

The first edition of an influential courtesy-book by the consummate Renaissance courtier.

Castiglione, Baldassarre. *Il libro del cortegiano*. Venetia: nelle case d'Aldo Romano, & d'Andrea d'Asola, 1528. 12 1/4 inches (310 mm), [244] pp.

Theophrastus, in his *Characters*, presented the varieties of man in the raw, essentially as products of Nature: the many character-books of the early modern period attest to the enduring appeal of this approach to evaluating human character. By contrast, the ideal eponymous characters of Castiglione's *Courtier* (1528), Elyot's *Governour* (1531), or Machiavelli's *Prince* (1532) were the results of Nurture.

Il cortegiano was first published ten months before Castiglione's death at the age of fifty. It presents an ideal of aristocratic conduct for the Renaissance, to be attained by careful cultivation. Drawing on classical philosophy (particularly Aristotle's *Ethics*) and a classical mode of presentation (the dialogue), the book also reflected the author's actual experiences at the courts of Milan, Mantua, and Urbino. The courtier must be a gentleman and a scholar, well-spoken, polite, honorable and manly, neglecting no faculty. Castiglione himself seems to have exemplified these virtues: the Spanish Emperor Charles V described him as “*uno de los mejores caballeros del mundo*”—the *Caballero* was the Spanish ideal, as was the *honnête homme* in France or the gentleman in England, all familiar models for readers of the many courtesy-books that succeeded Castiglione's. The Third Book (**Spreads 70–98**) offers a guide to conduct for the Lady. In the Fourth Book, at **Spread 116 (left, line 3)**, drawing on Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* as well as his friend Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani*, Castiglione puts into the mouth of Bembo a lengthy and celebrated discourse on the ideal of platonic love, an experience that the author had himself enjoyed with the Duchess Elisabetta at Urbino.

There were many editions and translations of *The Courtier*, but none so desirable as this original printing, by the heirs of the great Venetian scholar-printer Aldus Manutius (ca. 1450–1515) whose familiar anchor device appears on **Spreads 5 and 125**. The book had

a special appeal to Englishmen. It was translated as early as 1561, and influenced Spenser, Shakespeare, Sidney, and Jonson.

The earliest recorded owner of this copy was one of the leading English book collectors of his day, Samuel Butler (1774–1839)—to be distinguished alike from the author of *Hudibras*, and from his grandson, the author of *Erewhon*. Butler was headmaster of Shrewsbury School (where the young Charles Darwin was among his pupils), and he was one of the so-called “Greek play bishops,” a group of clerical scholars who were reputed to have owed their advancement to the Anglican episcopate to the editing of a classical text—in Butler’s case, four volumes of Aeschylus (1809–26). Butler had a fine library, notable especially for its collection of Aldine editions, of which *Il cortegiano* was one of the few not in Greek or Latin.

Spread 4 includes a note in Butler’s hand: “I consider this as a rare and valuable copy ...” It is indeed a large copy on fine paper, handsomely bound in full purple morocco by the leading London bookbinder of the time, Charles Lewis (1786–1836), whose stamp is shown in **Spread 3**. One of Butler’s rivals, William Beckford, author of *Vathek* and builder of Fonthill, nicknamed Lewis “the Angel,” describing him as “the first artist in this line that Europe can boast of.”

This Aldine edition is now in the Cecil H. Green Library, which comprises roughly a third of the Stanford University Libraries’ 8.5 million volumes. The Green Library houses special collections amounting to a quarter million rare volumes; among the rarities are an extensive collection of books printed by Aldus and numerous incunables.