

Mariusz Misztal, *The Elizabethan Courtier. Ideal versus Reality Embodied in Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester*, Kraków 2002, Wyd. Akademii Pedagogicznej, 332 pp., il., indexes.

This is truly an excellent book. It will certainly attract many readers, all the more so as the author, who is both a historian and a linguist, has written it in English, thus ensuring its accessibility on the international market. The book departs from the traditional approach usually practised in biographies. Its construction is based on an interesting comparison of the 16th century model courtier depicted in Baldassare Castiglione's world-famous work with Elizabeth I's favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Misztal presents passages from Castiglione's

book which describe the qualities of an ideal Renaissance courtier and compares them with the personality of Robert Dudley, analysing his looks, mentality, talents, vices and his activities in various fields. The book is based on an impressive wealth of sources. In addition to archives (Public Records Office in London, the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow) and abundant printed sources, the author has made ample use of literature concerning Elizabethan England (including many recent studies) as well as iconographic sources (among them Dudley's portraits showing the marks of age and changes in his physical features). In addition to archival and printed sources concerning socio-political life, the author has taken into consideration important documents depicting material culture and everyday life (e.g. accounts of expenses, shopping lists, inventories of equipment in residences, including collections of books, weapons, paintings, lists of jewellery and clothes, etc.). All this enriches the picture and makes it more expressive.

The book is divided into three parts. The first presents the "black legend" about Leicester; it is based mainly on an analysis of an anti-Leicester pamphlet, "Leicester's Commonwealth", published in 1584, and the influence it had on the contemporaries and future generations. The second part presents guides to good behaviour, from ancient times through the Middle Ages to Baldassare Castiglione's famous portrayal of an ideal courtier at a Renaissance court, and analyses their influence on social mentality and the lifestyle of the élites. In the most extensive third part, the core of the book, the author compares Leicester's physical and psychological qualities with those of the ideal literary model. He starts by discussing the concept of "good birth" and family honour and their significance for the career of every nobleman; he analyses this question with regard to Dudley, who because of his family connections, trial and incarceration had to face the accusation of treason. The ignoble name of "traitor" accompanied Dudley practically throughout his life, despite the favours bestowed on him by the Queen.

In the chapter dealing with Dudley's looks, the author stresses that his hero was remarkably handsome but he also points out that Dudley's health kept deteriorating, that he became obese and prone to diseases in later life. Misztal makes use of written sources, e.g. correspondence, information on Dudley's sojourns in watering places, and also analyses the changes that can be seen in successive portraits. His skilful use of evidence is one of the merits of the book. He also analyses the grace and personal charm of this "ideal courtier", his clothes, which were always in line with the fashion of the epoch and with the requirements of the court's glamour, his way of walking and behaving. As regards the last-named question, it would be worth while to take note of the recent animated international discussion on gesture. In the view of researchers, gesture was an important factor, especially in the 16th–18th centuries, for it signalled an individual's social status and set barriers between the estates, but at the same time it reflected emotional states and was an important means of communication. I would recommend above all the results of an international session on this subject which was held in Utrecht (1989) and led to the publication of *A Cultural History of Gesture* by J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg, Cambridge 1991. It would also be worth while to present the rules concerning attire, its colours and costliness (so-called *leges sumptuariae*) not only in the Elizabethan context but in the wide context of the whole of Europe (S. Salmonowicz is one of the authors who have discussed this question in Poland). Similarly, in connection with the concept of *imprese* it would be worth while to refer to the discussion on the history of early modern emblems, in particular to the conference dedicated to this question (Glasgow, 13–17, 1990), the results of which have been published by A. Adams and A. J. Harper in *The Emblem in the Renaissance and Baroque Europe. Tradition and Variety*, New York 1992.

In the chapter *Profession* the author discusses mainly a courtier's chivalrous occupations in Castiglione's interpretation and against this background outlines Leicester's military activity and analyses his military talents (also his personal courage). The Netherlandic stage of Leicester's career could be enriched by making

use of Dutch literature, but this could be difficult because of language problems. Misztal devotes much space to the question of education, evaluating Leicester's knowledge in various fields against the background of the requirements of the Elizabethan epoch (this part contains interesting reflections also on Elizabeth I's education). The author draws attention to the fact that Leicester was more interested in the exact sciences, especially mathematics and geometry, than in the humanities, and adds interesting reflections on his hero's activity as a patron of art and literature (in his opinion Leicester supported authors of historical works because they were useful in political propaganda). At the same time he emphasises Leicester's psychological and literary talents; Leicester was a shrewd observer and judge of people, he could aptly define their qualities and, as his letters show, he was endowed with no small literary talents. The author's remarks not only show that Leicester's lifestyle and behaviour were in concordance with the patterns and ideals depicted in Castiglione's work but they also reveal the important recesses of his hero's heart and the original traits of his personality.

A separate chapter deals with the typical way in which an ideal courtier spent his time. Leicester's way of life was certainly compatible with Castiglione's model. What is striking is the diversity of his activities and their "physical" character; they all involved movement (participation in tournaments, horse-riding, hunting, tennis, dancing). Leicester was fond of games of various kinds (cards, dice, chess, billiards). No intellectual occupations are mentioned, such as, for instance, reading, referred to on other occasions. Should not music be included here rather than in the passage concerning Leicester's education?

Intimate, emotional life is the subject of the chapter which presents women in Leicester's life. The hero's attitude to his son and the problem of offspring in general — a question of extreme importance for the people of those days and one on which their minds were focused — is discussed in the book but the author has not singled it out for special consideration in a separate chapter. The last chapter, which in my view is of key importance for the book and for the "Leicester question" as a whole, discusses Leicester's relations with Elizabeth. Compared with the courtier-prince pattern, this was certainly not a typical relationship. In a sense it is still enigmatic. Though much has been written on this subject, Misztal has undoubtedly succeeded in shedding new light on this question and he has presented it in an unstereotyped, original way.

The reader has been offered not only a penetrating psychological and physical portrait of Leicester and a presentation of his career but also an interesting interpretation of the personality of Elizabeth, England's untypical ruler who has fascinated researchers for years. The comparison of the ideal set by Castiglione with the realities of a union between two living persons, a very happy idea in my opinion, has given us an extremely apt and suggestive picture of the élites in 16th century England.

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