

## Luca Contile

### A secretary in the service of princes

Luca Contile was a true and proper secretary of Princes; a profession that did not seem to him the best one could choose, but not one to be despised either. And he, who had extensive experience in princely secretariats, when his nephew Giovanni became the secretary of Mons. Di Ceneda, wrote him several letters full of prudent and self-interested advice on the duties of a perfect secretary. First and foremost, a secretary had to be educated and literate, and if he could not dedicate a long time to studies, he should take advantage of every moment his office left him free to devote himself to them, seeking first and foremost to deepen his knowledge of the Latin language.

The main task of a secretary is to handle the correspondence of his master: and in this, fidelity and confidentiality are required. Whoever managed to satisfy all the desires of his lord should be content with his office; and he should not pay attention to those who, out of disdain, call secretaries "pennaiuoli." How many illustrious men of antiquity were secretaries to Princes! "Let them talk (Giovanni), practice in this profession that is more worthy than any other. You know how many Signori di Castelli usually go to the mercy of the pen pushers." But our protagonist lacked some duties of the perfect courtier, as we saw, and to these shortcomings were attributed the anger of Don Ferrante Gonzaga, and even more so, those of Sforza Pallavicino. However, Contile could, against those who wanted to humble the secretaries of Princes, argue that he was not a simple pen pusher. He belonged, in fact, to a distinct and numerous series of secretaries of the sixteenth century. A series of secretaries sought by princes not only as editors of their correspondence and as negotiators with other princes but also desired as ornaments of their courts and as makers of rhymes and prose in their exaltation.

All these literate-secretaries have, one might say, the same literary heritage: an encomiastic song in praise of some noblewoman, who can also be their Lady; a correspondence, of which a part, the most voluminous, is written as a duty; one or more dramatic compositions (especially comedies), made without inspiration, almost, we would say, on a mandatory theme and on a fixed deadline; some academic work; a treatise on the topics most favorably received and discussed in courtly conversations. The least space is occupied by works of true inspiration. This is the main reason why the literature of these minor figures of the sixteenth century is distinguished by a heavy uniformity and a singular lack of originality. And it is also explained how certain literary genres had in the 16th century a more extensive treatment than their importance required. Of Contile's works, most fall into this category, and they have value only as a manifestation of the tendencies of a century, which to the historian of our literature presents a much lesser originality than one would expect from its abundance.