

THE GENTLEMAN AND HIS PRIDE

By I. E. BEVAN

CASTIGLIONE'S *Il Cortegiano* gives us the picture of a perfect gentleman whose ostensible *raison d'être* is to serve his prince. Yet Burckhardt remarks of this paragon: 'The impulse which inspired him was directed, though our author does not acknowledge the fact, not to the service of the prince, but to his own perfection...'¹ In fact the ideal gentleman, as he appears in sixteenth century fiction as well, was essentially a believer in himself: as such, he loved grand gestures and elaborate displays; and these might take the form of magnanimous pardon for his enemies, lavish entertainment for his guests, compliments for ladies, or presents for foe and friend alike. In such demonstrations, he exalted himself rather than others. This dedication to one's own gentility and worth I would call 'the code of arrogance'; although, of course, the term implies a modern and therefore an unhistorical way of looking at sixteenth century ideas, for the quality was then scarcely recognized as arrogance: 'Magnanimity' was the word most often used to describe it.

The grand gesture, in its various forms, is a theme used particularly often by Italian story-tellers. The form of the *novella* usually demands some striking climax: and such a gesture on the part of the hero offers an effective one. But it is not in the *novella* only that this kind of action is described and applauded.² The Italian comedies are generally frivolous throughout, and less concerned with the strange and marvellous acts of individuals than the *novella*. But in Aretino's *Lo Ipocrito* we find a character who makes a magnanimous act of renunciation in love. The unselfishness with which Prelio releases Porfira from her promise to become his mistress, is qualified by the spirit of arrogance so typical of sixteenth century heroes. He has fulfilled the task imposed on him as a condition of the enjoyment of her favours, but cannot bring himself to insist on his reward against her inclination. He finally decides that the 'gentilezza somma' of releasing her will most befit him. But his magnanimous decision is precipitated by Porfira's announcement that she has taken poison; and as this action necessarily lessens his magnanimity, depriving him of some stature, he rebukes her for 'l'offesa che fatta havere a la mia magnanimitade, solo col non degnarvi di chiederle in dono l'obbligo, del quale

¹ *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Phaidon Edition), p. 235.

² *Orlando Furioso* (Papini), XXII, 93.

mi sete tenuta.' Thus in releasing her, he punishes her ungraciousness 'con la bontà e con la gentilezza'.³

A magnificent and self-conscious act of pardon is one form of the grand gesture celebrated by writers of fiction. The presence of arrogance is very evident, though at the same time hard to define, in the story of the King of Hungary and his servant, which is told in Erizzo's *Le Sei Giornate*.⁴ This King not only pardons his servant for stealing a ring, and for putting the blame on an innocent man, but refrains from dismissing him outright, and saves his honour by suggesting that he ask leave in public to depart from the court on a pilgrimage. Not content with this, he finally presents to him the very ring in question. The action seems on the surface to be as lacking in ostentation as it is full of generosity, and it is admired as such by the young men listening to the story. But meanwhile, the innocent man accused of the theft has been tortured to make him confess to it, although the King is aware of the real thief's guilt. The man is eventually released, but no reparation is made or remorse expressed, the young men listening, who have made comments on virtually every part of the tale, completely ignore this aspect of it: contemporary interest would be focused exclusively on the one fine gesture, the act of magnanimity in itself: and the king, consenting to the pain of an innocent man in order to demonstrate his boundless magnanimity, would not be considered at fault.

The love of the splendid act is well illustrated by another story of forgiveness,⁵ in which Raffaello dei Rusponi, having forgiven his mortal enemies, adds liberality to restraint by providing a sumptuous dinner for them, prepared in a magnificent room. He publicly embraces each offender and makes a long and noble speech, suitable for such an occasion. But so great is the shame of these men for their defeat in courtesy and so intense their hatred of being obliged to Raffaello, that they are driven to further mad assaults, which end in their deaths.

The cult of the grand gesture plays an important part in the serious literature of entertainment written during the sixteenth century, especially in the *novella*. It can happen that the dramatic extravagance of a courteous act reaches a pitch which makes it appear (to our eyes) absurd. In Bandello's tale of the Spanish ambassador, this extravagance blots out all real sense of consideration for others. The ambassador, while visiting a woman who lived in very splendid rooms in Rome, chooses rather to spit in his servant's face, than on the floor, — his explanation being that this face is the ugliest thing in the lady's room. Bandello gravely commends this action: 'un atto incivile, secondo che si fa, merta talora com-

³ *Lo Ipocrito* V, 1. (*Quattro Commedie*, 1588)

⁴ S. Erizzo, *Le Sei Giornate* (*Scrittori d'Italia*, Vol. 40), XI.

⁵ G. B. Giraldo Cintio, *Gli Ecatommiti* (Turin 1853) I, 7.

mendazione.⁶

Only once have I found any criticism of the consciously magnanimous gesture made, if need be, at the expense of others, including those who ostensibly benefit by it. This is in Bandello's story of Camillo and Cintia. Camillo mistakenly believes that his friend Giulio has seduced his mistress Cintia. Having accused him of this misdeed, he then says he will forgive him, and take no revenge for the treacherous dishonour done him, because a friend is more important than a mistress. A third friend, Delio, warmly commends Camillo's attitude at first: 'tu parli da gentiluomo'. But Camillo will not accept Giulio's solemn protestations of innocence: he insists that Giulio has offended, and thus insists on forgiving him; for to believe in his innocence would be a much less striking of act magnanimity than to forgive him while convinced of his guilt. Here the subtle egoism of the fine gesture is carried to an absurdity of self-glorification; and this does not escape Delio's criticism: 'ché, se tu brami mostrar la grandezza de l'animo tuo, mostrala in altro, e non volere con dimostrarti magnanimo e generoso far che Giulio sia tenuto disleale e villano.'⁷ But it seems to me that most, if not all acts of magnanimity, even those more genuine than Camillo's, are designed to raise those who perform them above the level of their fellow-men, and sometimes even at the expense of their fellow men.

This desire to triumph over others in being liberal, magnanimous and courteous in every way, also manifests itself in a dread of being obliged to anyone. Hatred of obligation, in fact, is an emotion which leads to and accompanies many a grand gesture; and sometimes it can make a man rebel against his very benefactor, who has made the gesture. Raffaello dei Rusponi's forgiveness and liberality only incense his enemies to further injury and outrage. In another of his tales, Bandello tells us of a king of Persia and his seneschal, who fight like two deadly enemies in unwearying combat: Ariabarzane the Seneschal is fighting to make the King obliged to him for his courtesy and liberality; Artese the King is fighting not to be obliged. Ariabarzane, in the writer's words, 'sapeva molto bene che queste sue cortesie non piacevano al re'; but he determined to persevere with them, 'non perché più roba volesse che il re li donasse, ma solamente per onorarsi ed acquistar fama.' But the King finally punishes Aria-

⁶ M.M. Bandello, *Il Novelliere* (Flora), III, 42. Vol. II, p. 463. This story may be a distorted version of the account (in Diogenes Laertes, Book VI, 32) of a similar action, which was praised by Alexander, on the part of the philosopher Diogenes. But even the warmest admirer of his philosophy would scarcely claim gentility for Diogenes as he is traditionally portrayed. Yet this Bandello does for the Spanish ambassador.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 40. Vol. II, p. 36.

barzane for his pride.⁸ Here, in fact, hatred of obligation is carried to such extremes that it arouses a tacit criticism on the writer's part. But in his tale of Anselmo, who nobly refuses to take advantage of an old family enemy's imprisonment to seduce his unprotected sister, Bandello gives no such hint of criticism. Anselmo is tempted by the situation, but resists his feelings successfully by remembering that he is a gentleman. Not only does he spare the sister's honour, but with 'animo magnanimo e cesareo' (his own words), overlooks the ancestral quarrel, and pays the required amount of money for the brother's release. Indeed, he overpays, and such is his liberality, will take nothing back. But his enemy has only exchanged a material prison for the more irksome bonds of obligation; and in order to escape these, he asks his sister to forfeit her honour voluntarily to Anselmo, and thus show that her will conforms to the nobility of their ancestors. He explains to her: 'non cape che in quella persona ove regna il brutissimo vizio de l'ingratitude possa lacuna gentil virtù abitare'; but he is thinking of his own gratitude, not his sister's. He begs her, therefore, 'che te e me tu voglia cavar d'obligo.' Anselmo, not to be outdone, marries the girl lawfully, giving her his goods as a dowry, and restoring her brother's wasted fortunes.⁹

Reminiscent of many a prose *novella* is Ariosto's account of the contest in courtesies between Ruggiero and Leone.¹⁰ This is acted out in the context and with the trappings of a past chivalry, but its spirit is very much of the sixteenth century. Ruggiero has decided to find and kill Leone, his rival (favoured by her father) for the hand of Bradamante. But meanwhile Leone sees and admires Ruggiero's courage in battle. In friendship for the unknown knight, he rescues him from imprisonment and imminent death in the Greek camp. Thus Ruggiero comes to owe his life to the very man whom he most hates, and it is impossible for him to ignore this distressing obligation:

Molto la notte, e molto il giorno pensa,
d'altro non cura, et altro non disia,
che da l'obligazion che gli aveva immensa,
sciorsi con pari e maggior cortesia.¹¹

An opportunity to free himself by a greater courtesy comes when Leone, still ignorant of his friend's identity, begs Ruggiero to wear his arms and colours, and to undertake the single combat against Bradamante in which

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 2. Vol. I, p. 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 49. Vol. I, pp. 575-586. See also Giraldi Cintio's tale of the exchanges between Fabrizio Colonna and Alfonso d'Este. (*Gli Ecatommitti*, VI, 2. Vol. II, p. 313).

¹⁰ *Orlando Furioso*, Cantos XLV-XLVI.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, XLV, 52.

all her suitors must engage, the successful one being he who remains unconquered by her after a day's fighting. If Ruggiero agrees to help Leone, he will of course be fighting in order not to marry the lady he loves. Yet his sense of obligation drives him to take this bitter step,¹² and when he remains unconquered by her, Leone is judged to have won Bradamante. But when Leone is told of the true situation by an enchantress he determines not to be outdone in courtesy. He surrenders Bradamante, and so saves Ruggiero from despair, though not from an eternal feeling of obligation:

Ma quando ti sciorrò l'obligo mai;
che due volte la vita dato m'hai?¹³

None the less, the author considers Ruggiero to have performed the more gorgeous act of courtesy.¹⁴

Ingratitude, 'il bruttissimo vizio de l'ingratitude,' as Anselmo's debtor calls it, is simply the failure to remember or honour an obligation. Gratitude itself has always been one of the virtues, but in the sixteenth century it was a virtue with perhaps a greater element of uneasy pride about it than at other times. Giraldi Cintio, who devotes the whole of his eighth *deca* to tales of ingratitude, calls it 'il più scelerato ed abominevole vizio, che sia nel mondo.'¹⁵ The ungrateful man, like Lucifer, is angry with his benefactor for being greater than himself, and unlike the grateful man, he does not seek the right remedy for his sense of inferiority. The gentleman, more intelligent than the vile man, will never be ungrateful to a benefactor, but will try to outstrip him in well-doing and courtesy: to ignore an obligation is not the way to wipe it out. In fact, the sixteenth century attitude to the exchange of courtesies, to being grateful, is the same in essence as one of the attitudes to revenge and injury: both are governed by the desire to mend one's personal honour by a certain kind of repayment, to make oneself equal in stature (or superior) to some other person with whom injury or benefit has created a special relationship.¹⁶

When Giraldi Cintio says that a 'vile' person is likely to be ungrateful, he is not referring to vileness of character alone; 'vile' is an epithet of scorn applied commonly to the low-born, though it may be used of a man of any origin if he has ignoble traits in him. In fact the bulk of the stories in the eighth *deca* prove that ingratitude is a characteristic vice of the

¹² *Ibid.*, XLV, 56.

¹³ *Ibid.*, XLVI, 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XLVI, 62.

¹⁵ *Gli Ecatommitti*, VII, 10. Vol. III, p. 39. Cf. *Ibid.*, I, Conclusion. Vol. I, p. 234.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, VI, 2. Vol. II, p. 316. 'Onde si può vedere che, come chi fa ingiuria dee sempre temere la vendetta, così chi usa cortesia, se forse il beneficio non cade in persona vile ed ingrata, ne dee sempre sperare dicevole guiderdone.'

lower orders. In the first story, for instance, the ungrateful man is one 'nato della vil feccia della plebe'¹⁷; and in the fourth story, the low-born Matea conforms to her ignoble origin in showing ingratitude towards the queen who has favoured her.¹⁸ After the final story of the *Ecatommitti* has been told, the company praise its courteous hero, Ottone, for magnanimity towards an enemy, and end by reiterating this opinion of the day on gratitude, and birth.¹⁹

Behind most gentlemanly displays of liberality, valour, and magnanimity, from the wearing of fine clothes, to the pardon of an enemy or the sacrifice of a love, lies concern for reputation. This concern also partly (though not entirely) explains the special sensitivity with which obligation and ingratitude are regarded by writers and their characters. Characteristic of the ideal sixteenth century gentleman is his implicit faith in his own merit; he longs for fame, not as a compensation for any inner sense of inadequacy, but as the just fulfilment of his worth and gentility. It is true that a consciousness of this worth is sometimes in itself felt to be satisfying, and in times of doubt and trouble, reassuring. Sidney's Evarchus, for instance, called on to administer justice in Arcadia, is encouraged to accept this responsibility by 'the secret assurance of his own worthiness . . . whiche although yt bee never so wellclothed in modesty yet allwayes lives in the worthiest myndes.'²⁰ Guyon, in all his vicissitudes, never loses this inner assurance,

And evermore himselve with comfort feedes,
Of his own vertues, and prayse-worthie deedes;²¹

and Tasso's Rinaldo is just as conscious of 'i suoi propri pregi,'²² Of course, they have their precedent in Aristotle's magnanimous man, who 'thinks himself worthy of great things, being worthy of them.'²³ Ingratitude

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII, 1. Vol. III, p. 41.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII, 4. Vol. III, p. 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, X, 10. Vol. III, p. 323. For English examples of the same assumption, see Sidney's *Arcadia* (Feuillerat, Cambridge, 1912) II, 9, where Antiphilus betrays his origin by his ingratitude to Musidorus and Pyrocles, who have saved his life: 'he would not be one to acknowledge his obligation', and Ford's *Ornatus and Artesia*, where Ornatus rebukes his base servant for killing his sovereign and his benefactor; the man is not only a traitor and a violator of the sacrosanctity of kings, but also an ingrate. [Henderson, *Shorter Novels*. London, 1930. Vol. II, pp. 130-133] Cf. also *The Merchant of Venice* (New Arden) V, i, 217. *Twelfth Night* (New Cambridge) III, iv, 353. R. Greene, *Perimedes the Blacke-Smith*, *Perimedes' Tale*. First Night, (Vol. VII, p. 39. Grosart).

²⁰ *Arcadia*, V. Vol. II of Feuillerat's edition, p. 155.

²¹ *The Faerie Queene* (H. J. Smith and E. de Delincourt) II, vii, 2.

²² *Gerusalemme Liberata*, V, 16.

²³ *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1123b.

itself should not dismay the gentleman who has confidence in his own noble actions: 'quando mai non ci fosse chi grato si dimostrasse, l'uomo almeno, che magnifica e liberalmente opera, fa officio di vero gentiluomo e virtuoso e fa ciò che deve.'²⁴ But generally, fame is the immediate goal of the man who acts with virtue and magnanimity. Ariabazane's dangerous liberality towards his king is all 'per... acquistar fama'; and the moral Erizzo, in the *Proemio* to the *Sei Giornate*, affirms that the desire to know oneself, and also to be known as virtuous, should be the chief end of life.²⁵ One of the justifications which Castiglione gives for modest self-praise, is that a virtuous man will not wish to be deprived by others' ignorance of his worth, of the fame and honour justly due to him.²⁶

It is not likely that any sixteenth century hero would regard the desire of fame as an infirmity, even of noble minds. On the contrary, it is accepted as a quality full of strength and worth.' To glitter in the eye of glorious grace'²⁷ may be the hope which inspires an act of liberality involving huge spending; but it also inspires deeds of valour, performed with unceasing effort:

The noble hart, that harbours vertuous thought,
And is with childe of glorious great intent,
Can never rest, until it forth have brought
Th' eternall brood of glorie excellent.²⁸

This is proper pride on the part of the Red Crosse Knight; it is quite different from the sinful pride which is also portrayed in the first book of the *Faerie Queene*. Pleusidippus, the lost prince of Green's *Menaphon* feels within him a like aspiration to fame and honour, and though ignorant of his birth, he takes it as an indication that this is gentle;²⁹ and Arivragus' impatience with his obscurity is one of the signs of his noble birth.³⁰ In a sense, Pleusidippus and Arviragus remain only gentlemen potential until they gain the recognition which is their due. For a gentleman cannot fulfil himself in solitude, and even if his reputation is already bright, he

²⁴ *Il Novelliere*, III, 67. Vol. II, p. 603. cf. *The Faerie Queene* V. xi. 17.

²⁵ *Le Sei Giornate*, p. 203.

²⁶ *Il Cortegiano*, (*La Letteratura Italiana*, Vol. 27) I, XVIII. p. 38.

²⁷ John Marston, *Jacke Drum's Entertainment*, line 115.

²⁸ *The Faerie Queene*, I, v, 1.

²⁹ R. Greene, *Menaphon*, (G.B. Harrison, Oxford, 1927) p. 80. 'Although my parents and progenie are envied by obscuritie, yet the sparkes of renown that make my Eagle minded thoughts tomount, the heave(n)ly fire imprisoned in the pannicles of my crest, inciting me to more deeds of honor, than Stout Perseus effected with his fauchon in the fields of Hesperia, ascertaineth my soule I was the sonne of no coward, but a gentleman'.

³⁰ *Cymbeline* (New Arden), IV, iv, 40.

must labour to keep it so. This is the advice by Ulysses to Achilles, as he skulks in his tent before Troy.³¹ For secret gentility is like a light hidden under a bushel: it is the quality of gentility to shine afar like the sun, and of a gentleman to be known and applauded by many. Barnaby Riche's hero Silvanus, who is an ideal type of sixteenth century gentleman, is essentially a gentleman resplendant, *in actu*; for he is 'the glorie and honour of all yong gentlemen that ever were, that bee now, or shall be hereafter this, whose vertue, vallaunce, and worthie exploit, doe glister emongst the multitude, as the sunne beames doe upon the cirquet of the yearth.'³²

Sidney, describing Evarchus' worthiness, implies that it is 'well-clothed in modesty'; and it may be appropriate at this point to stress that modesty, as distinct from humility, is an approved virtue in the gentleman of the sixteenth century. That there is a profound difference between humility and modesty is made very clear in the passage of Castiglione where he justifies self-praise, provided that it is judicious and modest: 'Ho conosciuti pochi omini eccellenti in qualsivoglia cosa che non laudino se stessi... non si dee pigliar mala opinion d'un omo valoroso, che modestamente si laudi'. Praising oneself modestly is one of the courtly accomplishments; and the modesty of the sixteenth century gentleman, especially perhaps the Italian, is as elaborate as the sweeping bow he gives to a lady. In the frameworks of both Erizzo's *Sei Giornate* and of *Gli Ecatommiti*, where the companies of young men meet, and discuss who is to tell what tale and when, the speeches of modesty are formidably long.

Arrogance which is unmitigated by the slightest touch of modesty is surely regarded as undesirable in any age. It is their lack of modesty in expressing self-approval, not principally the self-approval itself (for this is not always groundless) which makes the *milites gloriosi* ungentlemanly and ridiculous. Ben Jonson delights in exposing the absurd manifestations of arrogance which are adopted (for example by Stephen Knowell in *Everyman in his Humour*) as a substitute for gentility. Yet the characters of which he evidently approves most, show in their self-righteous and lofty contempt for the world, a more subtle form of arrogance. In fact a reading of some sixteenth century works of entertainment has led me to believe that two principal kinds of arrogance existed: the approved kind, which manifests itself in self-confidence, a desire to win fame to excel in cour-

³¹ *Troilus and Cressida* (The New Cambridge), III, iii, 115-123. Cf. *Everyman in his Humour*, IV, vi, 7: 'To keep his valour in obscurity, is to keep himself, as it were, in a cloak bag. What's a musician, unless he play?'

³² Barnaby Riche, *Farewell to Military Profession*, I, (*Eight Novels*, Shakespeare Society, 1846), p. 64.

tesy and magnanimity, and a dread of being obliged, or of being ungrateful to another man. Then there is that other kind, which Jonson is particular satirizes; and this manifests itself in unworthy posturing, and in discourtesy rather than courtesy; it has not the saving grace of modesty, and unlike the first kind of arrogance, it wins approval from no one of any judgement. To some extent the characters of Hotspur and the Prince in *Henry IV* illustrate the difference between these two kinds of arrogance. It is necessary to say 'to some extent', because unlike the objects of Jonson's scorn, Hotspur is neither a despicable nor an affected man, but merely one who mars his perfection as a brave gentleman by lack of moderation, lack of Castiglione's 'disinvoltura'. It does not occur to Shakespeare, certainly, to regard the Prince's confidence in his own worthiness as arrogance, and perhaps the explanation for a still prevalent reluctance to sympathize with the Prince is that since the eighteenth century, ideals of gentility, especially those connected with proper pride, have changed. But Hotspur's arrogance is consciously and critically depicted in the play. The Earl of Worcester, who has already noted his overenthusiastic self-confidence, which comes out in his mixed metaphors in the speech about honour,³⁴ later shows him how his haughty impatient bearing towards others lessens his gentility.³⁵ Prince Henry's arrogance does not lie in haughty speeches, but in that sense of his own worth shared by Guyon and Evarchus, in the complete confidence that he can leave his discreditable way of life at will, and dazzle the world by his nobility and virtue:

... herein will I imitate the sun,
 Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
 To smother up his beauty from the world,
 That, when he please again to be himself,
 Being wanted he may be more wonder'd at
 By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
 Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.³⁶

Sixteenth century fiction, in fact, contains little evidence that true humility in a gentleman was regarded as desirable, in the way that it was in Chaucer's Knight and Squire. Spenser, it is true, as a Christian, abhors Pride, which he sees as the Queen of Deadly sins: in his description of Cleopatra, he actually uses the word 'highminded' (used admiringly by

³³ *Il Cortegiano*, I, xviii. Cf. *Ibid* I, xliv.

³⁴ *Henry IV*, Part I (New Arden), I, iii, 199-206.

³⁵ *Ibid*, III, i, 174 seq.

³⁶ *Ibid*, I, ii, 192 seq. Nobility which is recognized by the world comes, naturally enough to be described in terms of sun, fire, and glittering light. Cf. Ulysses' speech to Achilles, *Troilus and Cressida*, III, iii, 115-123. See also, footnotes 27, 29 and 32.

many authors in describing gentlemen) as a term of reproach.³⁷ And elsewhere he shows that true courtesy, which is kindness, is not ashamed to stoop to acts of humility.³⁸ But Spenser's heroes, in so much as they are Elizabethan gentleman as well as faery knights and moral emblems, are possessed of a quiet pride in themselves. In prose fiction too, there are instances where a character expresses the idea that lack of humility is a fault. In William Warner's *Syrinx*, the King of Lydia rebukes his proud courtier Opheltes, telling him 'that honor standeth not without humility, that humility teacheth a man without oversight to have of himself an insight, and that in a poor man it is graceful, in a rich man glorious.'³⁹ Thus humility, paradoxically enough, can bestow on a gentleman added glory. Even Lodge's Rosader, who is very conscious of his own worth, and desirous that others should be so, does not forget his father's precept 'think that you are not born for yourselves'; and so, like Arthur, Guyon and Calidore, he does not scorn to show courtesy to his inferiors, — he even carries his old servant upon his back. In a truly noble knight, consideration for others can even prove stronger than anxiety about reputation. Pyrocles runs away from a challenger in arms, thereby incurring great personal dishonour, in order to rescue a lady: for 'the Ladies misery over-balanced my reputation.'⁴⁰ But none of these exercises in humility, I feel, involves any surrender of the inner self-esteem of those who practise them. One gentleman-hero who perhaps comes very near to being a humble man is Clarence in the anonymous play *Sir Gyles Goose-cappe*: his humility is felt by his friends to be part of his 'inward wealth and nobleness', yet even so, it is not felt to be incompatible with the 'high spirit' of a gentleman.⁴¹

The English may sometimes regard the cruder and the more dramatic manifestations of arrogance with a more critical eye than do the Italians. They seem to be less fascinated with the grand gesture, designed to glorify the individual who makes it; at least, they do not base so many stories on actions of this sort. Moreover, if implications that humility is a

³⁷ *The Faerie Queene*, I, v, 50. Cf. The Prayer Book Psalter, Psalm 131, verse 1.

³⁸ See *Ibid*, II, ii, 3, and IV, viii, 22.

³⁹ William Warner, *Pan his Syrinx*, chapter XLVIII (W.A. Bacon, North Western University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1950), pp. 152-153.

⁴⁰ *Arcadia*, II, 19.

⁴¹ *Sir Gyles Goose-cappe*, V, i.

'Furnival: I never knew a man of so sweet a temper,
 So soft and humble, of so high a spirit.

Momford: Alas my noble lord, he is not rich
 Nor titles hath, nor in his tender cheekes
 The standing kake of impudence corrupts...

virtue befitting gentlemen are exceptional, the exceptions which I have noted certainly all occur in English stories. But both English and Italian literature alike offer evidence that an inner consciousness of his own worth, usually coupled with a desire that this worth should become renowned, is an approved characteristic of the true gentleman. And this consciousness alone, which in its way is no less proud than an elaborate display of magnanimity, lies at the very heart of the sixteenth century cult of gentility.

POETI DEL DUECENTO NELLA DIVINA COMMEDIA*

di CARLO ALBERTO DORIGO

LA DIVINA COMMEDIA, è stato detto più volte, è una sintesi completa del mondo del suo tempo. In essa appaiono tutti i valori, i sentimenti, le passioni che si sono espressi nella coscienza medioevale, non solo italiana, bensì, si può affermare, europea. Attraverso la personalità, dantesca, che si rivela potentemente in ogni pagina del poema, noi ricostruiamo facilmente il quadro di tutta un'età, piena di fermenti religiosi, permeata di slanci mistici, ma anche agitata da fierissime passioni che continuano a far vibrare quel regno di morti con un fremito che raramente si riscontra nelle opere che parlano di vivi. C'è il mondo della politica, presente sia nel violento cozzo delle fazioni cittadine, sia nell'accorata deplorazione delle tristi condizioni di tutta la penisola, sia, infine, nel sogno di un'umanità raccolta nell'obbedienza ad un solo supremo reggitore, che, tenendo a freno con le leggi le intemperanze umane, assicura a tutti, per sempre, con la giustizia la pace. Non manca nella *Divina Commedia*, anzi occupa una parte rilevante, il mondo degli ecclesiastici, di cui Dante bolla a sangue la corruzione, l'avarizia, la cupidigia di potere, in una impressionante serie di episodi che vanno dallo schieramento di teste chercute fra gli avari dell'*Inferno*, alla grottesca scena dei simoniaci, fra i quali si prepara il posto all'abborrito Bonifacio VIII, alle severe condanne pronunziate in cielo dai grandi santi, che si scagliano contro la depravazione proprio di quegli uomini di chiesa che dovrebbero guidare il prossimo sulla via del bene.

La scienza e la filosofia del tempo, poi, sono componenti essenziali del poema, e vi appaiono sia nei frequenti riferimenti dottrinali, sia nella struttura generale dell'opera, che, per questo aspetto, è stata giudicata una vera e propria *Summa* del sapere medioevale. Numerosi pure i quadri di costume, volti a condannare la corruzione del presente o a rimpiangere nostalgicamente il buon tempo antico.

È pertanto naturale che in un'opera poetica in cui la vita del Duecento appare in tutta la multiformità dei suoi aspetti, non manchino pagine dedicate a quel mondo che è tanta parte della vita di Dante, e che finisce coll'essere, dopo il malinconico tramonto dei suoi sogni di esule, l'e-

* Conferenza tenuta per invito del Circolo «Dante Alighieri» a Valletta il 29 maggio 1964.