends very much on the public, the audience, the others.”94 Sharon Fermor touches on this same point in her discussion of the role of dance in sixteenth-century Italian society. In contrast to the nearly equal roles of fifteenth-century partners, the woman’s role became less energetic, more of an admiring audience for the male’ more athletic performance. If the man displays too much skill however, he

91 Castiglione, 83.


93 Berger, 300.

risks being compared to a professional entertainer, normally a person of low social status. As Fermor notes, Castiglione has Federico warn against the appearance of too much expertise:

when dancing in the presence of many and in a place full of people, I think he should maintain a certain dignity, though tempered with a fine and airy grace of movement; and even though he may feel himself to be most agile and a master of time and measure, let him not attempt those quick movements of foot and those double steps which we find most becoming in our Barletta, but which would perhaps little befit a gentleman.

Some of the attributes cited above are easily identified as the basic material with which an artist or sculptor would work to fashion a portrait or sculpture. One might posit it likely that the courtier would wish his portrait to indicate his prowess at arms, his virtù. A certain gravity of mien would be expected, and the form of the pose could be expected to indicate the noble birth and social status of the subject. These aspects are all in keeping with the normative image for male portraiture Gian Paolo Lomazzo initially expounded in 1584. Titian’s portrait of Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, (Fig. 10) painted about 1536, is an example that fits both the requirements of Lomazzo’s theory and Castiglione’s text.

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96 Castiglione, 75.

What of the traits recommended for the Court Lady? Authors have used Castiglione’s text to argue that the Court lady lacks spirit, power and influence and conversely, that her status mimics that of the Prince, since the Courtier must please and serve both. In general, the attributes of beauty, chastity and continence are lauded most highly and mentioned most frequently. We might say that the Courtier is about “doing” and that the Court Lady is about “being,” but the fact remains that they are both very much about “appearing.” For as Giuliano de’ Medici explains,

...she must be more circumspect, and more careful not to give occasion for evil being said of her, and conduct herself so that she may not only escape being sullied by guilt but even by the suspicion of it...100

There are at least nine admonitions that a Court Lady should be beautiful, including one statement that “beauty is necessary.”101 This may be because beauty, especially of face, is equated with “an effluence of the divine goodness.”102 The Court Lady is enjoined to be graceful, gentle, kind, modest, and prudent. Although it is suggested that she have a knowledge of dancing, music, painting and even of letters, it is stipulated that such knowledge is necessary “in order to entertain graciously.”103 Surprisingly, there is very little specific instruction as to style of dress. We are told that the Court Lady’s dress

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100 Castiglione, 151.

101 Castiglione, 150.

102 Castiglione, 244.

103 Castiglione, 152.
should “enhance her grace,” “flatter her physical characteristics”, and it should not be “vain or frivolous.”104 Again, these aspects are all in keeping with the normative image for female portraiture expounded by Lomazzo. Mary Rogers quotes Lomazzo:

\[ \text{...in female portraiture beauty, with exquisite delicacy, will be seen, improving the mistakes of nature with art as far as is possible, in this imitating the poets when they sing their praises in verse.} \]  

In her article examining the paragone in relation to the beauty of women, Elizabeth Cropper argues that “the portrayal of a beautiful woman also came to function as a synecdoche of the beauty of painting itself.”106 In her study of Italian portrait collections, Linda Klinger Aleci examines the concept of identity in early modern culture, and states that this period was one in which “the abstract constructions of Self and the living self (that is the ‘real person’) were subject to considerable tensions.”107 She posits that portraits were used as instruments which allowed individuals to impose a shape on their identities, ‘interpretive constructions’ that allowed psychic and social congruencies beyond the trappings of social station.108

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104 Castiglione, 154.

105 Lomazzo, as cited in Rogers, 297.


108 Aleci, 68.
Il Cortegiano has much to say about the character and attributes of Princes, as well. Cesare Gonzaga proposes "magnanimous, liberal, and valiant in arms" as positive attributes of a good Prince, while Ottaviano Fregoso expounds on princes who allow themselves to

...be transported by self-conceit, they become arrogant, and with imperious countenance and stern manner, with pompous dress, gold, gems, and by letting themselves be seen almost never in public, they think to gain authority among men and to be held almost as gods. It is the Courtier’s relationship to his Prince, addressed in Book IV, which requires attention. Ottaviano’s tirade about the faults of princes includes the statement that courtiers “always speak and act in order to please [the Prince].” Moreover, he insists that the Courtier “must seek to gain the good will and captivate the mind of his prince” and that he must “lead his prince by the austere path of virtue...beguiling him with salutary deception...” These instructions enjoin the Courtier to behave in a manner typically associated with femininity. If we replace the word “prince” with that of “husband” we would have a set of instructions for women of which Gasparo Pallavicino would most certainly have approved. On the other hand, strong gender distinctions of appearance and behavior are asserted by the interlocutors of Il Cortegiano yet on the other, the participants in the discussion propose that a successful courtier must function to some extent in the

109 Castiglione, 319.
110 Castiglione, 212.
111 Castiglione, 211.
112 Castiglione, 213.
113 Castiglione, 213.
feminine métier. As the next chapter will show, this irony was not lost on Raphael, who must have discussed Castiglione’s drafts with him and with other humanists who had been at the Urbino court of Duke Guidobaldo and the Duchess Elisabetta. Although there is no record of such conversations, the fact that there were several drafts of the manuscript indicates that the author sought advice from his friends.

Thus, a careful reading of Il Cortegiano makes clear that Castiglione created within his text, not one portrait, but three. The nostalgic portrait of the happy company truly brings them back to life before our eyes. The portrait of the “perfect courtier” is disingenuously conflated with creating and maintaining the appearance of perfection to those who view this paragon -- and the author succeeds in interposing the belief that, modest protests aside, he is this ideal. Moreover, he has created these portraits with *sprezzatura*. His portrait, by his friend Raphael, contains elements of all three portraits, and must have been Raphael’s reply to Castiglione’s challenge.
CHAPTER 4: Raphael’s Portrait, Baldassare Castiglione

When alone, the portrait by Raphael’s hand
Recalls your face and relieves my cares,
I play with it and laugh with it and joke,
I speak to it and, as though it could reply,
It often seems to me to nod and motion,
To want to say something and speak your word.
Your boy knows and greets his father, babbling.
Herewith I am consoled and beguile the long days.¹¹⁴

Anyone viewing Raphael’s portrait Baldassare Castiglione (Fig. 1) through the filter of these words must believe that the painting is a “speaking likeness” of its subject, a man much admired and loved by his wife and infant son. This may be true, but the appearance we are meant to perceive has been shaped by Castiglione, who penned the Elegy as though it was written by his wife Ippolita.¹¹⁵ Baldassare Castiglione married Ippolita Torelli on October 19, 1516. She was about fifteen years of age; he was twenty-three years her senior. Cartwright records that Ippolita brought a large dowry into the marriage.¹¹⁶ This was undoubtedly welcome, as the bridegroom’s role as ambassador for the Duke of Urbino in Rome had ended earlier that year with his patron’s fall from power. Pope Leo X awarded the prize of Urbino to his nephew, Lorenzo de’ Medici, while

¹¹⁴ Castiglione quoted in Campbell, 220.
¹¹⁵ Cartwright, II: 62.
¹¹⁶ Cartwright, I: 412.
Francesco Maria della Rovere, his Duchess Eleonora Gonzaga, and the widowed Duchess Elisabetta fled to the protection of the Mantuan court. Thus, Castiglione found himself returned to the country of his birth, and shortly after, a married man. A son was born to the couple on August 3, 1517. Events did not conspire to leave Castiglione in quiet domesticity, however. In February of 1519 Lorenzo de’ Medici died and Castiglione was sent to Rome, ostensibly as the envoy of the Marquis of Mantua (Federico Gonzaga). In actuality, he was dispatched to negotiate the return of Urbino to Francesco Maria della Rovere. He left his wife and son, and his portrait, in Mantua. Not long after his return to Rome, he composed the Elegy appropriating Ippolita’s voice as his own.

It would appear that Castiglione took his inspiration from the sonnets on portraits composed by other humanists, including his friend Pietro Bembo. Bembo, in turn, had looked to one of Petrarch’s sonnets on a lost portrait of Laura by Simone Martini.

When Simone, to the noble idea
given him in my name, added his manual skill,
if he had endowed the fair work
with voice and mind, as well as form,

he would have freed my heart from many sighs
that make what others hold dear seem vile to me:
for in appearance she looks humble
promising me peace in her expression.

118 Cartwright, II: 15.
119 Cartwright, II: 61-2.
But when I come to speak with her,
She seems to listen very graciously:
If only she could reply to my words.¹²⁰

In the following brief example of verse penned by Bembo on a portrait of his inamorata painted by Giovanni Bellini the poet’s debt to Petrarch is clearly evident in the acknowledgement of the artist’s ability to capture the beloved’s face so accurately that the lover expects a reply to his pleas.

I believe that my Bellini, as well as her face
Has given you the character of her,
...
And like a lady with a sweet and gentle expression
Well may you show me pity for my torment,
Then, if I beg for mercy, you do not reply.¹²¹

I seem to see on your face Love enthroned, and from one and the same place fly hopes, pleasures, fear and grief...¹²²

In both poems, the rendered subject does not reply to the admiring viewer. The silence of the image confirms the materiality of the painting. The likeness is lifelike but not alive. Ultimately, it remains pigment on panel. Unlike the poems of Petrarch and Bembo, the Elegy of Castiglione turns the conceit into an homage, cleverly crediting Raphael with a skill greater than that of the poet. Ippolita actually interacts with the portrait of her husband. Her cares are relieved, rather than increased, by speaking with the image of her

¹²⁰ Francesco Petrarca, No. LXXVII, quoted in Rogers, 300.
¹²¹ Bembo, No. XIX, quoted in Rogers, 301.
¹²² Bembo, No. XX, quoted in Rogers, 301.
absent spouse. By altering the Petrarchan model this way, Castiglione has enhanced both his own image and that of his friend Raphael.

In her study on sonnets on Renaissance female portraits, Mary Rogers notes that poems about female portraits emphasize relationships whereas poems about male portraits emphasize the sitter's virtù. The accepted formula for praising male portraits included a list of manly virtues that match those previously listed for the perfect courtier: courage, intelligence, dignity and graciousness. Rogers observes,

Poems on male portraits...efface the spectator, or reduce him to the status of a distant, barely noticed admirer: the sitter with his heroic virtues, is the almost exclusive actor.

This masculine formula is so ingrained that it occurs in modern descriptions of Castiglione's portrait. James Beck, for example, notes: "Grace, seriousness, penetrating intellect, a balanced temperament, bridled self-control, these attributes all may be deduced from [Raphael's] portrait [of Castiglione]." Feigned modesty would have prevented Castiglione from writing such a sonnet praising himself, but he has effected the same result by assuming his wife's voice and applying the pattern for praising portraits of ideal female beauty. If I may borrow from Jacobs's discussion of Il Cortegiano, Castiglione has succeeded in a "clever chiastic inversion" of gender.

123 Rogers, 293.
124 Rogers, 292.
125 Beck, 116.
126 Jacobs, 51.
Shearman recognizes a different, classical model for the Elegy, “the lament of Aretusa for her lover, Lycotas, away at war, written by Propertius in the first century B.C.”\textsuperscript{127} He states unequivocally, “This model was already recognized by Scaliger, and I would think that it was always known, and meant to be seen, and the comparison made.”\textsuperscript{128} If Shearman is correct, then Castiglione has ingeniously cast himself as both absent lover and virile warrior. The allusion is in perfect keeping with instructions on circumspect dissimulation in Il Cortegiano;

> But, for those things in which he feels himself to be mediocre, let him touch on them in passing, without dwelling much upon them, though in such a way as to cause others to think that he knows much more about them than he lays claim to know…"\textsuperscript{129}

What a perfectly subtle way to waft the idea of Castiglione’s military prowess into the mind of the reader. It can be argued that Raphael matched Castiglione’s verbal insinuations with paint. He gives the viewer only the smallest glimpse of the sword’s pommel. While the presence of the revealed hilt acknowledges the importance of the courtier’s military role, the fact that it is down-played as an attribute seems to substantiate R. J. Hale’s contention that Castiglione’s abilities as a warrior were virtually non-existent.

During the ten years 1503-1512 Castiglione was in the field for only eighteen months, and although danger and hardship played their part (he was seriously ill again for several months after the 1510-11 campaign against Ferrara) he cannot be shown to have struck a blow in action.

\textsuperscript{127} Shearman, Only Connect, 135.

\textsuperscript{128} Shearman, Only Connect, 135.

\textsuperscript{129} Castiglione, 99
Although technically a condottiere there is no evidence to suggest that he functioned as one…

Although Gian Paolo Lamazzo was to cite military paraphernalia as desired attributes in portraits of men, the presence of such devices here would most likely have left the sitter open to ridicule or, at the very least, raised an eyebrow. Raphael’s decision to provide the viewer with only a hint of golden pommel gives the effect of self-effacing modesty, suggesting a calm authority that can, if necessary, be reinforced by the might of the sword.

One might wonder why Castiglione felt compelled to burnish the luster of Raphael’s portrait with his Elegy. It was not unknown for the subjects of portraits to compose a sonnet of thanks. Antonio Tebaldeo composed such a poem about 1516, to thank Raphael for his portrait and to address the text/image paragone. “If, Raphael, excellence had been granted to my writing equal to yours in painting, you would see your likeness described by me no less than is mine by you”.

Compared to Tebaldeo’s sonnet, Castiglione’s poem, though a compliment to the artist, is not a simple poem of thanks but rather a vehicle to bring himself back “on stage” in Rome as a player of importance. He had been absent from the halls of papal power for almost three years, and his prince, Francesco Maria della Rovere, was in disfavor. Raphael, on the other hand, had continued to garner high-level commissions, and was living in princely fashion, in a palace designed by Bramante. The Elegy served to remind its readers of the close relationship between

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131 Tebaldeo quoted in Shearman, “Castiglione’s Portrait”, 75.

132 Cartwright, II: 58
himself and the famed painter, a reminder that could only help the author. While seeming to compliment the artist’s talent, the writer succeeds in promoting himself, and connecting his image to a painter of princes and popes.

Castiglione’s decision to describe his portrait by appropriating Ippolita’s voice and echo the language and tone of Petrarchan and classical poetry most closely associated with female portraits raises some interesting questions. What choices did Raphael make in his interpretation of Castiglione’s appearance that elicited this response from his subject, and were there precedents for this type of image? It cannot be documented, but it is likely that the young Raphael would have seen Piero della Francesca’s portrait of Duke Federigo da Montefeltro (Fig. 11) at the court of Urbino. It is also reasonable to assume that Raphael would have been in the presence of the Duke himself, based on his father’s employment and the recommendations that Raphael later received from the ducal household. It is plausible to believe that Raphael would have carefully studied this portrait. His reputation for being able to reproduce the style of other artists is given credence by the complimentary comments of Giorgio Vasari and the denigrating remarks of Michelangelo as mentioned by his biographer, Ascanio Condivi. Vasari describes Raphael’s study under Pietro Perugino,

It is remarkable that while Raphael studied Pietro’s style, he imitated it so exactly and in all its details that his portraits could not be distinguished from his master’s originals, nor could his own paintings be distinguished with any certainty from those of Pietro…

Goffen, quoting Condivi, discusses Michelangelo’s resentment of his competitor.

Raphael, having seen [Michelangelo’s] new and marvelous style, as one who was remarkable in imitation, sought through Bramante to paint the rest [of the Sistine Chapel] himself.\textsuperscript{134}

Only I have heard [Michelangelo] say that Raphael did not have this art from nature but from long study.\textsuperscript{135}

In either case, the ability to imitate requires the ability to observe carefully.

A complete analysis of Federigo da Montefeltro’s portrait and that of his Duchess has been written by Martin Warnke.\textsuperscript{136} It will not be repeated here. Nonetheless, there are a few points that should be noted. One might assume from the inclusion of warts on the Duke’s face and the deep creases at his mouth that this portrait was pitiless in its appropriation of a Northern aesthetic of individuated realism. Certainly, it is realistic, but the artist has been clever. Piero uses the strict profile, which was the standard portrait format for the time, but portrays the Duke on the left (or sinister side, usually the female position) in order to disguise the Duke’s disfiguring facial injury, including a missing right eye. Warnke notes,

The nose caves in at its bridge, in real life as the result of a tournament injury. The painter uses this notch to let the eyelashes emerge slightly from the contour of the profile; with them this leathery face seems almost to send a flirtatious wink across to the woman.\textsuperscript{137} (that is, the pendant portrait of his wife, Battista Sforza)

\textsuperscript{134} Condivi, quoted in Goffen, 217.

\textsuperscript{135} Condivi, quoted in Goffen, 235.


\textsuperscript{137} Warnke, 84.
Additionally, Piero set the Duke’s hat low on his brow, disguising his baldness, and sloping forehead, features clearly depicted in Pedro Berruguete’s portrait, *Federigo da Montefeltro and his Son Guidobaldo*, 1480-81 (Fig. 12). The strategy was not lost on Raphael. Not only does Castiglione’s hat frame the courtier’s face against the neutral background and provide compositional balance, it hides the sitter’s receding hairline. (Figs. 8 & 13).

It was not, however, Piero’s portrait of Federigo that exerted the greatest influence on Raphael’s depiction of Baldassare Castiglione. A more commonly acknowledged precursor is Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* (*La Gioconda*, Fig. 3). Raphael studied Leonardo’s fresh approach to the pose. As Goffen maintains, he “was not the only artist to borrow Leonardo’s invention for *La Gioconda*, but arguably he borrowed it more often than any other master,”138 adapting it to portraits of both males and females, as is evident in his wedding portraits of Agnolo Doni and Maddalena Strozzi. (Figs. 4 & 5) Here both bride and bridegroom are brought close to the picture plane and backed with a retreating landscape, and both are seated with a comfortable armrest – a chair arm for Maddalena Strozzi and a balcony ledge for Agnolo. Although a female portrait is the source for both, Goffen notes compositional variations based on gender.

Closer to the picture plane…and consequently more physically accessible than she, Agnolo is more psychologically available as well, regarding the viewer directly whereas she averts her gaze. His posture is more open than her and more suggestive of the possibility of movement…139

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138 Goffen, 186.

139 Goffen, 189.
In fact, neither portrait matches Leonardo’s psychologically accessible *Mona Lisa* with her nascent smile and direct gaze. Except for her shift in position, the stolid Maddalena still retains aspects of the normative female wedding portrait of the early Renaissance; her luxurious clothes and magnificent jewels providing the world with a portrait of family wealth and status. Despite the quotation from the *Mona Lisa*, Doni is strictly masculine. His slightly furrowed brow is perhaps meant to provide some *gravitas* to a very young man. The choice of position for his left arm allows the artist to square the shoulders of his subject into the broad and powerful line associated with the male sex. With this portrait pair, which predates the Castiglione portrait by a decade, Raphael has quoted Leonardo’s innovative pose but he has not manipulated gender norms to suggest psychological insight or disclose character as he will do in *Baldassare Castiglione*.

In contrast to the bold colors of Agnolo Doni’s attire, Castiglione’s wardrobe is a study in subdued elegance. The fur, fine linen, and soft wool are luxurious but the colors are muted. Shearman’s accusation of dandyism does not hold. The clothes conform to the strictures of appropriate male dress as Castiglione himself described them in *Il Cortegiano*. “Hence, I think that black is more pleasing in clothing than any other color; and if not black, then at least some color on the dark side....I wish our Courtier to...observe a certain modest elegance...”\(^{140}\) Castiglione must have chosen his wardrobe based upon this dictum, but Raphael’s selection of the *Mona Lisa* as the source of the pose has an effect on how the finery is displayed. This effect is pronounced in the shoulder line and the lay of

\(^{140}\) Castiglione, 89
the sleeves. Castiglione is depicted with the rounded, sloping shoulder line associated with
the female instead of the broad, square line that is the norm for men, as seen in the Doni
portrait as well as in Raphael’s Portrait of Lorenzo de’ Medici (Fig. 13). Both of these
subjects are depicted with broad shoulders, allowing a full display of their elegant sleeves.
The contrast in effect is particularly noticeable in Lorenzo’s portrait, for here even the fur
appears to bristle in masculine fashion. By contrast, Castiglione’s lies in soft, silky, and
gentle folds. The tactile softness of the fur and the undulating line of the folds of the fabric
are the perfect embodiment of morbidezza and leggiadria, precise gender-specific terms
used to describe female form and movement. Fermor discusses the connotations of the
term leggiadria at length, concluding, “Leggiadria is again connected with a movement
that is deliberate and carefully measured, with the body collected (raccolta) or
composed.”141 It is particularly telling that she bases her exposition in part on ideas
expressed by Pietro Bembo in Gli Asolani, first published in 1505,

> “singing and dancing in a circle, moving her pure and upright and collected
form to the sound of the instruments, now with slow steps showing herself
worthy of the greatest reverence, now with endearing turns, or bowing
pauses, filling, leggiadrissima, with beauty, all the circle.”142

Raphael creates the sartorial equivalent of leggiadria in his depiction of his
subject’s attire. The artist has chosen to emphasize the attributes of grace, composure and
dignity required of the courtier, and possessed in full measure by Castiglione. He employs
the feminine model of leggiadria in depicting the graceful, regulated flow of the fabric,

141 Fermor, 137.

142 Bembo quoted in Fermor, 137
thus conveying the deliberate and-measured persona of his friend. Moreover, his decision to not depict the “famous Renaissance elbow... an indicator of noble manliness reproduced in countless portraits of the time,”¹⁴³ as can be seen in Raphael’s portrait of Lorenzo de Medici, allowed the leggiadria of abundant fabric to remain undisturbed by any commanding indication of the masculine form. Although the portrait of Castiglione projects a presence it is not one of hypermasculinity, an attribute Patricia Simons identified in her discussions of male portraiture of this period.¹⁴⁴ Titian’s portrait of Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, 1536 (Fig. 10) is an example cited by Simons. He is enclosed in sharp unyielding metal, and surrounded by a panoply of attributes befitting his status and bellicose occupation. Even his beard bristles, and his lips are set in a hard line. Castiglione’s beard is soft, and his lips are visible, allowing us to believe the subject is relaxed and perhaps, as the Elegy suggests, about to speak to us.

It was noted in the previous chapter that Castiglione’s text sets clear boundaries between masculine and feminine appearance and behavior. Fermor explains,

Texts such as Castiglione’s Libro del Cortegiano thus present a complex and clearly articulated coding of movement and behaviour and a set of rules for proper deportment, within which gender roles and notions of masculinity and femininity appear ever more polarized and distinct. In Book III of the Cortegiano, for example, Castiglione stresses that, in every aspect of her behaviour, her manners, words, gestures and deportment, a woman should be very different from a man...¹⁴⁵


¹⁴⁵ Fermor, 131.
However, it was also noted that in *Il Cortegiano* the reality of court life required circumspect dissimulation; a certain level of calculation and deception was necessary if the courtier was to be successful in his attempts to please his Prince. Raphael was aware of the list of manly attributes ascribed to the “perfect courtier” but, clearly, he was also aware of the requirement to serve and to please, requirements that present a distinctly feminine cast, and ones implicit in the terms *cortegiano*, courtier and *cortegiana*, courtesan. The artist has chosen to incorporate normative female portrait elements in Castiglione’s portrait in order to convey the underlying, essential attributes required of the ideal courtier, who, like a woman, must serve his lord.

Comparing the positions of Doni and Castiglione relative to the picture plane and the viewer reveals that Castiglione is slightly closer to the viewer and on his level, whereas Doni is looking slightly down. For some time it was thought that the *Castiglione* had been cut down, based on the composition of a copy by Rubens (Fig. 14), but cleaning and restoration done in the 1970’s confirmed the current dimensions as original.\textsuperscript{146} Thus, Raphael intended to have Castiglione’s hands partially concealed, a decision De Vecchi describes as “profoundly innovative.” “In fact, the particular framing of the image, along with the height of the viewpoint, fixed on the level of the eyes of the model, suggests both physical and psychological vicinity.”\textsuperscript{147} It also suggests a complete absence of *affetazione*, in the form of circumspect dissimulation, as is required of a perfect courtier. This adjustment seems such a slight calibration, but the effect is substantial. When the clasped

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item De Vecchi, 106.
\item De Vecchi, 108.
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hands are fully visible, as in the Rubens copy, it adds to the feeling of anxiety and tension projected by the figure. Indeed, the viewer expects the subject to commence wringing his hands momentarily. Raphael’s choice results in a more stable and grounded figure, projecting a sense of calmness, which, in conjunction with the sitter’s direct and straightforward gaze, mediates the leggiadria of the sloping shoulders and voluminous sleeves. The viewer instinctively feels that the subject is relaxed and accessible. It is truly an example of sprezzatura, concealing the art, and appearing to be without effort.

Besides disguising Castiglione’s baldness, Raphael’s decision to frame Castiglione’s face with a prominent hat was in all likelihood motivated by compositional concerns as well as his subject’s taste for fashion. De Vecchi’s less than flattering description of the headgear, “Under a large cap with frayed edges, decorated by a medal, a pad conceals the receding hairline,” cannot be correct. Given the soft elegance and luxury of his other garments, including very fine linen (as evidenced by the fine pleating) a frayed cap would be completely unthinkable. Rather than fraying, I would suggest that the soft feathering near the top of the hat is the result of an ornamental badge. More to the point, the hat functions in at least three ways for the artist’s purpose. It allows Raphael to reshape and enlarge Castiglione’s head, and give it prominence by using a “reverse” halo effect. Since it disguises a distinguishing feature, the sitter’s premature balding, it allows

148 De Vecchi, 106.

149 Presumably De Vecchi has examined the original, whereas I have not.

150 Raphael’s Portrait of Lorenzo de’ Medici, 1518 (Fig. 13) demonstrates a similar irregularity along the rim of the hat.
the portrait to move toward the ideal, toward the second and more generic portrait Raphael was painting, that of the “perfect courtier.” Thirdly, it provides a surface for incorporating Castiglione’s *impresa*.

Cartwright cites early documents substantiating Castiglione’s portrait medal (Fig. 15) as a Raphael design. She also notes that he wore it in his hat. It is difficult to be certain that the badge displayed on the hat in the portrait by Raphael is the same because it is partially hidden in its pocket, and therefore difficult to “read.” Philipp Fehl has noted that such obfuscation is an unusual choice.

Renaissance portraits are full of devices pronounced by hat badges but hardly ever do we find a badge that, as it were, does not show its face. It wants to be recognized, to be read, even though its meaning may remain enigmatic to the uninitiated.

Yet, the play between the hidden and the revealed is not as strange as it might seem. Indeed, it reinforces the complexity of oppositions that characterize the image as a whole and makes perfect sense, if Raphael’s intent was to paint two portraits here: one, his friend Castiglione, the other, the “perfect courtier.” Friends would immediately recognize the subject, of course, and they would also “read” the *impresa*, being already familiar with it. To Castiglione’s contemporaries the badge would be a very particular identifying mark. Since Raphael designed the portrait medal, it functions as both an identifying label for the subject and as an identifying signature for the artist. At the same time, since it is partially

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151 Cartwright, II: 451.

concealed and cannot be clearly seen, it functions as a decorative but ambiguous sign for
the uninitiated viewer. Based on the little that is visible, Fehl argues that it is the obverse
of the medal that is depicted (Fig. 15). The subject is Aurora in her chariot, flanked by two
female figures, the personification of the Hours in the act of harnessing the chariot’s
horses. Appropriately, the motto “Tenebrarum Et Lucis” (darkness and light) stresses,
153 Finally, Fehl seems correct in Castiglione’s attachment to
Aurora with the final scene in Il Cortegiano, in which the coming of the dawn is
recognized by the company. “It is, I think, not an accident that Aurora appears at the heart
of the conclusion of the Libro del Cortegiano.” 154 As I have previously argued, this final
scene grants the court at Urbino eternal life, and it is an act of consummate sprezzatura for
Raphael to “quote” his friend’s text while in turn granting him eternal life in his portrait.

The impression of vitality in Baldassare Castiglione (Figs. 1 & 2) does not depend
upon a protruding elbow or prominent codpiece, but upon Castiglione’s startling blue eyes.
The glint of the hat badge and sword pommel, and the tiny glimpse of red silk lining are
the only other bright spots in this otherwise monochromatic painting. Just as their
inclusion, placement, and size are to some extent at the discretion of the artist, the
emphasis on Castiglione’s gaze must have been Raphael’s choice. Bringing the subject as
close as he does places Castiglione’s gaze at the level of the viewer’s and so rather than
being steely, piercing, cold, or aloof, the eyes appear to greet us with welcoming candor,

153 Cartwright identifies the figure as Apollo. (Cartwright, II: 451) I reject this identification based
on Fehl’s arguments, and Castiglione’s consistent rejection of the flamboyance that the choice of Apollo
would signal. Such hubris would be an example of affetazione unworthy of the perfect courtier.

154 Fehl, 13.
totally without *affezione*, in accordance with the prescription in *Il Cortegiano*. The blue eyes are a particularizing element that Raphael could not disguise, for the painting must indeed be a portrait of the real as well as the ideal, but he has managed to make their expression as soft as the fabric, the fur and the beard. Campbell has provided an explanation of Raphael’s technique for the effect that we feel, noting that “…Raphael has achieved a mobility of expression by contrasting the sizes and shapes of the eyebrows and eyes and the differing placings of the catchlights and pupils within the irises…”155 In fact the placement of the right pupil indicates that the right eye is gazing to the left, while the placement of the left pupil indicates that the left eye is gazing straight ahead. Thus the gaze is not one of direct confrontation as is seen in Titian’s portrait *Frances Maria della Rovere*. (Fig. 10) The viewer registers this as a softer expression. This softness might be the reason we have a quote from Pietro Bembo complaining that the portrait “would seem to be by the hand of one of Raphael’s apprentices so far as likeness is concerned.”156 Perhaps the gaze of the “ideal courtier” did not match the expression of eye and face with which Bembo was familiar. It is an intriguing thought. The fact that Castiglione felt compelled to assert the identity of the portrait as a “speaking likeness” by penning his *Elegy* may serve to confirm this suspicion, although other plausible motives for the poem have been advanced previously.

155 Campbell, 30.

156 Bembo quoted in Pope-Hennessey, 114.
Conclusion

I have argued that the portrait Baldassare Castiglione (Figs. 1 & 2) by Raphael was a response to the challenge of the paragone set out in Castiglione’s Il Cortegiano. Indeed, a complete appreciation of the painting is not possible without a thorough understanding of Castiglione’s dialogue to inform it. Previous critical discussions of the work have not seriously examined the choices Raphael made in relation to the text. Although Shearman identified the portrait as the “result of richly disingenuous calculation” on the part of the artist, he did not support his description with any links to Il Cortegiano. In fact, the explication presented in Chapter 4 agrees completely with Shearman’s statement. However, it goes farther, delineating specific examples of Raphael’s application of Castiglione’s “blueprint” for creating the “perfect courtier.” Although the book was not published until well after Raphael’s death, there is sufficient evidence that drafts were circulated, read, and widely discussed among the group of friends (including Raphael) that first became acquainted in Urbino. Castiglione assisted Raphael in his work on Rome’s antiquities for the Pope Leo X and, as evidenced by Pietro Bembo’s letter, the friends traveled and socialized in the company of other humanists. Thus, Raphael must have been aware that Castiglione was composing a challenge to the text/image paragone by

157 Shearman, Only Connect, 135.
“painting” the text portraits discussed in Chapter 3: the nostalgic memorial portrait of Urbino’s court, the portrait of an “ideal courtier,” and the subtle portrait, by implication and suggestion, of Castiglione as the paragon he undertook to create.

There has been critical emphasis on the portrait as a “speaking likeness,” and this emphasis is likely the result of Castiglione’s influence, for he could not let Raphael’s image stand unexplained. He authored an *Elegy* in his wife’s voice, emphasizing the portrait’s lifelike quality, and including subtle references to his role as husband, father, and *condottiere*. Castiglione’s motive in writing the *Elegy* may simply have been to emphasize the characteristics he felt Raphael had captured, or it may have been an act of self-promotion. It is also possible that as an image-maker extraordinaire, he had to have the final say in how he would be viewed for posterity. If the latter is true, his success may be judged by the extant literature on the portrait that stresses the noble, open character of the sitter. This view ignores the complex sub-text of Raphael’s masterpiece.

It is plausible that Raphael and Castiglione were engaged in a friendly competition revolving around the *paragone* of text and image. Just as *Il Cortegiano* is three portraits in one text, Raphael’s *Baldassare Castiglione* is three portraits in one image: the real man, the ideal courtier, and a “shadow” portrait of the court at Urbino. Despite Bembo’s comment, comparisons to other known portraits and medals confirm that it is a likeness of Castiglione. By removing or de-emphasizing particularities, the portrait also functions as the ideal described in *Il Cortegiano*. It is not a portrait of Castiglione “playing” the courtier, although it is clear from our discussion of *Il Cortegiano* that the subject did want to be seen by others as the personification of the ideal. The Court of Urbino is referenced
by Castiglione’s hat badge. The figure of Aurora recalls the final scene of Il Cortegiano, as
the courtiers and ladies leave each other at dawn’s break. They can also be envisioned as
the spectators with whom Castiglione is about to converse. Raphael has succeeded in his
reply to Castiglione’s challenge. The artist has evinced *sprezzatura* in the speaking
likeness of his friend and he has appropriated norms from female portraiture to portray a
living “perfect courtier.” The fact that Castiglione’s text is often used to describe
Raphael’s portrait is proof of the success of Raphael’s art. The fact that the means for
achieving this end has been overlooked serves to confirm that he successfully disguised the
extent of his effort. The artist would have been chagrined to have Ms. Albright’s opening
epigram applied to the superb portrait of his friend for, clearly as he intended, the *dificultá*
involved in the making of the portrait *Baldassare Castiglione* was obfuscated with *facilita.*
Bibliography


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Figures
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Figure 15: Portrait Medal of Castiglione, Raphael, n.d., Location unknown.
VITA

Margaret A. Southwick was born on February 8, 1947 in Paterson, NJ. She is a citizen of the United States of America. She received a B.A. in Chemistry, *cum laude* from Caldwell College in June 1968 and an M.S. in Library Science from the Catholic University of America in 1974. She was employed as a librarian in various capacities for thirty years, including technical services librarian at the Science Technology Library, University of Virginia and reference librarian at Tompkins McCaw Library, Virginia Commonwealth University. She retired from her position as head of the Research Library at Philip Morris USA in 1998. She is currently employed as a librarian at the Lora M. Robins Library, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.