

Luca Contile - The Intellectual and Spain

'Pilgrim from every part of Europe,' in Cetona attempted (unsuccessfully) to regain the lost nobility

Luca Contile was born in 1505 in Cetona. His paternal grandfather had married a "Bevignati" (Benvegnati), related to the Baglioni family, while his father, Giovanni, "fell from nobility not due to a dissolute life... but due to an unsuitable occupation for his ancestors." He had "violated the nobility of the family by engaging in a mechanical trade," damaging his career. Luca tried in every way to restore glory and "honor" to his family, attempting to gather evidence of descent from the counts of Cetona and seeking the testimony of his fellow citizens in support. He helped his mother and brothers Guidotto, Camillo, and Ceccante who remained in Cetona, and arranged for his favorite nephew, Giovanni, to become the secretary of Monsignor di Ceneda Michele Della Torre. His older brother Baldo moved to Germany, serving under Charles V.

At the age of ten, Luca Contile was already in Siena to study literature, grammar, philosophy, mathematics, music, and rhetoric. There, he cultivated friendships that would remain strong throughout his life, such as the one with Claudio Tolomei, who described him as: "...a good man, full of various knowledge, filled with noble and virtuous manners (...) very sweet in conversations of all kinds..." Despite the death of his father, at the age of twenty-three, Luca moved to Bologna to attend the lectures of Ludovico Boccadiferro. Here, he came into contact with Count Giulio Boiardo of Scandiano, who introduced him to the profession of a courtier. It was the count who, after taking him through Lombardy, secured him a patron, Cardinal Agostino Trivulzio. In 1535, Luca moved to Rome, remaining fascinated. He wrote in a letter: "Here, one truly lives with universal contentment because universal is the grace that this most holy Pontiff bestows. Here, the poor find mercy, the learned are rewarded, the good are esteemed, valiant soldiers are caressed, all people are secure from tyranny, merchants can conduct their affairs in every way, idleness has no place because the learned almost every day debate in front of the Pope, and gentlemen every day engage in the exercise of chivalry under the guidance of these gracious and most noble nephews of His Holiness. For some, entertainment is not lacking in card games, dice, or with courtesans... In short, Rome is like that Pandora's box, no more and no less, where virtues were enclosed with vices." In addition to working for the cardinal, he joined the Academy of Virtue, born under the impulse of the Sienese humanist Claudio Tolomei, which included Giovanni Gaddi, Annibal Caro, or Antonio Blado, close to Marcello Cervini. He continued his studies, which he commented on in a sonnet dedicated to his friend Antonio Borghesi: "As in my green age I offered myself / to that Goddess who with clear and pure thoughts / makes a home within our darkened breast." The reference is to philosophy, which remained a constant in his education.

In 1541, in Lucca, he participated in a meeting between Pope Paul III and Charles V. Cardinal Trivulzio allowed these opportunities, which did not prevent Contile from expressing the restlessness of a courtier and the search for more generous patrons. He attempted to establish himself in Milan with Alfonso d'Ávalos, Marquis of Vasto, but Trivulzio did not want to grant him permission, as he wrote to Orlando Marescotti: "I now serve two lords: the Lord Marquis of Vasto by choice and Trivulzio out of necessity that arises here, and I do all this and will do it to preserve this house." Between 1543 and 1544, the pass to that magnificent environment arrived: the marquis surrounded himself with intellectuals, including his wife Maria d'Aragona and her sister, Vittoria Colonna. When Alfonso, the commander of the imperial army, had to report the defeat of Ceresole against the French to Charles V, Contile was among the entourage. Meanwhile, he had published the comedy "La Trinottia" (Rome, 1542), infused with morality, and the "Dialoghi spirituali" (Rome, 1543), in defense of Catholic orthodoxy. In 1546, after the death of Alfonso d'Ávalos, the governor of Milan became Don Ferrante Gonzaga. Contile spent a few weeks in Piacenza with Claudio Tolomei before joining the widow of the Marquis of Vasto in Pavia and becoming the tutor of her son Francesco. In 1547, they traveled to Naples, Ischia, and Procida until the following year when he resigned from Maria d'Aragona.

After completing his commitment with the young Marquis of Pescara or, perhaps, for other reasons: in a letter from 1560, we learn how much she hated him. After staying in Rome and again with Tolomei, Contile entered the service of Ferrante Gonzaga in Milan, who was less open to art and culture, more severe and decisive than the Marquis of Vasto. Contile was assigned to the service of his wife, Isabella di Capua, whom he accompanied to Naples, Apulia, in 1549 and to Mantua in 1551.

In 1550, he served as an ambassador to Poland, where he had direct contact with the king and queen, the Italian Bona Sforza. This was a happy period for literary production. In 1550, a collection of three comedies was published: "La Pescara," "La Cesarea Gonzaga," and "La Trinottia," characterized by Plautine plots. Two eclogues with commendatory functions were conceived and performed in 1551: "La Argia" (in honor of Ippolita Gonzaga, daughter of Ferrante) and "La Nice" (dedicated to Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga). Towards the end of 1551, Contile was dismissed by Don Ferrante, perhaps due to revelations Contile would have made in Poland about the master's intention to attack Parma. In 1552, he joined the service of the Cardinal of Trent, Cristoforo Madruzzo. Among his duties were accompanying his nephew Ludovico to the Diet of Augsburg in 1554 and following Madruzzo to Milan in 1556, where he had been appointed governor by Philip II. In that year in Florence, "Le sei sorelle di Marte," political poems, were printed. In 1557, Contile was in Rome to handle some negotiations with the pope, but in the same year, he was dismissed because he was suspected of writing satirical poems against the cardinal. He would later manage to prove his innocence and reestablish a good relationship with Madruzzo, dedicating to him the "Discorso sopra li cinque sensi del corpo nel Comento d'un Sonetto del Signor Giuliano Goselini." He then returned to Piacenza to be employed by Duke Ottavio Farnese, with the benefit of the revenues from the Porto della Trebbia. In 1558, he joined the service of Sforza Pallavicino, becoming his negotiator in Venice. In the Serenissima, he came into contact with the most illustrious literati of the city. Admitted to the Academy of Fame, he contributed decisively to the election of Pallavicino as the general governor of the troops. Nevertheless, he was expelled because to achieve this brilliant result; he had violated a fundamental rule: absolute obedience. Contile worsened his position by writing an irreverent letter of explanations to Pallavicino, even going against Farnese. In Venice in 1560, "Le Rime" were printed, clearly inspired by Petrarch: the first fifty sonnets of the collection dedicated to Giovanna d'Aragona were commented on by Francesco Patrizi. In the same year, Contile was spared the wrath of Pallavicino and Farnese by the Marquis of Pescara, Francesco Ferrante d'Ávalos, who wanted him in Milan and made him travel extensively on his behalf.

In 1562, he became the commissioner of the estimate in Pavia, a role he would hold for several years. Economic conditions had improved, but the unrepentant courtier did not stop fantasizing about more advantageous prospects: he turned to Emanuele Filiberto and established relations with Chiappino Vitelli. To the latter, through the secretary and literate Giuseppe Betussi, he had recommended the fate of his country "...which could not, in the Siense district, find better...," being one of the options offered by the Medici for a marquisate. Perhaps Contile intended to conclude his days in Cetona, but he certainly claimed a pension from Philip II for the years of service to lords connected to the Kingdom of Spain. "I ran through Europe almost every country, / and for others, I toiled in vain and joyfully, / and now my reward for foolish hope is nothing," he wrote in an autobiographical sonnet. In a letter, he defined himself as a "Pilgrim from every part of Europe." In 1564, he published "La Historia de fatti di Cesare Maggi da Napoli," on the deeds of the imperial captain he had known at the court of the Ávalos. At the same time, he printed "Lettere." During the years in Pavia (in the role of commissioner for the Spanish), he edited the volume that would enhance his literary reputation: the "Ragionamento sopra la proprietà delle Imprese con le particolari degli Accademici Adati e con le interpretationi et chroniche..." published in the year of his death, 1574.

Bibliografia

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