

Paolo Giovio. *Notable Men and Women of Our Time*.

Ed. and trans. Kenneth Gouwens. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 56. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. xxi + 760 pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-674-05505-6.

Conscious of their cultural ascendancy, Italian Renaissance authors often celebrated the achievements of their countrymen in dialogues and histories that relied in large part on classical models. Thus literary histories often followed the model of Cicero's *Brutus*, a work in dialogue form, whereas accounts of the arts owed a debt to Pliny's *Natural History*.

In 1527, the humanist Paolo Giovio (1483–1552) experienced firsthand the Sack of Rome, when as papal physician he accompanied Clement VII to the relative security of Castel Sant'Angelo. Granted a papal safe-conduct, he repaired to the island of Ischia, where he was the guest of the distinguished woman of letters Vittoria Colonna (1490–1547). After the hell of the Roman catastrophe, this secure and secluded island must have seemed like paradise; and in tribute to this bucolic interlude and his charming hostess, Giovio resolved to immortalize his sojourn in a Latin dialogue. Following classical models, he presents an idealized discussion among himself, the commander Alfonso d'Avalos (1502–46), and the jurist Giovanni Antonio Muscettola (1487–1534), framing it as a Latin dialogue in three books, which he dedicated to Gian Matteo Giberti (1495–1543), the datary of Pope Clement VII who, like Giovio, had suffered during the Sack. In their conversation, the three learned men attempt to console themselves for recent misfortunes by eulogizing the most distinguished contemporary Italians: men of arms in book 1, men of letters in book 2, and noblewomen in book 3 — a series that recalls Andrea del Castagno's 1450 frescoes of famous men and women. One might expect a single interlocutor to expound upon topics of his own expertise — for example, D'Avalos on the military genius of his countrymen — but Giovio has more imaginatively cast his dialogue as an exchange between truly versatile Renaissance men. (In a more expository vein, Giovio later compiled two volumes of *Elogia* of great men, including scholars and commanders of various epochs and nations; and he encouraged Giorgio Vasari in the project that became the contemporary *Lives of the Artists*.)

Book 1 offers a lively gallery of the great military commanders who were active in war-torn Italy in the early sixteenth century. Book 2 turns to literature, beginning with poets in both Latin and Italian and then passing to prose writers — a topic that

affords the author a chance to celebrate his own histories, without which the deeds of great men would be forgotten (298–309). Giovio is here both partial and patriotic, doubting the ability of Northerners to attain Latin eloquence, but remaining silent about figures like Erasmus.

For modern readers, book 3 will prove the most interesting part of the dialogue, for in it the male interlocutors talk about women. (This forms a parallel to book 3 of Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, which offers precepts for the *donna di palazzo*, or court lady.) The discussion is by no means limited to a catalogue of distinguished contemporaries, but begins instead by examining the teachings of Plato and Aristotle on the supposed inferiority of the female sex. Giovio deprecates their views, and laments the political exclusion of women from public participation in Greek and Roman society. Despite the strictures of d'Avalos (the warrior male), Giovio and Muscettola argue for equality of the sexes and lament the common practice (notorious in Venice) of forcing daughters into convents.

The culmination of the work is the final encomium of Vittoria Colonna, who had hosted the refugee Giovio and occasioned the discussion portrayed in the dialogue. This long passage (500–27) is followed by a brief mention of less distinguished women, and then concludes with a peroration on Colonna's literary accomplishments (530–33). The encomium stresses her physical charms, and even describes how she brilliantly performed a solo Hungarian dance at a Neapolitan wedding.

Kenneth Gouwens has published important research on Clement VII and the Sack of Rome, and is ideally equipped to gloss the many references to Italians of the early Cinquecento. But this volume is also a considerable literary achievement. Despite the cumbersome density of Giovio's Latin prose, Gouwens has done an admirable job of rendering the text in lively and readable English.

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