Tasso's Dialogue on the Court

With a translation, introduction,
and notes by

Dain A. Trafton

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Il Malpiglio: A Dialogue on the Court

BY *Torquato Tasso*

The Italian text
along with the first English translation,
and Introduction, Notes, and Bibliography
BY *Dain A. Trafton*

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ILLUSTRATIONS

The portrait of Alfonso (facing p. 4) is in the British Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings as reprinted in William Boulting, *Tasso and His Times* (London and New York, 1907) and is reprinted through the courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum and Methuen and Company. The Vincenzo portrait (facing p. 5) is in the Galleria e Museo di Palazzo Ducale in Mantua as printed in Giovanni Paccagnini, *Il palazzo ducale di Mantova* (Edizioni Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1969) and is reprinted through the courtesy of Signor Paccagnini and the Galleria; the Tasso portrait (title page) is from the title page of *Gerusalemme liberata* (Genoa, 1590) and is reprinted with permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Preface

THE AIM of this brief work is to stimulate new interest in Tasso's dialogues. Although they fill over a thousand pages in the complete editions of Guasti and Raimondi (see the Bibliography) and thus constitute an important portion of the great poet's work, they have not received the attention they deserve. To be sure, a varied and useful tradition of commentary goes back nearly a century. Much of the biographical, historical, and philological background from which the dialogues emerge has been illuminated; and recently they have been the object of a number of highly specialized stylistic analyses (see the Bibliography). Nevertheless, while a great deal has been accomplished, even more needs to be done. For the manifold achievements of this tradition of commentary are more than balanced by its one significant defect: its failure to apply its discoveries and conclusions to the task of sustained critical interpretation. Indeed, no thorough reading of a single dialogue has yet appeared. Even the more sophisticated modern studies neglect to treat the individual dialogues as integral works of art; the concrete form and substance of each dialogue as a whole remains unclarified. The introduction that follows should begin to remedy this situation, while the translation of *Il Malpiglio overo de la corte* will for the first time make one of Tasso's best dialogues available to English-speaking scholars and readers.

Friends and colleagues have generously aided me with both the introduction and the translation. I should like to thank Professors Lawrence E. Harvey and L. Davis Hammond of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Dartmouth College, Carnes Lord of Yale University, and my wife, whose careful judgment has been invaluable. Finally, I should like to acknowledge the fact that the project was completed during time made free from teaching and other duties by a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for Younger Humanists.

D. A. T.

Hanover, New Hampshire
December 28, 1972

Tasso's *Il Malpiglio: A Dialogue on the Court*

Introduction

DURING his long imprisonment in the hospital of Sant'Anna in Ferrara, Tasso wrote *Il Malpiglio overo de la corte*.[1] The romantic legends that once surrounded this period in Tasso's life have been dispelled, and although some obscurity persists, the main facts, many of them relevant to *Il Malpiglio*, are now reasonably clear. We know, for example, that the immediate cause of Tasso's confinement was a public outburst of invective against the Este court. During the festivities at the marriage of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara, to Margherita Gonzaga in 1579, Tasso seems to have suffered a nervous breakdown. Feeling generally neglected in the round of pleasures and insulted by what he took to be a series of deliberate slights at court, he lost control of his sensitive and morbidly proud temperament, broke out into abuse of his patrons, and had to be restrained by force. He was not released until 1586. Of course this one breakdown in 1579, serious as it was, cannot explain by itself the extraordinary length of Tasso's confinement. Other factors, including the great poet's continued instability of mind, became involved eventually in Alfonso's decision not to release Tasso sooner. It would be surprising, however, if Tasso himself ever forgot the original cause of his fall from grace. During seven long years, as he poured out humble petitions to other princes who might help him regain his freedom, he must have had ample opportunity to meditate upon the dangers of speaking rashly about courts. And when a friend, Curzio Ardizio, had the temerity to ask him to write something "attacking the court" from his cell in Sant'Anna, Tasso quite understandably refused. In two long letters of reply, he explained why both reason and sentiment dissuaded him from such a task, professed himself "more inclined to flatter than to offend," and promised to return to

1. The best biography of Tasso is still Angelo Solerti's *Vita di Torquato Tasso*, 2 vols. (Torino: Loescher, 1895). The story of Tasso's imprisonment in Sant'Anna is told in vol. I, 306–495. For an analysis of some of the material relating directly to the composition of *Il Malpiglio*, see Torquato Tasso, *Dialoghi*, ed. Ezio Raimondi (Firenze: Sansoni, 1958), III, 40–42.

the subject of the court "in the proper place."[2] This promise seems to refer to *Il Malpiglio*, which was finished only a few months later, early in 1585, but the dialogue was never sent to Ardizio. Instead, it became a tool in Tasso's campaign to ingratiate himself with Vincenzo Gonzaga, heir to the Duke of Mantua, one of northern Italy's most powerful princes, and in fact the man who finally secured Tasso's release from Sant'Anna. Accompanied by a flattering letter asking for grace and aid,[3] the new dialogue on the court was dispatched to Vincenzo as soon as it was finished.

Given this background, we might expect *Il Malpiglio* to be just another of those collections of flattering courtly clichés that Tasso was not above producing on occasion. Even if he had wanted to write something "attacking the court" we might assume that he would never have done so in a work intended for the eyes of a prince. The dialogue itself argues that prudence is the most necessary virtue at court, and prudence, according to the Neapolitan Stranger, is primarily an art of concealment. To succeed, courtiers must learn to recognize and cover up anything about themselves that might cause offense; prudent concealment is the only way to protect oneself and to please at court. "By concealment, then," the Neapolitan Stranger concludes, "the courtier can avoid his prince's displeasure and also, it seems, protect himself from the envy of courtiers" (p. 35).[4] Such a doctrine of prudence might have provided the dialogue with its own justification for the worst kind of flattery, but if Tasso was tempted to flatter while writing *Il Malpiglio*, he resisted. It is, as we shall see, an extremely prudent document, employing the very art of concealment that it recommends, but it is also a firmly honest and subtly complex work of art. In the character of the Neapolitan Stranger, Tasso created an ironic mouthpiece through which he could expose the realities of court life without offending a patron who was also a prince.[5]

To understand the precise function of this mouthpiece, however, we must first grasp the peculiar situation, the dramatic context, in which he finds himself. As Tasso indicates in his *Discorso dell'arte del dialogo*, the dialogue is a hybrid form, combining philosophical dialectic with dramatic poetry.[6] The harmonious fusion of thought and drama that Tasso admires in the dialogues of Plato requires that all ideas—even those of the author's mouthpiece—be seen in light of the circumstances from which they emerge and which may have influenced them. Even a philosopher may speak differently in different circumstances; and the opening pages of *Il Malpiglio* are carefully designed to introduce us to the key elements in the setting and the dominant traits of the other characters which must be kept in mind when evaluating the Neapolitan Stranger's words.[7]

Vincenzo Malpiglio's suggestion that a boat trip might be made to San Giorgio, a suburb lying on the south bank of the Po di Volano, alerts us to the fact that the dialogue is set in Ferrara, where Vincenzo was a well-known figure at the Este court. Originally from Lucca, as we learn later, he had prospered in Alfonso's grace and had risen to control the finances of the Duchy.[8] As the dialogue opens, however, this highly successful courtier seems plagued by misgivings about the court. That his own son cares more about courts than studies and prefers Castiglione to Cicero or Terence obviously worries Vincenzo, and he does not hesitate to reproach the Neapolitan Stranger, who is his guest, for praising *The Courtier* in Giovanlorenzo's presence. "If he was eager to read *The Courtier* before," Vincenzo complains, "now that it has been so highly commended by you he will never put it down" (p. 19). Beneath Vincenzo's courteous good humor here lies a real exasperation with his son. Father and son are at odds over the court and echoes of their domestic quarrels can be heard throughout the first part of the dialogue.

At the same time, however, Vincenzo seems curiously eager to make the Neapolitan Stranger talk. We might expect the father to want to frustrate his son's desire "to learn about new developments" (p. 17) at court, but Vincenzo actually goes out of his way to initiate the discussion. When, for

2. See *Le lettere di Torquato Tasso*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1852–55), II, 278–88 (letters numbered 290 and 291).

3. *Lettere*, II, 321 (number 336). Cf. *Vita*, II, 29 (number XXXVI).

4. References to *Il Malpiglio* are keyed to the translation included here.

5. *Il Malpiglio* has never been closely studied. Croce's remarks on the dialogue's comparison between courts and republics, in "Libri sulle corti," *Poeti e scrittori del pieno e del tardo rinascimento* (Bari: Laterza, 1945), II, 198–207, are penetrating but do not approach a thorough analysis; and little more than a passing reference is to be found elsewhere.

6. Tasso's statement in the *Discorso* that the writer of dialogues is "halfway between the poet and the dialectician" ("quasi mezzo fra 'l poeta e 'l dialettico") is well known, and the discourse as a whole makes it clear that when he speaks of "the poet" he is thinking primarily of a dramatic poet; see Torquato Tasso, *Prose*, ed. Ettore Mazzali (Milano: Ricciardi, n.d.), pp. 331–46. And cf. Croce's "La teoria del dialogo secondo Tasso," op. cit., II, 118–24. I hope that my reading of *Il Malpiglio* will provide a rebuttal to his view that Tasso's attempt to fuse philosophy and dramatic poetry in the dialogues was bound to fail.

7. The Neapolitan Stranger appears in many of Tasso's dialogues, and in the dedicatory letter to *Il Conte overo de l'imprese*, Tasso admits that he uses the character as a cover for his own opinions (*Dialoghi*, II, 1027). Scholars have called attention to this passage, but no one has pointed out that the relation of author to mouthpiece in *Il Malpiglio* (as in several other dialogues) requires interpretation.

8. *Prose*, p. 125, n. 1.

example, the Neapolitan Stranger seems reluctant to begin, pleading his lack of experience as a courtier, Vincenzo urges him on. "It sometimes happens that wit, knowledge, and learning abound where experience is lacking" (p. 17), he declares, and goes on to assert that there is no one from whom Giovanlorenzo could hope to learn more about courts. And even after complaining about the Neapolitan Stranger's praise of *The Courtier*, Vincenzo wants to hear more. Although the Neapolitan Stranger himself offers to postpone further discussion of Castiglione until a better time, Vincenzo will not allow it. "You have commented on some parts of [Castiglione's] book before this," he reminds his guest, "and my son would like to hear those comments from you personally rather than from someone else. Like merchandise transported from place to place, truth passed from tongue to tongue is often lost" (p. 19).

Although apparently contradictory, Vincenzo's behavior—his effort to get the discussion started in spite of his desire to keep his son's mind off the court—in fact hints at a confidence that his own misgivings about courts are shared by the Neapolitan Stranger. We do not know exactly how well the two men are acquainted, but Vincenzo seems to have good reason to suppose that his guest's opinions will help to temper rather than to inflame Giovanlorenzo's enthusiasm. Those former comments about *The Courtier* that Vincenzo remembers and wants his son to hear must have been unfavorable, for when the Neapolitan Stranger admits that he has discussed Castiglione before "among friends," he also feels called upon to protest, "but the things that I criticized were few in comparison with the many that I praised" (p. 19). Few though they may have been, however, some parts of *The Courtier* were undeniably censured, and the Neapolitan Stranger's tone of protest makes clear his awareness that those few parts are the ones Vincenzo wants to bring up in front of his son.

No less clear, however, is the Neapolitan Stranger's reluctance to repeat his doubts about *The Courtier* or to undertake a more general attack upon Giovanlorenzo's predilection for the court. We have seen how he seeks first to avoid the subject altogether, then to postpone discussion of *The Courtier*, and finally to minimize his reservations about it. This reluctance reflects his prudence. As Giovanlorenzo reminds us, Ferrara is a city "where a man's worth shines out more clearly in courts than anywhere else" (p. 21). We must not lose sight of the fact that this discussion of the court takes place not on some neutral ground, not in a philosopher's ivory tower, but in a city dominated by a court. In that courtly city, moreover, the Neapolitan Stranger is, as he admits, "rather new and inexperienced"

Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara (1533–1597)

Vincenzo I, Fourth Duke of Mantua (1562–1612)

(p. 17). His very name keeps reminding us that he is an alien. He knows, too, that one of his companions is a strong partisan of the court; and he may have been struck by the fact that Vincenzo does not come out and ask openly for the criticism that he wants to hear. Is Vincenzo's indirectness simply a tactic to lure his son into the discussion, or does it represent the old courtier's prudence, his knowledge, won through experience, that it can be dangerous in Ferrara to reveal too much about one's feelings toward the court? We cannot be sure, but in view of both the certainties and the uncertainties of the situation, the Neapolitan Stranger's reluctance to be drawn out is hardly surprising. He suggests later, while stressing the dangers that confront men in the courtly world, that prudence sometimes consists simply in the good sense to keep quiet.

In the end, of course, the Neapolitan Stranger cannot avoid the discussion. Vincenzo and his son expect very different things from him, but they are united in their desire to make him talk, and they prevail. He is a courteous man, and they are his hosts. When he abandons the tactic of silence, however, the Neapolitan Stranger does not abandon either his prudence or his honesty. While he prudently refrains from stating openly his most serious reservations about the court, his skillful manipulation of a kind of Socratic irony enables him nonetheless to suggest them clearly enough. In his subtle mode of discourse lie the essence of Tasso's achievement in *Il Malpiglio* and proof that the art of concealment that courtiers must adopt need not preclude moral and intellectual integrity.

Having ascertained that Giovanlorenzo would "especially like to know how to win grace from princes and avoid the ill will of courtiers" (p. 21), the Neapolitan Stranger begins by surveying some of the activities and virtues conventionally associated with the good courtier: riding, jousting, hospitality, courage, etc. This is familiar ground to a student of courtly literature, and Giovanlorenzo agrees readily to the Neapolitan Stranger's initial conclusion: "Then physical training, a good mind, and moral virtue, O signor Giovanlorenzo, are what make a courtier pleasing to his prince" (p. 21). The young man is soon disabused, however, if he expects this pat formula to solve the problem of simultaneously winning grace from princes and good will from courtiers. As the Neapolitan Stranger proceeds to demonstrate, outstanding accomplishments and virtues can be hindrances rather than assets at court. For, while princes may be attracted by great attainments (and even this point will be qualified later), a courtier who shines too brightly is sure to arouse envy and ill will in his fellow courtiers. Therefore, the Neapolitan Stranger concludes, courtiers must

seek to prosper not "through great virtue or knowledge or other such qualities which call attention to themselves but through some other art" (p. 23). Although the explicit purpose of this argument is limited to clarifying the difficulty of pleasing both princes and courtiers, the unstated purpose cuts more deeply. By suggesting that an unenviable mediocrity is often more welcome at court than real excellence, the Neapolitan Stranger's words call into doubt the reassuring, conventional view that courts are havens for superior men. Without making the point explicitly, the Neapolitan Stranger has subtly begun to contradict the naiveté of Giovanlorenzo's admiration for the court.

Indications of a deeper antipathy to the court than he is willing to avow grow stronger, moreover, as the Neapolitan Stranger continues. Having established that the court "is a gathering for the sake of honor" (p. 25), he reminds Giovanlorenzo that his ancestors won honor not as courtiers but as free citizens of a republic; and he points out that the opportunities for honor in a republic actually surpass those at court. A citizen may legitimately aspire to the honor of ruling his fellow citizens and can attain to the highest offices in the state, but a courtier must be content to serve. In a court only the prince can enjoy the highest honor of ruling. The Neapolitan Stranger admits that some princes rule justly—some have accepted power "for the good of those whom they ruled" (p. 27)—but this admission mitigates only slightly the harsh truth implicit in his argument. Giovanlorenzo has agreed that honor not justice is the *raison d'être* of the courtly life, and it now begins to appear that princes alone reap the full benefit from the court's pursuit of honor. No matter how justly he rules, a prince necessarily prevents his courtiers from sharing in the honor of ruling with him. Honor-loving men, then, must expect to be frustrated and exploited at court. As the Neapolitan Stranger's pointed comparison between Giovanlorenzo and his ancestors makes clear, courtiership involves servility: "Am I to conclude that signor Lorenzo Malpiglio, descended from so many illustrious citizens, from men who have exercised legitimate rule over others, does not have the same desire for honor as his ancestors but prefers to serve?" (p. 27).

This comes very close to an explicit attack upon Giovanlorenzo's desire to be a courtier, and the Neapolitan Stranger quickly retreats from such an exposed position. He has led his young companion right to the brink of an unpleasant discovery about the court, and he also leaves himself a way out in case Giovanlorenzo is more inclined to take offense than to be enlightened. It is hardly likely, the Neapolitan Stranger hastens to explain,

that a man of Giovanlorenzo's "generous spirit" would prefer the honor of serving to that of ruling "if the splendor of some rare quality had not dazzled him, or rather illuminated him. The servants of princes often rule worthy men and lords with a greater and more independent authority than republics ever give" (p. 27). While it appears to dispose of the problem he has raised, this remark is deliberately deceptive. By seeming to justify courtiership, the Neapolitan Stranger contrives to stay on the safe side of the court, but his words quietly reassert a reservation. Courtiers may be allowed considerable freedom, but those who become "the servants of princes" still serve. Courtiers are granted such freedom as they have; it is not theirs by right but belongs to their masters.

That Giovanlorenzo grasps none of this irony is the measure of his infatuation. He has been more "dazzled" than "illuminated" by courtly splendor. No sense of contradiction troubles him as he goes on to add that even the highest magistrates in a republic "are like servants of the laws" (p. 27), but we may be reminded of the rather different emphasis in his earlier description of republican magistrates. Then he spoke of them not as "servants of the laws" but as desiring to rule "in accord with good laws and in a way suitable to men raised in freedom" (p. 27). When his mind is clear, Giovanlorenzo himself knows that serving the laws of a republic is compatible with freedom, but nothing in the dialogue indicates that serving a prince is. To Giovanlorenzo's remark that the most eminent citizens "are like servants" the Neapolitan Stranger replies, "But there are different kinds of servitude. In spite of appearances, we call this one freedom; and we call what I was describing servitude, although in many ways it reveals the greatness of princely rule" (p. 27). While insisting that the service of citizens is called "freedom," the Neapolitan Stranger is discreetly silent about the freedom of courtiers. They serve "the greatness of princely rule," but we have already glimpsed the Neapolitan Stranger's view that such greatness is built upon the exploitation of courtiers.

To impress upon us a sense of the prince's absolute power and of the courtier's consequent debasement is the underlying intent of much of the dialogue's long discussion of prudence. Once Giovanlorenzo has been convinced that both courtiers and citizens need prudence to guide their other virtues, the Neapolitan Stranger goes on to ask whether there is not some other kind of prudence beyond theirs: "To speak more clearly, let me ask you whether the citizen's prudence extends to the making and reforming of his laws and whether that of the courtier includes the granting of petitions and bestowing of grace as though he were the lord" (p. 31). His

companion replies that such activities would be evidence of "odious imprudence" in either the citizen or the courtier, and the Neapolitan Stranger immediately concludes, "In addition to the courtier's prudence, then, there must be the prince's. And the relationship of the prince's prudence to the other virtues is rather like the relationship of an architect to his workers" (p. 31). Once again the Neapolitan Stranger is deliberately and ironically deceptive. The discussion has been about both courts and republics, but the Neapolitan Stranger's conclusion, in spite of its satisfied air of finality, refers only to courts. Thus, by his silence about republics, the Neapolitan Stranger tacitly corrects Giovanlorenzo's assertion that citizens cannot make or reform laws. Of course they can; the highest prudence in a republic resides not in a prince but in its citizens. Giovanlorenzo is right, on the other hand, when he insists that courtiers must not act as though they were princes. Courtiers must recognize that a prince stands above them and above law; he is the architect of the regime which they merely support. The essence of a courtier's prudence consists in a willingness to accept an inferior station and in an unquestioning obedience. "It is often improper for him to inquire into the reasons behind the orders he receives," warns the Neapolitan Stranger; a courtier "must not want to know too much" (p. 31).

As for Giovanlorenzo, he is quite ready to accept a position of inferiority. He would "rather resemble Hephaestion for a single day than Parmenion for many years" (p. 33); and he seems unmindful of the possibility that his attitude involves any debasement. At times, indeed, his appetite for the court seems almost slavish. When the Neapolitan Stranger concludes that "a courtier who expresses his inferiority by obeying promptly and agreeing humbly will please his prince" (p. 31), Giovanlorenzo finds the idea wholly acceptable. He has come a long way from the view that "physical training, a good mind, and moral virtue . . . are what make a courtier pleasing to his prince" (p. 21), but he does not seem to notice where he is being led. Perhaps we are meant to conclude that Giovanlorenzo ought to be a courtier. His eagerness to follow and to submit suggests that some men deserve no better fate, but the Neapolitan Stranger does not let his companion's obtuseness and servility get off without one last strong challenge. Turning the discussion of prudence to the problem of the courtier who happens to be a better man than his prince, the Neapolitan Stranger allows his sense of the court's injustice to become almost dangerously visible.

Prudence, the Neapolitan Stranger argues, is especially necessary for the

superior man at court because "princes usually hate any greatness of mind" (p. 31). Near the beginning of the dialogue it was agreed that courtiers often envy each other, but now, in spite of Giovanlorenzo's desire to believe the contrary, the Neapolitan Stranger adds that princes sometimes envy their courtiers: "Pompey used to feel sad in the presence of Cato; and, whether out of politeness or respect, the courtier ought to avoid causing such melancholy when he is conversing with others and even when he is with the prince" (pp. 33–35). It is precisely the best men, according to the Neapolitan Stranger, who can expect the worst treatment at court, unless they are able to conceal their excellence. And the Neapolitan Stranger goes so far as to describe the superior man's life at court in terms of unceasing combat: "not only in debate but in every activity, the courtier must compete by yielding, like certain expert fighters who give way when attacked and by a supple trick throw their opponents more easily to the ground" (p. 37).

Like the contrast between Giovanlorenzo and his republican ancestors, the discussion of prudence barely manages to avoid "odious imprudence." As usual the Neapolitan Stranger stops short of actually formulating the conclusions that he aims to suggest, but his intentions gradually become perilously clear; and it is not surprising that the disquieting image of courtiers who are forced by an atmosphere of omnipresent envy to live as "expert fighters" leads to an abrupt change of subject which brings the discussion back to safer ground. By making a new beginning from the unexceptionable premise that the court is "a gathering" (p. 37), the Neapolitan Stranger skillfully reduces the pressure of his irony and prepares the way for a relatively conventional conclusion. Traces of irony persist, of course—in the notion that even tailors and shoemakers should become courtiers, for example, or in the comparison of young courtiers to morning stars that appear "swollen by the abundance of early vapors" (p. 41)—but the current of the Neapolitan Stranger's criticism is much more deeply submerged throughout the dialogue's final section than it was earlier. Having gone as far as he dares in the alien environment of courtly Ferrara, the Neapolitan Stranger prudently chooses to end his discourse with bland assurances about the court's perfection that Giovanlorenzo can easily take at face value if he wants to. Given his own need for the kind of concealment that he has been describing, the Neapolitan Stranger has done his best, and his ultimate failure to affect Giovanlorenzo should not be held against him. While Giovanlorenzo, the infatuated, would-be courtier, remains unenlightened to the end, Vincenzo, the experienced courtier who

hoped to hear the court criticized, appears satisfied. His disapproval of anything about courts that distracts his son from study obviously does not extend to the discussion he has just heard. "My son has plenty of time," Vincenzo comments, "and now he ought to be thinking more about his studies than about the court. Nevertheless, this discussion will have been a substitute for study because he may have learned a lot from it that he didn't know" (p. 43). We must assume that his own experience and his disenchantment at court enable Vincenzo to appreciate what his son misses: the subtle working of the Neapolitan Stranger's prudent irony.

Tasso's relationship to his mouthpiece and the brilliant achievement of the dialogue as a whole should be apparent by now. The Neapolitan Stranger's predicament in *Il Malpiglio*—his need to protect himself while speaking out on the court—closely resembles that of Tasso in Sant'Anna; and the prudent irony that both conceals and reveals the character obviously serves the author as well. Hints that Tasso puts in the Neapolitan Stranger's mouth lead to harsh conclusions about the court: it is infected by envy, founded on the exploitation of courtiers in whom it encourages a base servility, and dominated by a prince whose power is absolute, even over men who are his equals or superiors. Because these conclusions are never formulated in the dialogue itself, however, Tasso manages to indicate a rather radical critique of the court without actually committing himself to a single imprudent opinion. His technique of hints followed by silence at crucial moments or by the Neapolitan Stranger's deceptive tactical withdrawals is designed to beguile some readers while it forces others to take the final step of criticizing the court themselves. Indeed, if we imagine Tasso standing behind the Neapolitan Stranger, we may also imagine a courtly audience effectively divided by the dialogue's strategy into two distinct groups, one standing behind Giovanlorenzo and the other behind Vincenzo. The first group understands only those ideas which agree with its own infatuation, while the second is not only experienced and intelligent enough to follow the Neapolitan Stranger's irony but also prudent enough not to reveal the thoughts it has been led to think.

From the potential antagonism of this second group of readers, moreover, Tasso protects himself not only by implicating them in his criticism of the court but also by the urbane good humor of the dialogue's tone. In spite of the comparison between republics and courts that runs throughout the dialogue to the disadvantage of the latter, *Il Malpiglio* could never be mistaken for a revolutionary tract. The Neapolitan Stranger is no scheming politician, no malcontent, flattering princes in order to betray them. His prudence wears a tolerant smile; and if the young prince of Mantua, Vincenzo Gonzaga, had the intelligence to follow the irony that we have described he must also have understood that its purpose is philosophical rather than subversive. The underlying spirit of *Il Malpiglio* has little in common with satiric attacks upon the court or with works like the *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*; Tasso's dialogue grows instead out of a very different tradition which might be traced back through Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* and More's *Utopia* to the genial irony of Socrates himself. Life is a comedy, Erasmus' *Folly* keeps telling us, in which it is often necessary for a wise man to play the fool.[9] It is pointless and may be self-destructive to go about attacking folly openly. One must learn to tolerate it and to live with it, perhaps even to praise it. As Folly's own example proves, one can do this without becoming a fool oneself; and in the first book of his *Utopia* More adapts her lesson specifically to a justification of the kind of courtly prudence that Tasso exercises in *Il Malpiglio*. When Hythloday, who is the kind of man who scorns compromises and despises the court, remarks that "there's no room for philosophy at court," More replies,

> There's certainly no room for the academic variety, which says what it thinks irrespective of circumstances. But there is a more civilized form of philosophy which knows the dramatic context, so to speak, tries to fit in with it, and plays an appropriate part in the current performance. That's the sort you should go in for. Otherwise it would be like interrupting some comedy by Plautus, in which a lot of slaves were fooling about, by rushing on to the stage dressed up as a philosopher, and spouting a bit of that scene in the *Octavia* where Seneca is arguing with Nero. Surely it would be better to keep your mouth shut altogether than to turn the thing into a tragicomedy by interpolating lines from a different play? For, even if your contribution were an improvement on what had gone before, the effect would be so incongruous that you'd ruin the whole show. No, do the best you can to make the present production a success—don't spoil the entire play just because you happen to think of another one that you'd enjoy rather more.
>
> The same rule applies to politics and life at Court. If you can't completely eradicate wrong ideas, or deal with inveterate vices as effectively as you could wish, that's no reason for turning your back on public life altogether. You wouldn't abandon ship in a storm just because you couldn't control the winds. On the other hand, it's no use attempting to put across entirely new ideas, which will obviously carry no weight with people who are prejudiced against them. You must go to work indirectly. You must handle every-

9. For an illuminating discussion of prudence in *The Praise of Folly*, see Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963).

thing as tactfully as you can, and what you can't put right you must try to make as little wrong as possible. For things will never be perfect, until human beings are perfect—which I don't expect them to be for quite a number of years![10]

The similarity between the conduct of the Neapolitan Stranger in *Il Malpiglio* and this description of "a more civilized form of philosophy" which works "tactfully" and "indirectly" is obvious. As he talks with Vincenzo and his son in courtly Ferrara, the Neapolitan Stranger is especially careful not to "ruin the whole show." He demonstrates his willingness to play his part in the comedy; but through the double vision expressed in his ironic mode of discourse he, no less than *Folly* and More, keeps his eye on the truth as well. Through the Neapolitan Stranger, Tasso exemplifies a tradition of philosophic courtiership that flourished in Renaissance Europe and that produced in England such notable figures as Greville, Sidney, Spenser, and Clarendon—men who loyally served and even celebrated courts whose darker sides they clearly saw and discreetly managed to express. Their names represent the best that European courtiership has to offer; and when the Neapolitan Stranger confesses "as a courtier" that the prudent dissimulation that he has been describing "is not only Socratic but also courtly" (p. 37), he suggests that the common ancestor of these philosophic courtiers may be the father of western philosophy himself, who chose to live not in an ivory tower but in the market place.

A more conventional sixteenth-century writer on the court, following in the footsteps of Castiglione, might have used this allusion to Socrates to introduce an edifyingly elevated conclusion, but Tasso does not. At the very beginning of the dialogue, the Neapolitan Stranger admits to certain reservations about Castiglione's book; and although he never returns to the subject explicitly, the account of the court that emerges from *Il Malpiglio* might be compared to *The Courtier* without its fourth book, without the idealistic optimism of Ottaviano Fregoso and Pietro Bembo. Of course *The Courtier* itself is not deficient in shrewd realism.[11] Castiglione knew that not all courtiers, not even all the courtiers of Urbino, could follow the advice and example of men like Ottaviano and Bembo, yet the domi-

10. Quoted from the translation by Paul Turner (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 63–64. John Traugott's "A Voyage to Nowhere with Thomas More and Jonathan Swift," *The Sewanee Review*, 69 (1961), 534–65, provides a commentary on this passage which was especially useful to me in the formulation of my interpretation of *Il Malpiglio*.

11. See my essay, "Structure and Meaning in *The Courtier*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 2 (1972), 283–97.

nating roles that he accords them in his conclusion gives *The Courtier* an upward movement which *Il Malpiglio*, with its ironically conventional ending, wholly lacks. *Il Malpiglio* provides a portrait of the courtier "for these times when dissimulation is one of the most important virtues" (p. 37), and its allusion to Socrates appropriately brings with it a hint of tragedy rather than a burst of transcendent Platonism. For just before the Neapolitan Stranger speaks of Socrates, Giovanlorenzo mentions him too, along with Giotto, as a man whom "no false accusation, no calumny, no fraud" could deprive of his reputation for honesty. As usual, Giovanlorenzo intends no irony, but Tasso may have expected at least some of his readers to be reminded that while Socrates' reputation for honesty remained invulnerable to "false accusation," "calumny," and "fraud," his life did not. As More's fate also suggests, philosophic courtiership, albeit founded on the most prudent kind of Socratic irony, may not avoid a tragic end. It is in the light of such a suggestion within the context of the dialogue's generally rather bleak vision of courtiership that the good humor and philosophic calm of Tasso's tone takes on all its value. He was, after all, writing from prison, but the prudent irony of his mouthpiece remains urbane not bitter; and the dialogue comes to an amicable conclusion in which all parties—an ardent, young lover of the court, a disenchanted but still loyal, old courtier, and a courtly, philosophical stranger—can find satisfaction and, in spite of their differences, go on keeping pleasant company.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Il Malpiglio presents no serious textual problems. All modern editions derive from a single source: the excellent text—marred only by a few minor typographical errors—found in *Gioie Di Rime, E Prose Del Sig. Torquato Tasso, Nuovamente poste in luce per ordine dell'altre sue opere. Quinta e Sesta Parte*, published at Venice in 1587. No other early editions or manuscripts are known. The present edition follows the text printed by Guasti in 1859 (see the Bibliography), except that the clearer and more flexible punctuation of Raimondi (see the Bibliography) has been adopted in some cases.

The translation is as literal as I could make it without violating my sense of English idiom. Tasso's prose in *Il Malpiglio* is relatively unembellished and on the whole clear; and I have tried to give my English a colloquial ease which approximates the original. At the same time, however, I have sought to avoid transforming Tasso's sixteenth-century Italian gentlemen into characters from a modern American play or novel. A certain formality, I hope, tempers the colloquial quality of my translation and will remind the reader that the dialogue has its roots in a different intellectual and political environment from our own.

Notes to the translation will be found on page 44.

Il Malpiglio overo de la corte

Interlocutori: Vincenzo e Giovanlorenzo Malpiglio, Forestiero Napolitano.

V. M. Noi siamo a buona ora avisati de la vostra venuta.

F. N. E da chi sì tosto l'avete inteso?

V. M. Da mio figliuolo, il quale è stato il primo a saperlo, perché desiderava di venir con esso noi a diporto.

F. N. Non volete condurlo e compiacerlo in questo?

V. M. Non possiamo oggi andarvi perché non abbiamo il cocchio, se forse con qualche barchetta non volessimo passar a San Giorgio. Ma il desiderio di mio figliuolo non era tanto di vedere il monistero, ov'è stato molte volte, quanto d'udirvi ragionare in qualche materia, e particolarmente de la corte: e forse per riverenza non ve l'ha palesato; ma spesso meco e con la madre s'è doluto di non avere occasione.

F. N. Poco da me ne potete udire, perch'in questa corte sono anzi nuovo ed inesperto che no, e ne l'altre ho sì rade volte usato che molto m'avanza che ricercarne.

V. M. Ove manca peraventura l'esperienza, abonda l'ingegno, il sapere e la dottrina, sì ch'a niun altro egli si potrebbe avvenire, da cui più credesse d'intenderne.

F. N. S'egli non cerca i prattici cortigiani, ma coloro che ne parlano o scrivono per alcuna scienza, molti potrà ritrovarne, a' quali io sono tanto inferior di sapere quanto minor d'età; ma fratanto può leggere i libri di coloro c'hanno formata l'idea del cortigiano.

V. M. Egli ha letto il *Cortigiano* del Castiglione e lo ha quasi a mente, e forse meglio che l'*Epistole* di Cicerone o le *Comedie* di Terenzio; ma desidera d'intender cose nuove, avendo udito dal nostro Sanminiato che le corti si mutano a' tempi.

F. N. Chi forma l'idea non figura alcuna imagine che si muti con la mutazione fatta de gli anni, ma, isguardando in cosa stabile e ferma, la ci reca ne' suoi scritti quale nel pensiero l'ha formata. Né stimo già che 'l Castiglione volesse scrivere a gli uomini de' suoi tempi solamente, tuttoch'egli alcuna volta faccia per gioco menzione di que' più vecchi cortigiani i quali al tempo di Borso portarono lo sparaviero in pugno per una leggiadra usanza: perché la bellezza de' suoi scritti merita che da tutte l'età

A Translation of Torquato Tasso's *Il Malpiglio: A Dialogue on the Court*

Participants: Vincenzo Malpiglio, Giovanlorenzo Malpiglio, and a Neapolitan Stranger.[1]

V. M. We learned of your arrival early this morning.

N. S. From whom did you learn so soon?

V. M. From my son. He was the first to know, because he has been eager to come with us on this excursion.

N. S. Don't you want to bring him along and humor his eagerness?

V. M. We can't go today because we don't have the coach . . . unless you want to take a small boat over to San Giorgio. But my son wasn't as eager to see the monastery, which he has visited many times, as he was to hear you talk, particularly about the court. Out of respect he may never have revealed this desire to you, but to me and to his mother he has often complained that he has never had a chance to listen to you.

N. S. You can't learn much from me on this subject. I am rather new and inexperienced in this court, and I have been around the others so little that it would do me a lot of good to find out about them myself.

V. M. It sometimes happens that wit, knowledge, and learning abound where experience is lacking. There is no one from whom he could expect to learn more.

N. S. If he isn't looking for actual courtiers but rather for men who speak or write about them knowledgably, he will be able to find many who surpass me as much in knowledge as in age. And in the meantime he can read the books of those who have described the ideal courtier.

V. M. He has read Castiglione's *Courtier* and almost memorized it. He may know it better than Cicero's *Epistles* or Terence's *Comedies*. But he wants to learn about new developments, for he has heard from our Sanminiato[2] that courts change with the times.

N. S. The man who creates an image of the ideal does not base it on anything mutable; he gazes on what is stable and fixed and recreates it in his writing as he formed it in his thought. I certainly don't think that Castiglione wanted to write only for the men of his time. Although sometimes he jokes about those old-fashioned courtiers who, in Borso's day, used to carry a sparrowhawk on their wrists as a mark of elegance,[3] the

sia letta e da tutte lodata; e mentre dureranno le corti, mentre i principi, le donne e i cavalieri insieme si raccoglieranno, mentre valore e cortesia avranno albergo ne gli animi nostri, sarà in pregio il nome del Castiglione. Ma s'alcuna cosa è forse la qual si cambi e si varii co' secoli e con l'occasioni, non è di quelle che son principali nel cortigiano: laonde io non posso se non lodar vostro figliuolo ch'abbia più tosto voluto per suo famigliare il formator de le corti che lo scrittor de le comedie.

V. M. Se per l'adietro egli volentieri leggeva il *Cortigiano*, per l'avvenire no 'l lascerà giamai, poiché da voi tanto è commendato, al quale non soglion piacere tutte le cose che piacciono a gli altri.

F. N. Molte sono le cagioni per le quali onoro la memoria del Castiglione, e mi riserbo di parlarne con maggiore opportunità.

V. M. Ma pur in questo libro alcune particelle furono già da voi notate, le quali mio figliuolo non vorrebbe udire da alcun altro che da voi: perché la verità de le cose le quali passano di lingua in lingua, molte volte si perde, come l'altre che sono trasportate di luogo in luogo.

F. N. La mia è balba, com'udite, ma pur assai vera e fedel interprete de l'animo: laonde ciò che dentro l'intelletto scrive o dipinge, ella si sforza di mandar fuori con parole assai popolari, a le quali ne son mescolate alcune raccolte da' libri non per istudio posto da me nel parlare, ma per usanza ch'io ho di leggere o di scrivere: e per questa cagione non ragiono se non famigliarmente con gli amici co' quali ho ragionato altre volte in questo soggetto. Ma le cose richiamate in dubbio furono assai poche in comperazione di quelle ch'io lodai, le quali son molte: e di quelle poche non ben mi ricordo, perché la mia indebolita memoria è simile ad una pittura ne la qual, se pur v'è alcuna imagine formata, i colori ne son caduti e bisogna rinovarli: e percioch'avviene assai spesso che non solo il simile ci riduce in mente il simile, ma il contrario il contrario, molte volte l'opinioni de gli altri mi fanno ricordar le mie, de le quali mi dimentico agevolmente. Non è dunque maraviglia ch'io ne divenga sollecito investigatore.

V. M. Mio figliuolo vorrebbe esser oggi participe di que' medesimi ragionamenti domestici i quali solete far con gli amici: perché, se maggior cosa volgete ne l'animo, ora non ardirebbe di pregarvi che la manifestiate.

F. N. La materia propostami è così ampia che non si può tutta ristringere in un breve discorso; e 'l fare elezione de le cose più importanti è difficile altretanto quanto il narrarle tutte partitamente. Ma di quali egli vorrebbe che particolarmente si ragionasse?

V. M. Questo a lui medesimo richiedete; che se vergogna nol ritiene, certo per averne picciol desiderio non si rimarrà di rispondervi.

beauty of Castiglione's writing should make it read and praised in every age; while courts last, while princes, ladies, and knights assemble, and while courage and courtesy dwell in our souls, his name will be prized. And if, by chance, there is something in courtiers which alters and varies with time and occasion, it is not essential. I can only praise your son, therefore, for having taken to heart the creator of courts rather than the writer of comedies.

V. M. If he was eager to read *The Courtier* before, now that it has been so highly commended by you he will never put it down; for you're seldom pleased by all those things that please others.

N. S. I honor the memory of Castiglione for many reasons, and I shall speak of them when I have more opportunity.

V. M. You have commented on some parts of his book before this, however, and my son would like to hear those comments from you personally rather than from someone else. Like merchandise transported from place to place, truth passed from tongue to tongue is often lost.

N. S. My tongue falters, as you hear,[4] yet it represents my mind truly and faithfully enough. Whatever my mind writes or describes within itself, my tongue strives to bring forth in popular terms mixed with some fruits of my reading. These appear not because of any deliberate effort on my part but simply as a result of my habitual reading and writing. Because of my manner of speaking I usually don't discuss things except in familiar terms and with my friends. It was among friends that I formerly talked about this subject, but the things that I criticized were few in comparison with the many that I praised. Moreover, I don't remember those few very clearly, for my weakened memory is like a painting in which some form remains but which has lost its color and which needs retouching. And as it frequently happens that not only similar things but also contraries bring each other to mind, so the opinions of others often make me recall what I so easily forget. It is no wonder, then, that I examine other men's opinions so carefully.

V. M. My son wants to take part in one of those intimate discussions which you usually have with your friends. If you have something more important on your mind, he wouldn't presume to ask you to reveal it now.

N. S. The subject you propose can't be treated briefly as a whole, and to choose its more important parts is as hard as to discuss them separately. But what is he most interested to hear about?

V. M. Ask him, not me. Unless he is ashamed he won't hesitate to answer. He certainly won't be held back by lack of desire.

F. N. Piacciavi dunque, signor Lorenzo, ch'io sappia la vostra intenzione.

G. M. Io vorrei spezialmente sapere come s'acquisti la grazia de' principi e come si schivi l'invidia e la malivoglienza de' cortigiani.

F. N. Non è mica picciola dimanda, perché ne la grazia del principe e ne la benevoglienza de i cortigiani tutte l'altre cose paiono esser contenute. Ma questo a che fine, di ragionarne solamente o pur d'operare?

G. M. D'operar più tosto.

F. N. Dunque volete esser cortigiano? Voi non rispondete?

V. M. Vorrebbe, e si vergogna di palesarlo perché teme ch'io non me ne sodisfaccia, al qual piacerebbe più tosto ch'egli attendesse a lo studio.

G. M. In vero non mi spiacerebbe l'esser cortigiano, perch'io sono allevato in questa città, ne la quale il valor de gli uomini risplende più chiaramente ne le corti ch'in altro luogo; ma nondimeno mi sarebbe grave di tralasciare gli studi, perché mi pare che ne le corti simili a questa accrescano molto d'ornamento a' cavalieri.

V. M. E de la cavalleria s'è invaghito parimente.

G. M. In questo proposito avrei caro particolarmente intendere quali sono l'operazioni del cavaliero.

F. N. Le operazion di cavaliero chiamate, se non m'inganno, il cavalcare, il correre a la quintana ed a l'anello, il giostrare, il combattere a la sbarra e nel torneamento.

G. M. Queste.

F. N. Ma non vi paiono ancora operazioni di cavaliero quelle che fa il liberale donando, e 'l magnifico albergando et edificando, e 'l forte esponendosi a' pericoli de la guerra?

G. M. Oltre tutte l'altre mi paiono azioni di cavaliero: e questa ho creduta sempre che fosse la cagione per la quale alcuni cortegiani non solamente hanno seguito il principe ne le guerre, ma con sua licenza, mentre egli in pace governava il suo stato, sono andati ricercandole.

F. N. Dunque gli essercizi del corpo e 'l valor de l'animo e le virtù de' costumi saranno quelle, o signor Giovanlorenzo, che faranno il cortigiano assai grato al suo principe.

G. M. Saranno.

F. N. Ma ne le corti si stimano le virtù equalmente, o l'una più de l'altra?

G. M. Io stimo che sian più stimate la fortezza e la liberalità, perch'elle più giovano a ciascuno.

N. S. If you please, then, signor Lorenzo, let me know what you want.

G. M. I should especially like to know how to win grace from princes and avoid the ill will of courtiers.

N. S. That is no small demand, for in the grace of princes and the good will of courtiers every other part of the subject seems to be contained. But why do you ask this . . . for the sake of argument only or for some practical end?

G. M. More for a practical end.

N. S. Then you want to be a courtier? Why don't you answer?

V. M. He wants to be one, and he is ashamed to answer because he is afraid that I shall be angry. It would please me more if he would attend to his studies.

G. M. In fact it wouldn't displease me to be a courtier, for I have been brought up in this city where a man's worth shines out more clearly in courts than anywhere else. I am reluctant to abandon my studies altogether, however, because it seems to me that they confer great luster on knights in courts such as ours.

V. M. He is in love with chivalry too.

G. M. As for chivalry, I am especially eager to hear about what knights do.

N. S. Unless I am mistaken, the activities considered proper for a knight are riding, tilting at the quintain and at the ring, jousting, and fighting in the lists and at tournaments.

G. M. Those are the ones.

N. S. But don't you also find it proper for a knight to make gifts like a liberal man, to provide hospitality and to engage in building like a magnificent man, and to expose himself to the dangers of war like a brave man?

G. M. More than all the others, in fact, these seem to me to be a knight's proper activities. And I have always believed this to be the reason that some courtiers have not only followed their own prince to war but have even, with his permission, gone out to seek other wars when he was governing in peace.

N. S. Then physical training, a good mind, and moral virtue, O signor Giovanlorenzo, are what make a courtier pleasing to his prince.

G. M. So they are.

N. S. But are the virtues all esteemed equally in courts, or one more than another?

G. M. I suppose that courage and liberality are the most esteemed, because they are the most useful to everyone.

F. N. E peraventura le più stimate son quelle che prendono l'animo del signore, perch' è ragionevole ch'egli ami più coloro de' quali si fa maggiore stima.

G. M. Assai mi pare ciò ragionevole.

F. N. Or vorrem noi che s'esserciti il corpo solamente del cortigiano, o quella parte de l'animo la qual è soggetta a le passioni, o l'intelletto ancora?

G. M. L'intelletto parimente.

F. N. Dunque si debbono apprender le matematiche scienze e la filosofia de' costumi e la naturale e la divina, ed aver buona cognizione de gli istorici e de' poeti e de gli oratori e de l'arti più nobili, come sono quelle de lo scolpire e del pingere e l'architettura: e di tutte queste cose il cortigiano dee tanto sapere che non possa alcuno riprenderlo d'ignoranza, perch'in tal guisa egli sarà molto onorato dal principe, e la benevolenza seguirà l'onore.

G. M. Niuna altra cosa mi pare così vera: perché l'amar quel che non si stima non par che proceda mai da giudizio, ma sempre da passione.

F. N. Ma l'eccelenza di tutte queste arti e di tutte quelle virtù è degna d'alcuna invidia?

G. M. Anzi di molta.

F. N. Quelle cose medesime dunque le quali acquistan la benevoglienza de' principi, generan l'invidia cortigiana: laonde, non si potendo l'una e l'altra conseguire, non ci debbiamo curar d'esser invidiati da la corte, o non conviene con tanto studio ricercar la grazia de' signori.

G. M. Gran difficoltà è questa; ma senza l'uno e l'altro non istimo che 'l cortigiano possa giamai esser felice.

F. N. Dunque per altre vie che per queste di tante virtù, di tante scienze e di tante cose apparenti e risguardevoli dee procedere il cortigiano a due fini così disgiunti, se pur le cose disgiunte si possono congiungere per artificio.

G. M. Questo era quello a punto ch'aspettava d'intendere.

F. N. Io, come ho detto, sono quali smemorato, però non mi sovvengono tutte le cose da me pensate altre volte; ma, ricercandole, soglio richiamarle ne la memoria: e se vi piace, mi potreste aiutare in questa investigazione, altramente se ne potrebbe smarrire alcuna. Ora cominciamo da questo lato. Non vi pare che la corte sia un'adunanza overo una compagnia?

G. *M.* Certo.

F. N. E de l'adunanze alcune son fatte per diletto, come quelle del carnevale, ne le quali ciascun porta la sua parte de la cena e si sforza di superar ciascuno ne la bontà de le vivande e de' vini preziosi; altre sono

N. S. And perhaps the virtues which are most esteemed are also the ones which most impress the lord of the court. It is reasonable for him to prefer those which are valued most highly.

G. M. It seems reasonable enough to me.

N. S. Well now, do we want the courtier to exercise only his body? Or only that part of his soul which is subject to the passions? Or his intellect too?

G. M. His intellect too.

N. S. Then he ought to learn mathematics and moral philosophy as well as natural science and theology; and he ought to be well acquainted with the historians, the poets, the orators, and with the noble arts, such as sculpture, painting, and architecture. He ought to know enough about all of these subjects so that no one can accuse him of ignorance. Such knowledge will win high honor from his prince; and good will will follow honor.

G. M. In my opinion nothing is truer. Love for what is not esteemed never seems to result from judgment but always from passion.

N. S. But is excellence in all these arts and virtues worthy of any envy?

G. M. Of a great deal, in fact.

N. S. Then those very things that win good will from princes cause envy in courtiers; and since it is impossible to attain both of the goals you mentioned earlier, we must either cease to care about being envied by the court or refrain from seeking the grace of princes with so much eagerness.

G. M. This is a great difficulty, for without both the prince's grace and the good will of other courtiers I don't see how the courtier can ever be happy.

N. S. If there is any way to achieve two such disparate goals, then, it will not be through great virtue or knowledge or other such qualities which call attention to themselves but through some other art.

G. M. This is exactly what I have been waiting to hear about.

N. S. As I said, my memory is almost gone, and my former ideas don't help me much any more. When I make an effort, however, I often recall them. And you can help me too, if you will, to keep this inquiry from going astray. Now, let us begin in this way. Wouldn't you say that the court is a gathering or a company?

G. M. Of course.

N. S. And some gatherings are for pleasure . . . carnival parties, for example, when everyone brings part of the feast and tries to outdo everyone else by providing better food and more precious wines. Other gather-

raccolte insieme per utilità, come le compagnie di mercanti; ma questa de la corte, quantunque ad alcuni sia molto utile, a molti piacevole, nondimeno non è congregata per utile o per diletto simplicemente, ma per altra cagione.

G. M. Così stimo.

F. N. Ma quel altra può essere che l'onore?

G. M. Niun'altra a mio parere.

F. N. Ma chi dicesse che fosse il servizio del principe?

G. M. Direbbe quasi il medesimo, perch'altri serve i principi per onore.

F. N. La corte dunque è congregazion d'uomini raccolti per onore.

G. M. È veramente.

F. N. Ma lo onore s'acquista ne le republiche ancora, ne le quali il padre vostro e gli avoli con la giustizia e co 'l valore e con l'altre virtù cittadine conseguirono i principali magistrati e furono più volte ne' supremi gradi de la civil dignità.

G. M. Io sono così amico a la buona fama de' nostri maggiori ch'assai volentieri confermo quel che voi dite non senza verità, ma con molta cortesia.

F. N. L'onor dunque si ricerca ne la republica e ne la corte.

G. M. Ne l'una e ne l'altra.

F. N. Ma se la republica e la corte sono l'istessa adunanza, l'onore il quale si propone per fine dovrebbe esser il medesimo: e se le compagnie son diverse, diverso parimente sarà l'onore.

G. M. Pare assai ragionevole.

F. N. Dunque, concedendo quello che si conosce chiaramente, la republica non esser corte, mi concederete che non sia l'istesso onore quel che ne l'una e ne l'altra è ricercato: e voi l'onore de la republica, anzi gli onori non desiderate, ma bramate que' de la corte. E se questo è vero, non vorrei che nel vederli fosser da noi presi gli uni per gli altri.

G. M. È facil cosa che io gli prenda in iscambio, come avviene de' simili.

F. N. È convenevol dunque che procuriamo di separarli in guisa che la somiglianza non c'inganni e la dissimilitudine ancora non vi spaventi dal vostro nobile proponimento. Ditemi dunque: non credete ch'i cittadini desiderino gli onori de la republica?

G. M. Sogliono molti e quasi tutti desiderarli.

F. N. E quali son più desiderati, i minori o pure i maggiori e i supremi?

G. M. I maggiori e i supremi.

ings are utilitarian, like the merchant companies. But the gathering which constitutes a court, albeit useful to some and pleasurable to many, has a completely different purpose.

G. M. I agree.

N. S. What end could it have but honor?

G. M. None whatsoever, in my opinion.

N. S. But what if someone should say that courts exist for the service of princes?

G. M. He would be saying almost the same thing, because it is honor that makes men serve princes.

N. S. The court, then, is a gathering for the sake of honor.

G. M. It is indeed.

N. S. But honor can be acquired in republics too. Your father and grandfathers lived in a republic; and with their justice, their courage, and the other virtues of citizens they obeyed the principal magistrates and often reached the highest ranks of civil dignity themselves.

G. M. I love the reputation of my ancestors so much that I shall agree willingly with what you have said. Your words are not untrue, and they are also very courteous.

N. S. Honor, then, is sought both in republics and in courts.

G. M. In both.

N. S. But if republics and courts are the same kind of gathering, each ought to be seeking the same kind of honor; and if they are different, they will seek different kinds of honor.

G. M. That seems reasonable enough.

N. S. It is obvious, however, as I am sure you will agree, that republics and courts are not the same and that the same kind of honor is not sought in both. You don't desire republican honor or, I should say, honors; you long for the honors of a court. And if this is the case, I don't want our discussion to mistake one kind of honor for the other.

G. M. I confuse them easily, as often happens when things are similar.

N. S. Then we must manage to keep them distinct so that the similarity doesn't deceive us and also so that the difference does not frighten you away from your noble purpose. Tell me, now, don't you think that citizens desire republican honors?

G. M. Many do. Usually almost all of them do.

N. S. And which honors are the most desired: the lesser or the greater and highest?

G. M. The greater and highest.

F. N. Ma coloro ch'ottengono gli onori e le dignità supreme commandano a gli altri?

G. M. Così avviene.

F. N. Dunque il desiderar sovrano onore ne la republica altro non è che desiderio di commandare.

G. M. È desiderio di commandare secondo le buone leggi e come si conviene a gli uomini che son cresciuti in libertà: perché, s'alcuno in altra guisa tentasse di commandare, avrebbe spesso in vece d'onore l'infamia che soglion dare le republiche a' tiranni ed a gli altri usurpatori.

F. N. Né io altramente intendo, quantunque molte volte le republiche mutino forma in meglio, e si conceda per utilità publica autorità sovrana a principi prudentissimi, come fu . . . ; la quale autorità molti hanno cercata, molti non rifiutata, adoprandola per beneficio di coloro a' quali si commanda.

G. M. Così in molte republiche molte volte è succeduto.

F. N. Ma 'l desiderio d'onore il qual sospinge il cortigiano a la grazia del signore è desiderio di commandare o di servir più tosto?

G. M. Anzi di servire che di commandare.

F. N. Il signor Lorenzo Malpiglio dunque, figliuolo di tanti illustri cittadini, i quali han commandato a gli altri legittimamente, non ha il medesimo desiderio di onore, ma desidera di servire? Essend'egli d'animo generoso, non è verisimile che, lasciato l'onor del commandare, seguisse questo che si ritrova ne la servitù, se lo splendor d'alcuna rara virtù non l'abbagliasse, o più tosto non l'illustrasse: percioché questi medesimi i quali servono a' principi commandano assai volte ad uomini eccellenti ed a signori con maggiore e più libera autorità di quella che ne le republiche è conceduta.

G. M. Ne le republiche si serve e si commanda parimente: percioché coloro che sono ne l'infimo ordine seguono i commandamenti del primo, ed alcuna volta quelli che inanzi commandorono ubbediscono dapoi, e quelli che prima ubbedirono al fine commandano a gli eguali: anzi quelli stessi ch'ascendono a' magistrati supremi sono come servi de le leggi.

F. N. Ma la servitù è diversa: l'una chiameran più tosto libertà, benché abbia qualche somiglianza di servitù; l'altra servitù, quantunque in molte azioni dimostri la grandezza del principato.

G. M. Assai mi pare ch'i nomi a le cose abbiate compartiti.

F. N. Ma l'onor che è in queste maniere di vita nasce da virtù?

G. M. Nasce senza fallo.

N. S. But don't those who obtain the highest honors and dignity rule the others?

G. M. That is the way it turns out.

N. S. In a republic, then, the desire for supreme honor is nothing less than the desire to rule.

G. M. It is a desire to rule in accord with good laws and in a way suitable to men raised in freedom, for anyone who tries to rule differently often wins instead of honor the infamy that republics usually confer upon tyrants and other usurpers.

N. S. I didn't mean anything else. Republics often change for the better, however; and for the sake of the public good, they surrender their sovereign authority to princes of the highest prudence. Such a prince was . . . .[5] Many have sought such authority, and many who have been offered it have accepted for the good of those whom they ruled.

G. M. That is the way it has happened in many republics.

N. S. But what about the love of honor that drives the courtier to seek grace from his prince? Is it a desire to rule or to serve?

G. M. To serve, not to rule.

N. S. Am I to conclude that signor Lorenzo Malpiglio, descended from so many illustrious citizens, from men who have exercised legitimate rule over others, does not have the same desire for honor as his ancestors but prefers to serve? With his generous spirit he would hardly abandon the honor of ruling for the honor of serving if the splendor of some rare quality had not dazzled him, or rather illuminated him. The servants of princes often rule worthy men and lords with a greater and more independent authority than republics ever give.

G. M. In republics, a man both serves and rules. Men in the lower ranks obey their leaders, but sometimes the positions are reversed. Then those who used to rule their equals obey, and those who once obeyed rule. And even those who have reached the highest offices are like servants of the laws.

N. S. But there are different kinds of servitude. In spite of appearances, we prefer to call this one freedom; and we call what I was describing servitude, although in many ways it reveals the greatness of princely rule.

G. M. It seems to me that you have very nicely given things their proper names.

N. S. In courts and in republics alike, however, honor springs from virtue.

G. M. Without fail.

F. N. Ma se fosse diversa la virtù de l'una e de l'altra, come si dubita, noi debbiamo cercar quella del cortigiano?

G. M. Quella, pare, e non altro.

F. N. E forse meglio la conosceremo, se con l'altra, ch'è del cittadino, faremo di lei paragone. Or quale stimate voi che sia la virtù che si ricerca principalmente al buon cittadino?

G. M. Alcuni han creduto la fortezza e la liberalità, le quali son tanto onorate, come testimoniano le statue dirizzate a' valorosi, l'orazioni funebri e i versi e gli altri segni d'onore publici e privati.

F. N. E la virtù suprema del cortigiano pare a voi la fortezza o pur alcuna altra?

G. M. La fortezza parimente, la qual è propria virtù del cavaliero: e quella è cui più si conviene il saper adoperar l'armi per onor proprio e per servigio del suo principe.

F. N. Nondimeno la fortezza così civile come cortigiana per difetto di prudenza è precipitata molte volte in casi molto pericolosi, come a' tempi antichi (ché mi giova tacer de' nostri) quella di Flaminio e di Minuzio e di Paulo o pur di Regolo istesso.

G. M. Così avvenne.

F. N. Ha dunque bisogno di guida e di freno e di chi la regga e l'indrizzi: e questa è la prudenza, senza cui la fortezza è cieca e temeraria, o più tosto non è vera fortezza.

G. M. La fortezza a me par simile a' destrieri generosi, che quanto sono più feroci, tanto hanno maggior bisogno di morso.

F. N. Tuttavolta chi pare a voi più nobile, il cavallo o 'l cavaliero, il guidato o la guida, lo sfrenato o chi pone il freno?

G. M. Non si può negar che non sia maggior nobiltà in coloro che governano ch'in quelli che son governati.

F. N. La prudenza dunque, ch'è scorta de la fortezza, è più nobil virtù: e questa nel cittadino è civile e nel cortigiano peraventura è cortigiana prudenza.

G. M. Facilmente mi persuadono le vostre ragioni.

F. N. E la differenza ch'è fra l'una e l'altra è quella che si piglia dal fine: percioch'il cortigiano ha per fine la riputazione e l'onor del principe, dal qual si deriva il proprio come rivo da fonte; e 'l cittadino la conservazione de la libertà.

G. M. Assai questa differenza distingue l'una da l'altra, e ce le fa conoscere in quella maniera che le monete d'oro e d'argento sono conosciute per la diversità de l'imagine impressa.

N. S. And if the virtues of the courtier and the citizen differ, as we may suspect, we must try to discover the courtier's.

G. M. His, it seems, and no other.

N. S. Perhaps we shall be able to recognize his virtue more readily, however, if we compare it with the other, the virtue of the citizen. Which virtue do you think is most sought after by good citizens?

G. M. Some say courage and liberality; for the statues, funeral orations, verses, and other memorials, both public and private, dedicated to courageous men, testify to the honor in which these virtues are held.

N. S. And does courage seem to you to be the highest virtue of the courtier, or is it some other?

G. M. Courage is also the courtier's highest virtue. And to exercise it he must know how to use his arms for his own honor and for the service of his prince.

N. S. All the same, both the courageous citizen and the courageous courtier often fall into grave danger through lack of prudence. I prefer not to mention our own times, but consider Flaminius, Minucius, Paullus, or even Regulus.[6]

G. M. This happens.

N. S. Courage, then, needs guidance and restraint and something to rule and direct it. This something is prudence; without prudence, courage is blind and rash. Indeed, it is not really courage at all.

G. M. Courage seems to me like a generous war-horse; the more spirited it is, the more it needs the bit.

N. S. Which seems to you more noble, however, the horse or the rider, the thing guided or he who guides, the thing restrained or he who does the restraining?

G. M. It can't be denied that the ruler is more noble than the ruled.

N. S. Therefore prudence, which guides courage, is the nobler virtue; and the citizen's prudence is civil while that of the courtier is courtly.

G. M. Your arguments persuade me easily.

N. S. And the difference between the two kinds of prudence derives from their ends, for the courtier's end is the reputation and honor of his prince, from which his own reputation and honor flow as a stream from a spring, while the citizen's end is the preservation of freedom.

G. M. This nicely distinguishes the two kinds of prudence and makes it possible to tell them apart just as the different images on gold and silver coins make it possible to tell them apart.

F. N. Ma oltre questa prudenza eccene alcun'altra, o pur l'una basta ne la città e l'altra ne la corte? Ed accioch'io meglio mi dichiari, io vi chiedo s'a la prudenza del cittadino s'appartiene il far sue leggi e 'l riformarle, ed a quella del cortigiano il segnar le suppliche e 'l conceder le grazie non altramente ch'egli fosse il signore.

G. M. Questa sarebbe ne l'uno e ne l'altro imprudenza odiosa.

F. N. Dunque oltre questo è necessaria la prudenza del principe, la quale in comparazione de l'altre virtù è quasi architetto per rispetto de gli operari.

G. M. Necessaria senza dubbio.

F. N. La prudenza dunque del cortigiano consisterà ne l'essercitare i commandamenti del principe.

G. M. Così mi pare.

F. N. Ma l'essecutore e 'l ministro, in quanto egli è tale, è sempre inferiore a colui che gli commanda. Dunque dee il cortigiano in guisa operare ciò che gli è imposto che dimostri prudenza inferiore non sol di persona inferiore: e molte volte è disdicevole ch'egli spii le cagioni di quel che gli è commandato, o che voglia più saper di quel che gli conviene; ma con la sua piacevolezza e con la destrezza modera la severità de le commissioni, e come i venti prendon qualità da' luoghi onde passano, divenendo tepidi per camino, così le severe commissioni per l'accortezza del cortigiano sogliono parer men dure e spiacevoli il più de le volte.

G. M. Assai per mio parere sarà lodato il cortigiano ch'in questo modo saprà ubbedire: e già veggio come insieme si possa acquistar la grazia del principe e la benevoglienza de' servitori, la qual da principio mi pareva assai malagevole da conseguire.

F. N. L'inferiorità dunque manifestata ne la pronta ubidienza e ne l'umiltà di non contradire è quella che fa grato al principe il cortigiano.

G. M. Così stimo.

F. N. Ma perché colui che di prudenza è superiore, per niun'altra cagione par che debba esser riputato inferiore, essendo l'intelletto quello al quale da la natura è conceduto il principato, ogni maggioranza d'ingegno suole essere odiosa al principe: laonde, quando ella sia nel cortigiano, come aviene alcuna volta, dee più tosto esser coperta con modestia che dimostrata con superba apparenza. Dunque appari il cortigiano più tosto d'occultare che di apparere.

G. M. A me pare così difficile l'apparere quel ch'io non sono, come il celar quel ch'io sono; nondimeno, perché celando celerò molte imperfezioni e discoprendo non discoprirei alcuna mia perfezione, prenderò partito più volentieri di nascondermi che manifestarmi.

N. S. In addition to these kinds of prudence, however, is there another? Or is one of these adequate for the city and the other for the court? To speak more clearly, let me ask you whether the citizen's prudence extends to the making and reforming of his laws and whether that of the courtier includes the granting of petitions and the bestowing of grace as though he were the lord.

G. M. In doing such things both citizens and courtiers would be acting with odious imprudence.

N. S. In addition to the courtier's prudence, then, there must be the prince's. And the relationship of the prince's prudence to the other virtues is rather like the relationship of an architect to his workers.

G. M. No doubt the prince's prudence is also necessary.

N. S. The courtier's prudence, then, consists in carrying out the prince's orders.

G. M. So it seems to me.

N. S. But an executor and minister is, as such, inferior to a ruler. The fact that the courtier must obey orders shows that he is inferior not only in position but in prudence. It is often improper for him to inquire into the reasons behind the orders he receives; he must not want to know too much. With his charm and cleverness, however, he can soften the harshness of the prince's commands; and just as winds are modified by the lands through which they pass and become warm as they go along, so severity usually comes to seem less rigorous and wounding as a result of the courtier's skill.

G. M. I think that the courtier who knows how to obey his prince in this manner will be highly praised. Now I see how the prince's grace and the courtiers' good will can be acquired together—an accomplishment which at first seemed to me very difficult.

N. S. Then a courtier who expresses his inferiority by obeying promptly and agreeing humbly will please his prince.

G. M. I agree.

N. S. But since the intellect is meant by nature to rule, it seems that the man who possesses superior prudence ought not to be considered inferior for any reason. And this is why princes usually hate any greatness of mind. When a courtier has great intelligence, which sometimes happens, he ought to cover it up modestly, not show it off with pride. Concealment becomes the courtier more than showing off.

G. M. I think that it will be very difficult for me to seem to be what I am not and to hide what I am. Because I am imperfect in so many ways and perfect in none, however, I shall be more easily persuaded to hide than to show off.

F. N. Questo nascondersi nondimeno si può fare con alcuno avvedimento, per lo quale la picciola parte che si dimostri generi desiderio di quella che si ricopre, ed una certa stima ed opinione de gli uomini e del principe medesimo, che dentro si nascondra un non so che di raro e di singolare e di perfetto: il che par che più si convenga a gli amatori del principato ch' a quelli del principe, perché debbono mantener la sua riputazione accioch'i consigli abbiano autorità; gli altri fanno il principal fondamento sovra l'amore e sovra la benevolenza.

G. M. Io amerei meglio essere un giorno simile ad Efestione che molti anni eguale a Parmenione: laonde niun mio difetto mi curerei di celare al principe, sì veramente ch'egli insieme conoscesse la fede.

F. N. Questi sono due modi e, per così dire, due strade per le quali si perviene quasi egualmente a la grazia del principe: ma l'una è propria dei consiglieri e de' secretari, l'altra de' compagni e di quelli che servono a la persona; e se questi per quella o quelli per questa caminassero, non ci giungerebbono così agevolmente. Ciascun dunque deve elegger quella via che più gli si conviene, avendo risguardo a la nobiltà, a la ricchezza, a l'industria, al valore e a l'altre condizioni datele da la natura e da la fortuna.

G. M. Conoscitor di se stesso dunque dee essere il cortigiano.

F. N. La cognizion di se stesso dee preceder tutte l'altre; ma chi se medesimo conosce e conosce il principe, non può in modo alcuno ingannarsi, tuttoché al principe non si manifesti.

G. M. Il nascondersi al principe non è argomento di benevolenza.

F. N. È nondimeno segno di riverenza, perch'il discoprir tutte le passioni de l'animo si fa con molta domestichezza, la quale a le persone più gravi, come sono consiglieri e secretari, par meno conveniente: e s'alcun ve n'è mai, il quale con la cognizione e con la benevolenza, serrando e disserrando, soavemente s'apra l'animo del principe in modo che tolga tutti gli altri da i secreti, facilmente è sottoposto a l'invidia.

G. M. Questa vorrei sapere come si potesse schivare.

F. N. L'invidia è del principe verso i cortigiani o del cortigiano verso il principe o pur del cortigiano verso il cortigiano.

G. M. Io credo che 'l cortigiano non soglia mai invidiare il principe o 'l principe il cortigiano, ma che solamente porti invidia l'uno a l'altro cortigiano.

F. N. Nondimeno, o sia fastidio o riverenza, quella mestizia che genera l'apparente eccellenza, per la qual Pompeo pareva contristarsi a la presenza di Catone, dee schivarsi dal cortigiano non solamente quando egli ragiona

N. S. But this concealment can be shrewdly managed. The little part of oneself that is revealed can create a desire to know what is covered up; it can cause men generally and even the prince to believe that something rare, singular, and perfect is being hidden. But such shrewdness seems more appropriate in lovers of the principality than in lovers of the prince himself. For the former must maintain their reputations so that their counsels will have authority, but the latter build principally on love and good will rather than on authority.

G. M. I should rather resemble Hephaestion for a single day than Parmenion for many years.[7] Therefore I shouldn't try to hide any of my defects if my prince were also truly aware of my faithfulness.

N. S. There are two methods, two roads, so to speak, by which to win a prince's grace; one is for councilors and secretaries and the other for those who serve the prince's person. And if the latter group travels by the former road or the former group by the latter road, neither will arrive very easily. Everyone must consider his rank, his wealth, his industriousness, his courage, and the other qualities given him by nature and fortune; then he must choose the road that suits him.

G. M. Then the courtier must know himself.

N. S. Self-knowledge must precede all other knowledge. The courtier who knows himself as well as his prince will never deceive himself in any way . . . although he may not be open with his prince.

G. M. Concealing oneself from one's prince is no argument of good will.

N. S. But it is a sign of respect. Revealing all one's passions smacks of too much familiarity in dignified men such as councilors and secretaries. And any councilor or secretary who exploits his knowledge and favor, who manipulates the prince so as to gain access to his soul and exclude others from his secrets, will be subject to envy.

G. M. That is what I want to know how to avoid.

N. S. A prince can envy a courtier, a courtier can envy a prince, or courtiers can envy each other.

G. M. In my opinion a courtier is hardly likely to envy a prince or a prince a courtier. Courtiers envy only each other.

N. S. All the same, there is a melancholy created in some men by obvious excellence in others. Pompey used to feel sad in the presence of Cato;[8] and, whether out of politeness or respect, the courtier ought to avoid causing such melancholy when he is conversing with others and

con gli altri, ma quando è inanzi al principe istesso; né si può meglio fuggire che ricoprendo o, come dice alcuno, tacendo.

G. M. Io niun altro migliore ne saprei ritrovare.

F. N. Dunque occultando il cortigiano schiva la noia del principe, ed occultando ancora par ch'egli possa celarsi da l'invidia cortigiana.

G. M. Con l'arti medesime.

F. N. Né solamente la dimostrata cognizione de le scienze divine ed umane e quella de l'istoria e de la poesia e de l'arte oratoria, ma l'opinion del valore, ricercata armeggiando ambiziosamente, e la soverchia pompa e l'importuna liberalità e la magnificenza, che non prende, ma cerca l'occasioni, sogliono spesso generare invidia.

G. M. Infelice dunque in questo è la vita de' cortigiani.

F. N. E s'alcuno è fra' cortigiani il quale sia più dotto che ne la corte non par necessario, non deve amar le contese e le quistioni in quel modo che si fa ne le scuole de' filosofanti; perch'anzi buon loico che buon cortigiano si dimostrerebbe.

G. M. Così mi pare.

F. N. Dunque la prudenza è quella virtù che supera ne le corti tutte le difficoltà, o la cognizione de le cose naturali; ma questa è propria del filosofo, quella del cavaliere: i quali, se pur son cortigiani, non debbon molto ricercar a gli altri ne le lettere o ne l'armi, perchè, facendosi eguali in queste cose, superano con la prudenza, ch'è la principal virtù de le corti.

G. M. In questo modo voi ristringete in una le molte virtù del cortigiano, e l'altre non ci avranno luogo.

F. N. La virtù del cortigiano è tutta la virtù, ma fra le particolari virtù maggiore è la prudenza: e questa non è disgiunta da l'altre; ma come il capitano conduce seco la sua schiera, così la prudenza è seguita da le virtù de' costumi, de le quali è lume e guida e quasi imperatrice.

G. M. Ma forse non si mostreranno, quantunque siano sempre dove è la prudenza.

F. N. Non tutte egualmente né sempre si manifestano, ma sì come ne le pitture con l'ombre s'accennano alcune parti lontane, altre sono da' colori più vivamente espresse, così avverrà parimente de le virtù che sono con la prudenza: percioché la fortezza e la magnanimità ed alcun'altre si veggono adombrate e paiono quasi di lontano discoprirsi; ma la magnificenza, la liberalità e quella che si chiama cortesia con proprio nome e la modestia è dipinta con i più fini colori ch'abbia l'artificio del cortigiano, anzi viva più tosto: parimente le virtù del conversare, io dico la verità, l'affabilità e la piacevolezza.

even when he is with the prince. The best way to accomplish this, moreover, is by concealment or, as some say, by keeping quiet.

G. M. I don't know any better way.

N. S. By concealment, then, the courtier can avoid his prince's displeasure and also, it seems, protect himself from the envy of courtiers.

G. M. The same arts accomplish both ends.

N. S. Showing off one's knowledge of divine and human studies, of history, poetry, and oratory, however, is not the only way to cause envy. A reputation for courage, if it seems to have been won too ambitiously, excessive pomp, and that kind of liberality and magnificence which actually goes around looking for opportunities for display often have the same effect.

G. M. For this reason too, the courtier's life is unhappy.

N. S. Moreover, if some courtier is more learned than necessary, he ought not to love disputes and debates as they do in the schools of philosophy, or he will prove that he is a better logician than courtier.

G. M. So it seems.

N. S. Prudence, then, is the virtue that overcomes all difficulties at court . . . prudence or, perhaps, knowledge of nature. Properly speaking, however, the latter is the philosopher's virtue, while the former belongs to the knight. And when either a philosopher or a knight is also a courtier, he should not try to outdo others in letters or arms. For by making himself seem equal to the other courtiers in these activities he will conquer and show his superiority in prudence, which is the principal virtue in courts.

G. M. By this argument you reduce the courtier's many virtues to one: the others have been left out.

N. S. Courtly virtue includes all virtue, but the most important single virtue is prudence. It is not unconnected with the other virtues but rather leads them as a captain leads his company; it is their light, their guide, almost their empress.

G. M. Perhaps they are not visible in spite of the fact that they are to be found wherever prudence is.

N. S. Not all the virtues are always equally visible. Just as some parts of the background of a painting are hinted at with shadows while others are represented in a more lively way with colors, so it is with the virtues that accompany prudence. For courage, magnanimity, and certain other virtues appear sketched in and distant, while magnificence, liberality, courtesy itself, and modesty are done in the finest colors of the courtier's art—as though they were alive. The virtues of conversation—truthfulness, affability, and charm—are also presented in a lively manner.

G. M. Io veggio non solo il disegno, ma l'imagine del cortigiano e 'l ritratto già colorito. E se l'altro del Castiglione fu per quella età ne la qual fu scritto, assai caro dovrà essere il vostro in questi tempi, in cui l'infinger è una de le maggiori virtù.

F. N. Ma può egli infingere il verace?

G. M. Veggaselo Socrate e Giotto, a' quali niuna falsa accusa, niuna calunnia, niuna frode può torre il nome di verace, ma solamente soverchia modestia.

F. N. Or credete voi ch'alcuna mediocrità sia mai soverchia?

G. M. Veggio quel che volete conchiudere, che, s'ella è soverchia, non è mediocrità né virtù.

F. N. Per aventura lo stringere altrui in questa guisa non s'appertiene a coloro che ragionano de la corte, ne la quale, se niuno eccesso è laudevole, questo co 'l quale si scemano le proprie laudi, oltre tutti gli altri merita lode ed onore: come cortigiano dunque vi concederò facilmente, signor Lorenzo, che 'l simulare in questo modo sia virtù di corte, non solamente socratica.

G. M. E di queste particolarmente che sono in fiore, de le quali io non ho molta certezza, ma pur n'ho sentito ragionar molte fiate.

F. N. L'adattar le cose antiche a' tempi nostri è laudevol molto, purché si faccia acconciamente: nondimeno potrebbe parer a' cortigiani cosa odiosetta anzi che no, se alcun dicesse di non saper nulla e, riprovando sempre quel ch'è detto da gli altri, volesse rimaner al disopra in tutte le questioni: e l'uom si reca a minor vergogna di cedere a chi fa qualche professione di sapere, e può farla chi la può sostenere.

G. M. E questi, che la possono sostenere, si veggono tutto dì ne le tavole de' principi.

F. N. Ciò che voi dite è vero: nondimeno chi disputa ne le corti ed aspira in tutti i modi a la vittoria e con tutte le persone egualmente senza riguardo e senza considerazione di tempi e di luoghi, è più tosto vago de la gloria che desidera il dialettico, che de l'onore cercato dal cortigiano, il qual non solamente ne le dispute, ma in tutte l'azioni de la vita dovrebbe contender, cedendo in quella guisa che fanno alcuni esperti lottatori, i quali, piegandosi a quella parte dove gli tira l'avversario, con questo pieghevole artificio più facilmente il gittano per terra.

G. M. Assai piacevoli dunque saran que' contrasti d'ingegno che son convenienti a' cortegiani.

F. N. Ma vogliam ritornare a quel che di sopra dicevamo, che la corte sia una ragunanza, come fanno coloro i quali hanno dimenticata alcuna cosa, o gli sopragiunge non pensata necessità?

G. M. I see not only the outline of the courtier but his complete picture, his portrait in color. And if that other portrait, by Castiglione, was made for his time, the portrait you have made ought to be prized in these times when dissimulation is one of the most important virtues.

N. S. But does an honest man dissimulate?

G. M. Look at Socrates and Giotto. No false accusation, no calumny, no fraud, but only their excessive modesty could deprive them of their reputations for honesty.[9]

N. S. Well now, do you believe that any mean can be excessive?

G. M. I see what you are driving at. If something is excessive, it is neither a mean nor a virtue.

N. S. Perhaps one shouldn't be too strict on this point while discussing courts. For if no excess is wholly praiseworthy, yet the art of diminishing the praises one really deserves is more praiseworthy and honorable than any other excess at court. As a courtier, then, signor Lorenzo, I readily confess that this kind of dissimulation is not only Socratic but also courtly.

G. M. And it is especially necessary in the courts which flourish today. My knowledge is not very certain, but I have often heard about them.

N. S. The adaptation of ancient things to our own times is very praiseworthy when it is done in the right way. Courtiers might find it rather exasperating, however, if one were to insist constantly upon one's ignorance while at the same time trying to win every debate by attacking the statements of others. It is less shameful to give in to a man who claims some knowledge of a subject and who can defend his claim.

G. M. Men who can defend their claims to knowledge can be seen every day at the tables of princes.

N. S. What you say is true. Nevertheless, the man who enters into discussions at court with a desire to win by any means and against everyone, without consideration of time or place, is more attracted by intellectual glory than by courtly honor. For not only in debate but in every activity, the courtier must compete by yielding, like certain expert fighters who give way when attacked and by a supple trick throw their opponents more easily to the ground.

G. M. The courtier's witty encounters, then, ought to be pleasant.

N. S. But do we want to go back, like men who have forgotten something or who are struck by some unforeseen necessity, to what we were saying before about the court being a gathering?

G. M. Come vi piace.

F. N. Noi dicemo che la corte è una congregazione d'uomini raccolta per onore.

G. M. È vero.

F. N. Ma questa congregazione vogliam presupporre che sia perfetta o imperfetta?

G. M. Perfetta.

F. N. E s'ella è perfetta, è bastevole a se stessa, o pur non basta a se medesima?

G. M. A bastanza contiene in se stessa tutto ciò che l'è necessario.

F. N. Ma tutte l'arti che son necessarie a la vita civile son parimente necessarie al cortigiano?

G. M. Parimente.

F. N. Quelle ancora che si ricercano per ornamento, come son la pittura e la scoltura: anzi forse tanto più quanto, essendo la corte più risguardevole, deve abondar di più nobili ornamenti.

G. M. Così stimo.

F. N. Tutti gli artefici dunque sono ne le corti?

G. M. Sono.

F. N. E gli artefici che son parte de la città son parimente de la corte?

G. M. Parimente.

F. N. Dunque il sartore sarà non solamente sartore ma cortigiano, e 'l calzolaio e l'orafo e 'l pittore e lo scultore e ciascun altro.

G. M. In questo modo stesso.

F. N. E gli artefici de la corte son più o meno eccellenti?

G. M. Più eccellenti senza dubbio.

F. N. La corte dunque è una raccolta di tutte l'eccellenze di tutte l'arti e tutte l'opere le quali sono fatture: laonde parte de' cortigiani a contemplare, parte a l'operare, parte al fare saranno intenti.

G. M. Nobilissima adunanza e bellissima raccolta è questa veramente.

F. N. E i poeti e gli oratori e i musici e gli altri che fanno professione de le matematiche o pur de la filosofia naturale, sono in quel modo cortigiani che son cittadini?

G. M. In quel modo istesso.

F. N. Ma propriamente cortigiano è colui ch'attende a l'azione ed al negozio: e questo è il prudente al quale ne le corti s'appertiene il commandare intorno a tutte l'arti e tutte le scienze non altramente che faccia l'uom civile ne la città.

G. M. Assai ragionevolmente mi pare che questi uffici in questo modo si corrispondano.

G. M. As you like.

N. S. We said that the court is a gathering of men for the sake of honor.

G. M. That's right.

N. S. But do we want to assume that this gathering is perfect or imperfect?

G. M. Perfect.

N. S. And if it is perfect, is it self-sufficient or not?

G. M. It contains in itself all that it needs.

N. S. Are all the arts that the citizen needs equally necessary to the courtier?

G. M. Equally.

N. S. Even those which are ornamental, like painting and sculpture, are necessary. The more considerable the court, perhaps, the more noble its many ornaments should be.

G. M. I agree.

N. S. Then the court contains every kind of craftsman?

G. M. It does.

N. S. And the kinds of craftsmen found in the city are also found in the court?

G. M. In the court too.

N. S. The tailor will be not only a tailor, then, but also a courtier, and so will the shoemaker, the goldsmith, the painter, the sculptor, and every other craftsman.

G. M. Exactly.

N. S. Are the craftsmen of the court more or less excellent?

G. M. Undoubtedly more excellent.

N. S. Then the court is a gathering of all that is excellent in the arts and in every kind of work. Some of the courtiers will be devoted to contemplation, others to the active life, and others to labor.

G. M. This is truly a most noble and beautiful gathering.

N. S. Moreover, the poets, orators, musicians, and the professors of mathematics and natural philosophy can be courtiers just as they can be citizens.

G. M. In the very same way.

N. S. Properly speaking, however, the courtier is the active and prudent man who rules the arts and sciences in a court just as the prudent citizen does in a city.

G. M. That the duties of the courtier and the citizen correspond in this way seems to me quite reasonable.

F. N. Color dunque che son volti a la contemplazione de le cose grandi e sublimi, tuttochè non siano cortigiani propriamente, tanto dovrebbono esser partecipi de la prudenza e de le maniere laudevoli de la corte, quanto bastasse a farli più cari al principe ed a ciascun altro.

G. M. Così mi parrebber assai graziosi.

F. N. E quelli ancora ch'essercitano l'arti participano de la prudenza de' superiori.

G. M. In questa maniera l'arti, quantunque ignobili, prendono qualità e gentilezza da la corte.

F. N. Niuna maraviglia dunque è, signor Gianlorenzo, che voi siate invaghito di lei, che raccoglie il meglio, o quasi il meglio, non solo de la città ma de le provincie e de' regni, e, scegliendo il perfetto, s'alcuna cosa riceve di non perfetto, cerca d'aggiungerle perfezione.

G. M. Ed io, con gli altri imperfetti avvicinandomele, posso acquistarla.

F. N. Potete agevolmente; né perché siate lucchese, vi sarà negato luogo fra' Lombardi; avegnachè la corte sia adunanza di varie nazioni, le quali non usano una lingua solamente, ma con gli Italiani sono mescolati i Tedeschi, i Francesi, i Boemi, i Greci e quelli d'altre provincie, fra' quali è gran concordia nel servire al principe: e s'alcuna contesa è in questo, è contesa di gentilezza e di cortesia.

G. M. Le vostre parole possono invaghir quelli ancora che n'avessero l'animo lontano.

F. N. Anzi più tosto l'affabilità del principe dovrebbe confortarvi, il quale non dee far differenza fra le diverse nazioni, e se pur la fa giamai, è simile a l'agricoltore, il quale, avendo piantate ben mille maniere d'alberi, fa maggiore stima de' peregrini.

G. M. Questa, o sia bontà de' principi o merito di chi serve, è certo accompagnata da molta grazia.

F. N. Però non debbon in alcun modo diffidare i giovani cortigani che vengono di lontane parti: e sì come il sol nascente e l'altre stelle matutine paiono aggrandirsi per la copia de' vapori, così per lo favore acquistato ne l'età giovenile sogliono essere in pregio maggiore, sì veramente che 'l valore o la diligenza porga occasione al favore.

G. M. A raro valore non dovrebbono mancar rare occasioni.

F. N. E 'l sole occidente ancora ha maggiore apparenza, ed a questa similitudine tutte le cose accrescono la riputazione. I giovani dunque per la benevolenza, i vecchi per la riverenza sono più stimati; ma l'età interposita fra l'una e l'altra è riputata per l'operazione e forse più sottoposta a

N. S. Men who are devoted to the contemplation of high and sublime things, then, are not really courtiers; but they ought to possess at least enough of the courtier's prudence and praiseworthy manner to ingratiate themselves with princes and other men.

G. M. Then I should find them full of grace.

N. S. And even those who exercise the arts share in the prudence of their superiors.

G. M. Thus even the most ignoble arts are elevated and take on the politeness of the court.

N. S. It is no wonder, then, signor Gianlorenzo, that you are in love with the court. It gathers to it the best, or nearly the best, of everything, not only from cities but also from whole nations and kingdoms. It seeks perfection and strives to make perfect whatever comes to it.

G. M. I and other imperfect men can perfect ourselves by going to court.

N. S. You can, easily. And you won't be denied a place among the Lombards simply because you come from Lucca. The court includes many nations and uses more than one language. Germans, Frenchmen, Bohemians, Greeks, and other nationalities mingle with the Italians, and all are united in serving the prince. If there is any competition in their service, it is in politeness and courtesy.

G. M. Your words have the power to attract even those who are not interested in courts.

N. S. The graciousness of the prince ought to encourage you more than my words. He shouldn't treat the courtiers from one nation any differently from those of another, but if now and then he does favor certain nationalities, he is apt to act like the farmer who has planted a thousand different kinds of trees and takes more care of the exotic ones.

G. M. Whether such favor results from the goodness of the prince or from the merit of the servant, it is certainly full of grace.

N. S. Therefore young courtiers who come from distant parts ought not to lack confidence in any way. Just as the rising sun and the morning stars appear swollen by the abundance of early vapors, so young courtiers usually rise to great esteem because of the favor accorded them in their youth—provided, of course, that courage and diligence seize the opportunities that favor offers.

G. M. Rare courage ought not to lack rare opportunities.

N. S. Furthermore, the setting sun appears enlarged, and like it all

l'invidia: però debbiam ricordarci di tutte quelle cose le quali sono atte a schivarla.

G. M. Io ne farò conserva ne la memoria, quantunque sia lontano da questa età quanto da l'essere cortigiano.

V. M. A mio figliuolo non manca il tempo, ed ora dee pensare più a lo studio ch' a la corte: nondimeno questi ragionamenti li saranno stati in vece di studio, perché molte cose può avere apprese, ch'egli non sapeva.

F. N. Più tosto le dovrebbe essere quasi uno sprone perch'egli prima impari le scienze, e poi di servirsene in quella guisa che si conviene a gentiluomo di corte, nel quale, non è tanto necessaria la eccellenza de le lettere, quanto la prudenza e l'accortezza di saperle a tempo manifestare; nondimeno l'una senza l'altra pare imperfetta.

things in decline increase their reputations. Young men, then, increase their reputations as a result of good will, and old men as a result of respect. The age in between, however, is esteemed for its deeds and is perhaps more open to envy. Therefore we ought to keep in mind all the means of avoiding envy.

G. M. I shall remember them, although I am as far from that age as I am from being a courtier.

V. M. My son has plenty of time, and now he ought to be thinking more about his studies than about the court. Nevertheless, this discussion will have been a substitute for study because he may have learned a lot from it that he didn't know.

N. S. It should rather be a kind of spur to him to gain knowledge first and then use it in the way that befits a gentleman at court. Excellence in letters is not as necessary there as the prudence and shrewdness to know how to make one's excellence known. One without the other, however, seems imperfect.

NOTES TO THE TRANSLATION

1. On the participants and setting of the dialogue, see above, p. 3.

2. Paolo Sanminiato, a wealthy and learned gentleman from Lucca, appears as one of the interlocutors in Tasso's dialogue *Il Cataneo overo de le conclusioni amorose*. See also Solerti, I, 128–31.

3. See *The Courtier*, II.3.

4. Tasso himself seems to have suffered from a stammer (see Solerti, I, 131, and *Dialoghi*, II, 798).

5. Why Tasso refrains from naming a particular prince at this point is not clear. Is he challenging the reader to think of a prince who took power "for the sake of the public good"?

6. The Flaminius mentioned here is probably the Roman consul Gaius Flaminius who fell into Hannibal's trap at Lake Trasimene in 217 B.C. (see Polybius, III.80–84 and Livy, XXII.4–6). Minucius must be Marcus Minucius Rufus, another Roman general, who nearly lost his life and his army in 216 B.C. when his impatience with the cautious strategy of Fabius led him into an ill-considered attack upon Hannibal (see Polybius, III.90–106 and Livy, XXII.24–30). Regulus is almost certainly the famous Marcus Atilius Regulus who attacked the Carthaginians on disadvantageous ground in 255 B.C. and was defeated and captured. According to tradition he was later sent to Rome to negotiate peace or an exchange of prisoners. Upon his arrival, however, he urged the senators to refuse the offered terms and then returned to Carthage where he was tortured to death. (See Polybius, I.33–35 and Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.39 and III.99–115.) Paullus is less easy to identify, but since the other examples in this passage are all Roman generals from the Punic Wars, perhaps Tasso was thinking of Lucius Aemilius Paullus, one of the Roman commanders in the disastrous attack upon Hannibal at Cannae in 216 B.C. Nevertheless, while Paullus no doubt shares some of the responsibility for that defeat, Polybius and Livy agree in putting most of the blame on the other Roman general, Varro, and in presenting Paullus primarily as the voice of reason and prudence (see Polybius, III.107–18 and Livy, XXII.38–51).

7. Hephaestion was one of Alexander's most trusted lieutenants. Parmenion was also an important figure at the Macedonian court, but when his son, Philotas, was convicted of treason in 330 B.C., Parmenion himself came under suspicion, and Alexander had him murdered. (See Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, XLVII–XLIX.)

8. See Plutarch's *Life of Cato the Younger*, XIV.

9. Socrates' "modesty"—his insistence upon his own ignorance—is famous. On Giotto, see Boccaccio's *Decameron*, VI.5.

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