

Paola Ugolini. The Court and Its Critics. Anti-Court Sentiments in Early Modern Italy

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Paola Ugolini. *The Court and Its Critics. Anti-Court Sentiments in Early Modern Italy.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. Pp. 301. ISBN 9781487505448.

Criticism against court life is the subject of Paola Ugolini's meticulously surveyed investigation of numerous literary texts, while focusing on sixteenth-century satires. The scholar contextualized her analysis within the classical, medieval, and humanistic traditions of 'anti-courtliness' and highlighted the pervasiveness of such a disenchanting approach to the court. Many different literary genres, from *novella* to pastoral drama and even conduct manuals on life at court display attacks against the court as deceitful *locus* of fierce competition among the courtiers, all of them desiring recognition from the prince. This scholarly work enriches the field of Renaissance studies by reclaiming front stage for texts addressing the courtier's dismal life and the alternatives to it as embodied by the satirist and, most convincingly, the shepherd in the pastoral drama. These literary testimonies, mostly by experienced courtiers, partake in the conversation on the multifaceted issue of the individual in relation to society's expectation to conform, especially at court. Here, life resulted in a daily performance at the expense of faithfulness to oneself. Relying on John Jeffries Martin's scholarship on Renaissance individualism, Ugolini detects in the anti-court literature she examines the discontent of authors with masking one's moral and intellectual self to ensure their lord's favor. However, the scholar convincingly rejects the conclusion that the courtier's withdrawal to the world of shepherds and nymphs was a perfect antidote for discomfort and dissatisfaction. Each individual courtier's relationship with the court was complicated. As a world of refinement and elegance, hopefully shared with kindred noble peers, the environment continued to attract the same courtiers who had experienced, and now condemned, all of its evils.

The first chapter traces anti-court attitudes outside the genre of the satire. Not even *The Book of the Courtier* is immune from critique against the court through contradictions in the portrayal of the perfect courtier. While such incongruities are rather hinted at and quickly dismissed, too quickly actually to be really ignored (Harry Berger), the criticism of later conduct manuals on the topic, from Agostino Nifo's *De re aulica* (1534) to Stefano Guazzo's *Civile conversatione* (1574), resembles more closely the adverse assessment of the court and a courtier's existence in satirical writings. The courtier is subjected to the prince's whimsical attribution of favor which comes at the expense of his personal freedom to please the courtly audience.

Chapter Two investigates the behavior codification of the court lady as well as her personification of the shortcomings of court life. Her assigned task as judge of the courtier's performance triggered the accusation of effeminizing the knight into a domesticated, well-mannered, and elegant man subordinated to the prince (David Quint). Anti-court satires appropriated such arguments to depict the court as a place in which the natural order of man on top was subverted. In addition, satire traditionally criticized female figures, like the witch and the prostitute or, more fittingly for the court, the courtesan, in order to demystify the lures of this environment, like wealth and social advancement, that eventually would prove to be mere illusions like the physical beauty of a sorceress and the artistic gifts of a self-declared *hetaera*. Ugolini cogently displays the similarities between the immoral nature of the courtesan and the courtier. Both relied on deception and flattery to satisfy their greed and ensure the benevolence of clients and superiors, respectively.

In Chapter Three the study discusses the recurring motifs of anti-court satires in verse and prose, among which are the notion of Fortuna, the deceptive human relations at court, and their pernicious impact on the self, whose moral integrity and freedom could only be guaranteed through reliance on "coarse sincerity" (83). Devoting scrupulous analysis in particular to Ariosto's *Satire* and Pietro Aretino's satirical writings (from *Lamento de uno cortigiano* to *Ragionamento delle corti*), as well as less-known poetry in the *capitolo* form, Ugolini focuses on the portrayal of the unsatisfied courtier turned satirist. His charges against the court and its protagonists unveil the intent to distance himself from such a toxic place through his self-depiction as genuine and inescapably committed to the truth. Aretino ultimately succeeded by elevating himself to the role of scourge of the court from the privileged status of a man of letters living on his writing and enjoying a free life outside the palace while still involved with the lords of various courts. This paradigm was difficult to replicate. In fact, later anti-court literature disseminates the private withdrawal into the unsophisticated, and therefore authentic, pastoral world of the villa in order to evade the decay and servitude at court.

The final chapter of this enthralling study examines the literary representation of the courtier's existential dimension pursued by the critics of court life. At the center of Ugolini's analysis is the shepherd as a model of self-fashioning that is antithetical to the dissatisfying contemporary actualization of Castiglione's ideal courtier. In satiric *capitoli*, like those by Niccolò da Correggio, Panfilo Sasso, and Francesco Berni, as well as in the pastoral tragicomedy, all texts that emphasize the benefits of life in the countryside versus the faults of courtly life, the shepherd

is also valued against the limitations of the satiric persona. In the opposition of the villa as genuine reality versus the duplicitous court, the satirist invalidated the same courtly ideal intellectuals still promoted while being critical of the betrayal of court values. The ambivalence of such approach to court life is most evident in Tasso's *Aminta*, but it comes closer to a resolution in Guarini's *Pastor Fido*. The interpretation of these two pastoral plays is preceded by an exhaustive, although necessarily brief, excursus on the pastoral mode from classical sources to the sixteenth century. By this time, the ideal world of shepherds and nymphs mirrored the courtly aspiration of a community of noble spirits living in accordance to moral standards, "a purified version of the courtly environment" (157).

Ugolini's fascinating study is most informative in a very reader-friendly way. The writing style and the layout of this book facilitate the retention of the plethora of information thanks to summaries throughout.

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Carole Birzan-Berz, Guillaume Coatalen and Thomas Vuong, eds. *Translating Petrarch's Poetry. L'Aura del Petrarca from the Quattrocento to the 21st Century*. Cambridge: Legenda (Modern Humanities Research Association), 2020. Pp. 277. ISBN 9781781886632.

The volume edited by Birkan-Berz, Coatalen and Vuong is foremost a collection that illustrates under different facets what it means to translate poetry, and only secondarily is it a book on Petrarch's poetry. This is a concept to keep in mind while reading through the pages of the volume, which can be useful mainly to those who wish to understand the different critical, cultural, and even poetic and literary approaches to "translation" in different shapes (from transposition into images, analogies with music, poetic rewriting, and useful material for a *contaminatio* in other literary works). Petrarch's poetry therefore offers the model and the repertoire of examples to show the different approaches to the translation of a poem that is difficult to "rewrite," but it is necessary to consider that Petrarch's poetry is only subordinately the object of the analysis. The Petrarchian text is read formally and thematically in order to illustrate the ways in which it was analyzed and rewritten, and how it influenced the poetry of the following centuries; therefore, the main purpose, as declared by the editors in the *Introduction*, is not