

Aretino, Pietro. *Cortigiana (La cortigiana) (1525)*. Translated by J. Douglas Campbell and Leonard G. Sbrocchi. Introduction by Raymond B. Waddington. *Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation* 38. Ottawa: Dovehouse editions inc., 2003. Pp. 158.

My first approach in reading this translation of Aretino's *Cortigiana* was to simply enjoy the comedy *per se* as a completely new creation, to take pleasure in what happened on stage, to laugh at the foolishness of Messer Maco and Parabolano, and to appreciate the dialogue, the freshness of the imagery, the language itself. I was not concerned with the original Italian version nor did I compare the efficacy of the translation: I read the comedy as a creation of Campbell and Sbrocchi, not Aretino. The language used by the translators definitely reflects the tone used by the Renaissance writer, the "range of diction, from high to low or, always a feature of daily life, the specialized vocabulary of the trades and professions" (20). What is not reflected in this excellent translation is, however, the "range of dialect and accents" (20) used in the comedy, from Sienese to Neapolitan, from Spanish to Sicilian. This setback, however, is inevitable; and almost as compensation, Raymond B. Waddington, in his introduction, dedicates two brilliant pages (19–21) to the analysis of the language in the *Cortigiana*. In my opinion, there is no doubt that this translation makes Aretino's text more accessible not only to an English-speaking reader but also to advanced students of Italian as a second language. This is mainly because of the almost 150 textual annotations (141–156), whose purpose is twofold: 1) to explain the numerous references to Renaissance history, people, events, allusions; 2) to justify the translation of difficult idiomatic expressions of that period or obscure lines that even a modern Italian-speaking reader would not have otherwise understood. This is definitely an act of philological recovery of the original text. The philological accuracy of the translators is also evident in the fact that they have chosen as the base-text the 1525 edition, a choice that is meticulously justified in Waddington's introduction ("*La cortigiana* in Aretino's Theatrical Achievement," [9–10] and "the Two *Cortigiana* Texts" [11–12]). The 1525 edition, in fact, suits better one of the purposes of the *Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation* series: that is, to keep the performer in mind as well as the reader. As stated by Waddington,

The two texts differ substantially, reflecting Aretino's altered circumstances in various ways.... Other changes are indicative of Aretino's absorption in the print culture of Venice. *La cortigiana*'<sup>34</sup> has been described as a print text conceived for

readers in contrast to the performance text of '25. It also takes care to spell out physical actions for the convenience of the reader who must imagine the stage scene (11–12).

Theatrical vividness, adds Waddington, “is perhaps “the most memorable quality of the *Cortigiana* ‘25” (10), as in it Aretino anticipate techniques developed in the *commedia dell'arte*.

The scholarly solidity of the entire volume is also evident in Waddington’s critical essay (about 50 pages). This introduction is both concise and informative, written with both the scholar and the students in mind, as well, as mentioned before, the performer. It encompasses everything one needs to know in order to have an excellent understanding of the comedy and its political and literary setting during the Renaissance. Beside the sections mentioned above—Aretino’s theatrical achievement, the two *Cortigiana* texts, and the language of the *Cortigiana*—one will find a short biography of Aretino, an explanation of the title, a discussion on *Commedia erudita* and Aretino’s attitude towards it in *Cortigiana*, a description of the Leonine Rome in 1517–27, a comparison between Castiglione’s *Book of the courtier* and the *La cortigiana*, the presentation of *Cortigiana* as a virtual tribute to Pasquino and his *pasquinata*, an analysis of how Aretino’s comedy is a mirror of Leo X’s papal court, and a bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

The explanation and interpretation of the title is perhaps a key section in understanding the organization of Waddington’s introduction. The fact that no such character as a “cortigiana” appears in the play, gives way to many interpretations of the title. In one such reading the term has been interpreted with reference to the court or to the courtiers, and English translations include *The Courtiers’ Play* and *The Comedy of the Court*. This is at the base of the section entitled “Castiglione’s *Book of the courtier* and the *La cortigiana*.” Another interpretation identified the “cortigiana” as theater itself:

The Prologue explains that the audience will witness the births and deaths of two comedies, then hastens to assure them: “But don’t be afraid, Milady Comedy Cortigiana is falser [‘contrafatta’] than the chimera.” Drama makes love to an audience with the expectation of payment, either in admission fee or, at the time Aretino wrote, in patronage. (14–15)

1 Cook explains that his title is derived from the motto on the Nowlan coat of arms.

To this interpretation is linked the section on “*la cortigiana* and the *commedia erudita*.” Finally, the “cortigiana” is the papal court and Rome itself (the eternal city is often associated with the figure of a whore). The association Rome-courtesan, which could be seen from the very beginning of the play, seems to be—if the number of pages dedicated to this analysis can be considered a sign of preference—Waddington’s preferred interpretation as it is discussed in the brilliant and informative sections on “Rome and Italy, 1517–27” and “The New Golden Age: Leonine Rome,” “Pasquino,” and “Holding the Mirror up to Nature.” If Aretino, through this comedy, makes you relive the atmosphere of the papal court, Waddington’s introduction definitely follows suit.

Translations of original texts into other languages frequently tend to betray the unique nature of their beauty, but this is not the case with *Cortigiana*. If translating a text is an act of interpretation—as is commonly accepted—then we could say that Campbell, Sbrocchi and Waddington’s interpretation of Aretino’s comedy is as excellent an example of translation as one is likely to find.

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Gregory M. Cook. *One Heart, One Way: Alden Nowlan, A Writer’s Life*. Lawrencetown Beach, NS: Pottersfield Press, 2003. 296 pp. \$21.95.

Although Greg Cook’s biography is called *One Heart, One Way*,<sup>1</sup> in reading the life of Alden Nowlan, we hear many voices. Cook interviewed an assortment of Nowlan’s friends, family and colleagues to present a multi-dimensional story of the writer’s life. In order to let Nowlan and his friends tell Nowlan’s life story, Cook keeps his narrative to a minimum, filling approximately half of the book with primary material including poetry, interviews and letters. He meticulously reproduces the reminiscences of friends and associates in their own voices, complete with all the “you know’s,” “I mean’s,” and other colloquialisms. The participants attempt not only to describe the man, but also to understand his motivations, and they accept him despite his faults.

For example, Allan Donaldson, a UNB faculty member at the time Nowlan was poet-in-residence, identifies his often-disguised shyness, and he explains, “I think that at times, some of his famous explosions were the