



The Book of the Courtier (Penguin Classics)

Baldesar Castiglione

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‘The courtier has to imbue with grace his movements, his gestures, his way of doing things and in short, his every action’

In *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), Baldesar Castiglione, a diplomat and Papal Nuncio to Rome, sets out to define the essential virtues for those at Court. In a lively series of imaginary conversations between the real-life courtiers to the Duke of Urbino, his speakers discuss qualities of noble behaviour – chiefly discretion, decorum, nonchalance and gracefulness – as well as wider questions such as the duties of a good government and the true nature of love. Castiglione’s narrative power and psychological perception make this guide both an entertaining comedy of manners and a revealing window onto the ideals and preoccupations of the Italian Renaissance at the moment of its greatest splendour.

George Bull’s elegant translation captures the variety of tone in Castiglione’s speakers, from comic interjections to elevated rhetoric. This edition includes an introduction examining Castiglione’s career in the courts of Urbino and Mantua, a list of the historical characters he portrays and further reading.

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