PARADOXICAL VIRTUES: INTELLECTUALS BETWEEN THE COURT AND THE ACADEMY IN AGOSTINO MASCARDI’S CHE LA CORTE È VERA SCUOLA NON SOLAMENTE DELLA PRUDENZA, MA DELLE VIRTÙ MORALI (1624)

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This article analyses the oration Che la Corte è vera scuola non solamente della prudenza, ma delle virtù morali (1624), delivered at the Accademia degli Umoristi by Agostino Mascardi, a courtier, professor of rhetoric, and renowned member of academies. Mascardi’s oration has traditionally been read as a commendation of the court, and as proof of intellectuals’ willing submission to political powers in the seventeenth century. This article aims to challenge such a reading by proposing a reinterpretation of the text that suggests the oration is, in fact, paradoxical. This article also considers Che la Corte è vera scuola in relation to Mascardi’s other writings on courts, and investigates them in the larger context of the academie of early seventeenth-century Rome in an attempt to shed light on the role that academies played for early modern Italian intellectuals in trying to define their relationship to political power.

KEYWORDS: court, courtiers, academies, intellectuals, paradox

INTRODUCTION: THE INTELLECTUAL AND THE COURT IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

As the main social, political, and cultural institution of early modern Italy, princely courts often occupied the thoughts of Italian writers of the time. The success and dissemination of Baldassare Castiglione’s Libro del cortegiano, and his attempt at theorizing a perfect courtier who could also act as a wise counsellor to his prince, further contributed to the development of a rich tradition of texts dealing, either entirely or partially, with the institution of the court and with the figure of the courtier. Representations of courts and courtiers, however, were frequently polarized in two opposite visions. While, on the one hand, there existed a positive image of the court that could go as far as to portray it as the congregation of the noblest of souls in a place devoted to aesthetic and moral refinement, on the other
hand, an increasing number of harshly critical texts portrayed the court as a place of depravation, deceit, gilded servitude, and broken dreams of success; and, most importantly, as a place where no sage and virtuous man could survive without being corrupted. Texts criticizing courtly life progressively outnumbered the attempts at salvaging the idea of the courtier as a virtuous figure that, in the most ambitious proposals, may hold an active role in a princely court.

In the seventeenth century, such contrasting views resulted in heated discussion about the possible role for the letterato at court that witnessed the participation of some of the most renowned intellectuals of the time. The best-known protagonists of such debate were Matteo Peregrini, author of Che al savio è convenevole il corteggiare (1624) and Difesa del savio in corte (1634), two works aimed at defending the possibility for the intellectual to pursue a righteous and socially useful life at the service of a prince, and Giovan Battista Manzini who, in Il servire negato al savio (1633), contrasted Peregrini’s ideal with a representation of the court as a dangerous place for the sage man and a notion of wisdom as incompatible with any form of political power. The polemic between Peregrini and Manzini has recently revived critical attention thanks to the modern edition of Peregrini’s Difesa del savio in corte. However, the debate over the role of the intellectual at court also featured many orations that were delivered in the peculiar environment of the early modern accademie, and that are mostly unknown to present-day scholarship. Academic discussions of the role of the court intellectual flourished in early seventeenth-century Rome due to the optimistic atmosphere towards a possible allegiance between culture and power that characterized the early years of the papacy of the humanist pope Urban VIII. An eloquent example of the exchanges that took place in the Roman academies are the essays collected by the Genoese courtier and rhetorician Agostino Mascardi in his Prose Vulgari (first edition published in 1625), Saggi Accademici (first edition published in 1630), and Discorsi Accademici (published posthumously in 1705).

For some time now, the dominant scholarly attitude towards such debates has been that of reading them as inconsequential lamentations or of considering them nothing more than proof of the inevitable submission of contemporary intellectuals to political power. Francesco De Sanctis theorized a decline in Italian literature originating in the second half of the sixteenth century, and his words created a persistent stereotype of the seventeenth century as an age of cultural decadence and servility to power. Although the twentieth century, with its notion of the baroque, has paved the way for a rehabilitation of seventeenth-century art and literature, the same cannot be said for seventeenth-century thought. As a consequence, crucial issues discussed in the cultural circles of the time, such as the relationship of letters to political power, have often been investigated only superficially. In accordance with such an attitude, the texts on the court presented at the Roman academies and written and collected by Mascardi have usually been depicted as representative of an age when the court was deemed the sole, indisputable source of every form of power, and when nearly all the texts reflecting the condition of the courtier could be considered as preaching submission to the rules imposed by the court establishment.

This essay will analyse a text that has often been considered a patent example of the subjugation of the seventeenth-century Italian intellectual to courtly powers: Agostino Mascardi’s Che la Corte è vera scuola non solamente della prudenza, ma...
AGOSTINO MASCARDI AND THE CULTURAL MILIEU OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ROME

When Mascardi delivered *Che la Corte è vera scuola*, the Accademia degli Umoristi was the fulcrum of Rome’s cultural life. By choosing the court as the topic of his oration, Mascardi relied on a well-established tradition: the court was one of the most common subjects discussed by the Umoristi. Moreover, it was also a central theme in Mascardi’s literary production. Mascardi had already dealt with courts and courtiers in *Il genio di Socrate*, a work written in the early 1620s during a temporary withdrawal from the world of the court, which exists today in two different extracts: *Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi, perché veggia più favorito in Corte l’ignorante, che’l dotto, che’l plebeo, che’l Nobile*, published as part of the *Prose Vulgari*, and *Della Speranza della Corte, tratto dal genio di Socratic*, published in 1705 in the *Discorsi Accademici*. Mascardi would return to touch on the topic of the court in his 1624 inaugural speech at the Accademia dei Desiosi, titled *Che gli esercitii di lettere sono in Corte non pur dicevoli, ma necessari*, and finally in *Della giudiciosa congiuntione dell’Accademia, e della Corte*, most likely delivered at the same academy one year later. *Che la Corte è vera scuola*, however, represents an interesting moment in Mascardi’s reflections on the court, which separates it from the conventional anti-court critiques expressed in *Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi* and in *Della Speranza della Corte*, and introduces the notion of a committed court intellectual and of an active role for the humanities at court that Mascardi will also develop in *Che gli esercitii di lettere* and in *Della giudiciosa congiuntione*.

Throughout all of Mascardi’s life, his relationship with the courtly milieu was contradictory, often subject to abrupt shifts of fortune. Born in Sarzana (at the time part of the Republic of Genoa) in 1590, Mascardi was educated by the Jesuits from childhood, and joined the order before his eighteenth birthday. His relationship with the Jesuits was extremely conflicted: Mascardi was at first admonished for having published vernacular poems, and eventually ended up leaving the Society of Jesus in 1617. The reason for his exit remains unknown, and it is unclear whether he voluntarily left the order or was expelled from it. In either case, Mascardi’s departure from the Society of Jesus was most certainly related to his involvement with the courtly milieu (specifically with the Este court in Modena) which may have led him to be less observant of the Society’s rules.
these early stages of his career, Mascardi may well have looked to the court to find some independence from the oppressive authority of the Jesuits. In this sense, Mascardi’s biography is at odds with one of the best-known Italian anti-court texts, Pietro Aretino’s *Ragionamento delle corti*. Aretino’s dialogue concludes its meagre account of courtly life quoting those who, driven by desperation, left the court to look for freedom in the ranks of a religious order. Intriguingly, Mascardi’s life followed the opposite path.

After his rupture with the Jesuits, Mascardi was hired as a full-time secretary by Cardinal Alessandro d’Este. Mascardi’s relationship with the Este court, however, was not long-lived: most likely because of a scandal that followed the publication of a polemical treatise against the conclave, which in 1621 had elected the new pope Gregory XV, Mascardi was compelled to leave the court and return to the Republic of Genoa, where he worked as an attorney for the Republic, and waited in vain for Cardinal Alessandro to call him back to court. While in Genoa, in a time of disappointment felt towards princely courts, Mascardi voiced his harshest reflections on court life in *Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi* and in *Della Speranza della Corte*. Written in a disenchanted tone that recalls popular early modern anti-court writings such as Enea Silvio Piccolomini’s *De curialium miseriis* (1444), the two extracts from *Il genio di Socrate* aim to disabuse courtiers from the belief that merit and excellence can guarantee success and favour at court, and warn them about the whimsicality of princely favour.

Despite his position with the Republic and his disillusion with courtliness, Mascardi still maintained an eye on the world of the court. Again tempted by the idea of seeking fortune in the courtly milieu during the animated and promising circumstances surrounding a Vatican conclave, Mascardi left for Rome as soon as he was informed of the death of Pope Gregory XV. He made it just in time to witness the election of Maffeo Barberini as Urban VIII in the summer of 1623.

The arrival of the erudite Barberini on the papal throne was followed by his decision to invite many well-known men of letters and scientists into his entourage. Such circumstances created a climate of optimism among intellectuals, who saw in this union of culture and power the long-awaited opportunity to participate actively in the political and social sphere. In the 1620s Rome became a place of great intellectual vitality, where many ambitious and well-educated men migrated every day hoping to seize the opportunity of a lifetime. Together with this constant flux of human energy, an impressive number of academies were founded. This flourishing of cultural gatherings was supported by what Mario Biagioli has defined as an incredibly active and ever-changing patronage scene. Potential patrons tried to establish themselves as the persons at the centre of cultural activities, while potential clients were in constant search of powerful and profitable alliances. Among this crowd of eager prospective clients was Agostino Mascardi.

Mascardi would not regret the decision to try his luck in the dynamic world of early seventeenth-century Roman households. In Rome he would reach the peak of his career: universally praised for his work celebrating the election of Urban VIII, *Le Pompe del Campidoglio*, Mascardi was hired as a cameriere d’onore for the new pope. Shortly thereafter he was admitted into the prestigious Accademia degli Umoristi, and, beginning in 1624, he became a courtier in the service of Cardinal
Maurizio di Savoia, who also put him in charge of creating his own academy, the Accademia dei Desiosi.

A REINTERPRETATION OF MASCARDI’S *CHE LA CORTE E` VERA SCUOLA NON SOLAMENTE DELLA PRUDENZA, MA DELLE VIRTU` MORALI*

The positive relationship with the court establishment that Mascardi seems to have enjoyed in the early 1620s might legitimate the reading of his 1624 oration *Che la Corte e` vera scuola* as an encomium of the courtly milieu. Mascardi himself seems to point out the straightforwardness of his own speech when pleading for the audience not to resent his sincerity, since the academy ‘non è teatro di lusinghe, ma scuola di verità’ (p. 87). Mascardi then states that what made him extremely eager to speak was his ardent desire to ‘difendere comunque per me si potesse, l’innocenza della Corte, e de’ Cortigiani’ (p. 88). Courts and courtiers, he explains, are challenged by two very powerful enemies: fame and the populace, both of which depict the courtly milieu and its members as evil. Courtiers are regarded as madmen by virtue of their position — as pointed out in the *Odyssey* by the peasant Eumaeus, who states that Zeus takes half of the brain away from those who voluntarily submit themselves to servitude. The Roman author Lucan, too, warned the virtuous man to leave the court: ‘exeat aula / qui vult esse pius’ (p. 90).

Mascardi claims that his goal will be to contrast such popular opinions, and to prove, on the contrary, that the court is ‘una vera scuola, in cui s’affina l’intelletto con la prudenza, e si coltiva la volontà co’ virtuosi esercitii’ (p. 91). The court is like a modern theatre for gladiators, where every courtier has to confront the weapons of simulation, fraud, and envy. However, the courtier ‘omnia adversa exercitationes putat’, and would even regret ‘di trapassar senza contrasto gli anni migliori, perché alla cote dell’avversità s’aguzza l’ingegno; e contro gli assalti di rea fortuna s’esercita’ (pp. 92–93). The courtier is like the Greek Theramenes, nicknamed Cothurnus because

non aveva piede, che destro, o sinistro gli fosse: perfettissimo simbolo del discreto huomo di Corte, che a tutti gli humori, a tutte le complessioni, a tutti i genii virtuosamente s’adatta; imitando, per quanto conviene ad huomo puramente morale, l’esempio dell’Apostolo, che diceva di se medesimo, omnibus omnia factus. (pp. 93–94)

What would a courtier be without the court? He would only be ‘un Alessandro senza la Persia, la Media, e l’India da soggiogare, imprigionato dentro i confini della Macedonia; uno Scipione senza Cartagine; un Pompeo senza i Corsari; un Metello senza la Numidia; un Mario senza Giugurta; un Socrate senza Xantippe’ (p. 94). A man who lives among the tribulations of court life versus one who enjoys a tranquil existence surrounded by his loved ones is comparable to Achilles fighting in Asia versus Achilles in Skyros: the latter is pampered and feminized, the former ready for battle. The courtier lives a life of privations, and yet ‘questa medesima necessità lo rende piu` sagace, e piu` scaltro’ (p. 95).

But this is not all: the adversities of court life also enhance the courtier’s morality. As Mascardi puts it, ‘il Cortigiano tanto assolutamente diviene in Corte padrone de’ propri affetti, che può servire per un’idea a gli scrittori de la scientia morale’ (p. 97). The first vice that the courtier overcomes is ambition. The vice of
ambition is usually considered the hardest to confront, even for the most virtuous and sage among men. The courtier, however, easily defeats it thanks to the harsh discipline of courtly life. He is constantly exposed to the capricious nature of favour at court: ‘quanto spesso si vede un vilissimo, e scellerato huomaccino, in cui non è altro di buono, che la fortuna, a guisa di vapore impurissimo tratto in alto dal caldo del favore del padrone, sovrastare, e minacciare tempesta a’ Cortigiani nobili, virtuosi e da bene?’ (p. 100). But the courtier is able to withstand all this with equanimity:

Perché gli Spartani provano i figliuoli con le battiture, i Galli co’l Rheno, l’Aquila col Sole, i Psilli co’ Serpenti, la Corte con la patientia. Avviene alhora, che un meritevole personaggio di Corte ambiese un carico in ricompensa del suo servire: gli esce per fianco il ballarino, il suonatore, il buffone, o chi che sia e si gli dichiara competitore [...] s’aspetta dal Principe la sentenza; egli ricordevole de’ suoi gusti pronuntia a favore del più vile, il meritevole sente la fiancata, et in guisa di can battuto passa avanti, e non parla, consolandosi con l’esempio d’huomini grandi. (pp. 101–02)

Similarly, the courtier is also able to free himself from wrath, an ‘indomito mostro, c’ha fatto tanta strage nel mondo’, but that nonetheless ‘con la clava della patientia, dall’Ercole della Corte si vince’ (p. 105). The courtier is like Ulysses among Penelope’s suitors, bearing insult and abuse without taking revenge: ‘o raro esempio della sofferenza di Corte, in cui le ripulse si vendicano con le preghiere; gli affronti si pagano con le lodi; l’ingiurie si ricompensano con gli ossequii; i danni si ristorano co’ rendimenti di gratie’ (pp. 105–06). If only his ultimate aims were spiritual, would not the courtier be a ‘vero imitatore de gli Apostoli’ (p. 106)?

Mascardi provides further proof of courtly fortitude by citing examples of courtiers who were able to endure unspeakable humiliations and cruelties from their princes without batting an eye. The fortitude of a courtier has no comparison, according to Mascardi: while the mythological Thyestes, tricked into eating the flesh of his children, cried out loud in anguish, a courtier forced by his prince to undergo the same brutality was able to repress his grief, even responding that he would always accept his prince’s will. This, the author asserts, proves that ‘la mortificatione, che con altro nome abnegatione chiamano i Teologi mistici, è così propria del Cortigiano, che dal perfetto religioso non è differente in altro, che nel motivo’ (p. 110). Mascardi goes on to quote Plato, who observed that man is an indomitable animal, extremely difficult to control. Yet, Mascardi says, the court can tame him, ‘sicché veggendo un Cortigiano di spirito parmi veder appunto un Leone mansuetamente condotto dal gran Cartaginese Annone, che primamente seppe addomesticargli’ (p. 112).

Finally, the courtier is exceedingly accomplished in fighting greed: not only does he spend all his wealth just to keep up with the requirements of the court, he must also lavish goods on the prince and his favourites. The courtier is, in fact, well aware that in the sea of the court ‘non si piglia pesce per piccolo che sia, e pieno di spine, che secondo il detto d’Augusto, non sia fatto prigione con amo d’oro; onde per lo più maggior dell’utile, o dell’honor, che pretende, è la mercede, che paga’ (p. 115). Even at the moment of saying farewell to his audience, Mascardi further applauds the patience of courtiers: by sitting through his long speech, his listeners
have just given a practical example of that very tolerance that he was praising in theory (p. 116).

Any scholarly analysis that has explored Mascardi’s oration seems to bear an unresolvable contradiction: on the one hand, studies point out the complexity of Mascardi’s attitude towards the courtly milieu, and on the other hand, they often appear to force a univocal interpretation onto the text, one that would make it an encomium of courtly prudence andadvocation that the courtier assume a patient and unassertive attitude. Laura Alemanno, who has investigated Che la Corte è vera scuola in the broad context of a general analysis of the Accademia degli Umoristi, dates Mascardi’s oration to the 1630s, and considers it representative of a period that she defines as ‘meno originale nelle espressioni, più silenziosamente acquiescente al nuovo corso politico’.\(^2\)

Eraldo Bellini opposes Alemanno’s reading of the oration as representative of the 1630s by convincingly arguing that, given the presence of Che la Corte è vera scuola in the 1625 edition of the Prose Vulgari, the text was written and presented at the Umoristi in early 1624.\(^2\) However, Bellini’s interpretation of the text is not notably different from Alemanno’s. While he does point out that Che la Corte è vera scuola is structured ‘quasi in forma di paradosso’,\(^2\) Bellini does not analyse in depth the possible ambiguities of such commendation of a courtier’s capacity to learn the arts of prudence, secrecy, and flexibility in order to ensure his survival amidst the hardships of life at court.

Riccardo Merolla has further investigated writings on courts and courtiers generated in seventeenth-century Rome, referring in particular to Mascardi’s Saggi Accademici, a collection of essays by different authors presented at the Accademia dei Desiosi. Merolla sees most of the essays included in the Saggi Accademici as being largely in favour of the courtly milieu to the point of often being simply acquiescent to courtly power,\(^2\) and considers Mascardi the example of a moderate attitude, however compromised by many contradictions. Merolla underlines the complexity of Mascardi’s representations of the courtier, specifically warning readers not to underestimate the meaning of Mascardi’s ideal of a court intellectual who endeavours to have an active role in society.\(^2\) Still, he does not fully explore the contradictions inherent in Mascardi’s praise for an unassertive court letterato who accepts the evils of court life on the one hand, and his ideal of an active intellectual who strives to reclaim his influence within the courtly milieu on the other. Merolla seems to hint that, no matter how committed, how ‘esposto e non sequestrato’\(^2\) such a court intellectual may be, Mascardi’s definition of him as an ‘eroe stoico, che di fronte alle palesi ingiustizie del Principe, pure “si porta in pace” e “sta saldo”’, a ‘novello martire cristiano’, and a ‘perfetto religioso’ points to an acceptance of the status quo.\(^2\)

There are, however, many elements in Che la Corte è vera scuola — including both the features of the text and the circumstances in which it was delivered — that call for an interpretative revision, and many reasons to argue that there may be much more at stake than submission to a prince now seen as ‘il Sole che partecipa il suo splendore a’ pianeti minori’ (p. 99), as stated in a much-quoted passage of the text. First of all, the specific context in which the oration was delivered is particularly significant. From an avviso published in Rome in 1624, we know that Che la Corte è vera scuola was presented during carnival week of that same year, precisely on the domenica di carnevale. The avviso states that ‘nelle famosa accademia degli Humoristi, che si teneva in casa del Sig. Paolo Mancini,
dal Sig. Agostino Mascardi era recitata una dotta et elegante oratione in lingua toscana, sopra la Corte, reprobando la comune opinione di quelli che la biasimavano. The license of the timeframe may have allowed Mascardi to touch upon tricky subjects, while being able to dismiss his arguments as carnival jokes. It is necessary in addition to consider the Umoristi’s established tradition for texts that employed irony, oxymoron, and paradoxes. A most celebrated principe of the Umoristi, Alessandro Tassoni, famously delivered provocative, paradoxical speeches like Encomio sopra il Boia and the oration In biasmo delle Lettere. Given such a cultural environment, a text reversing the usual picture of the court by depicting it as a school for heroic, saintly courtiers would not have been out of place.

Yet Mascardi’s oration seems much more complex than a simple mockery of courts and courtiers. What is particularly intriguing about Che la Corte è vera scuola is the declared intention to contrast ‘il giudizio del vulgo’ (p. 89) or, as the avviso puts it, to go against ‘la comune opinione’. Mascardi’s desire to oppose common judgement and widespread opinion recalls the classical definition of the paradox, as expressed by Cicero in his Paradoxa Stoicorum, a text that enjoyed great popularity in early modern Europe. According to Cicero’s definition, the Stoic call ‘paradoxes’ all things that are ‘admirabilia contraque opinionem omnium’ (remarkable and contrary to everyone’s opinion). A reading of Mascardi’s oration as a text related to the paradoxical tradition proceeding from Cicero’s Paradoxa Stoicorum is also supported by Mascardi’s well-known interest in Stoicism.

This interpretation may be further confirmed by similarities between the text and Mascardi’s explicit — though unrecognized by scholars — use of paradox in his Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi. As Mascardi remarks in this text, ‘il tenor della vita de’ Cortigiani è somigliantissimo alla dottrina degli Stoici; perche l’uno e l’altro si fonda sui paradossi’, and for such reason ‘molto agevolmente mi verrà fatto d’imprimer un paradosso di Corte nella mente del Cortigiano, per esser di propria elettione usato a valersi di questi, per asiomi, o vogliam dire per primi principi della sua professione, e de’ costumi.

COURTLY PARADOXES

Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi introduces the paradoxical theme that will be the centre of Che la Corte è vera scuola: the notion that the tribulations of court life eventually make the virtuous man grow stronger. As Mascardi points out,

da gli huomini di senno, e magnanimi sono desiderati gli incontri della fortuna, per haver con che affordar la natia generosità; e per dar un esempio non lontano dal proposito nostro, Platone fondò studiosamente l’Accademia in luogo d’aria corrotta, per render l’animo più vigoroso con la debolezza del corpo cagionevole.

Both Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi and Che la Corte è vera scuola can be read as referring to the Stoic paradoxical tradition of presenting a moral topic that at first glance appears to oppose common opinion, but that will eventually be proven true. To consider Che la Corte è vera scuola as no more than an acknowledgement of courtly subjugation is to limit one’s interpretation of the text
to a primary and simple level of reading. Mascardi’s public would have been familiar enough with the classical paradoxical tradition to be able to reach a second, more complex level of reading: that is to say, contemporary readers would have been quick to identify the text as a philosophical paradox based on the model of Cicero’s *Paradoxa Stoicorum*. In this regard, it is important to remember that stating, as in a Stoic paradox, that the hardships of court life paradoxically strengthen the courtiers’ virtue does not mean denying the text the function of presenting criticism of contemporary court life. Rosalie Colie has investigated the flourishing of paradoxes that characterized early modern Europe — a vogue which, in her opinion, reached epidemic proportions. In her study, Colie has highlighted the aspects of social criticism present in many paradoxical writings, pointing out, for example, how Cicero’s use of Stoic moral theses is actually an indirect way to criticize his society for its loss of values. Mascardi’s courtly paradox is equally critical as it denounces, by paradoxically praising the courts as ways of fortifying virtue to the point of turning courtiers into heroes and saints, the manifold evils of court life. Mascardi’s heroic and saintly courtiers are praised because they are able to dismiss ‘la perversità degli humani giudizi’, and to turn a blind eye to ‘la debolezza di chi sciocamente dishonora gli honori’ (pp. 103–04). The courtiers’ virtue ultimately consists in tolerating capricious and cruel princes with a smile. The examples of the courtiers’ fortitude and heroism, while being presented as a commendation of the courtiers’ moral strength, ultimately paint a bleak picture of court life that recalls the popular early modern genre of anti-court satires.

The presence of such elements of critique of the court suggests a possible third level of reading. The most perceptive among Mascardi’s listeners might have regarded the text as using the form of the Stoic paradox to cast an ironic look at courts and courtiers. Mascardi’s arguments in favour of the moral teachings of court life do not, as a matter of fact, sound completely convincing. This is particularly true in relation to the image of courtiers as models of fortitude and ethics. The concept that courtiers, usually deemed ‘pazzi, e scelerati’ (p. 91), should be recognized as the bearers of a virtue superior to that of Quintus Martius or Paulus Aemilius, whose ‘costanza’ ultimately ‘resta indebolita dalla fortezza d’un cortigiano’ (p. 109), as the true imitators of the Apostles (p. 106), or as a modern version of Hercules fighting injustice using patience as his club (pp. 105, 94), may simply appear too good to be true. Mascardi’s oration, therefore, might also be interpreted as a text that professes to absolve courts and courtiers of their notorious reputation, while in actuality also providing a sarcastic depiction of the vices of contemporary court life, hidden under the veil of a paradoxical form of praise. Although Mascardi was enjoying a moment of upward mobility and success at the time when the oration was delivered, he had surely not forgotten the disappointments of his previous experience as a courtier at the service of Cardinal Alessandro d’Este. It would be no surprise, therefore, if some of that disillusion were still pervading his perspective on court life, informing the subtle criticism of his courtly paradox.

In its complexity and ambiguity, Mascardi’s *Che la Corte è vera scuola* also seems to possess many of the characteristics that Anne Larsen has attributed to the ‘parent genre’ of the paradox, the *declamatio*. The *declamatio* was, like the paradox, a popular early modern exercise in *serio ludere*, usually structured in the
form of a speech. According to Larsen, the declamatio also ‘challenges popular opinion’; however, it does so ‘without revealing the author’s personal stance’. Larsen quotes Jean Lafond’s definition of the declamatio in order to explain the cloaked personal position taken by the author:

Paradox is a simpler genre than the declamatio. Since paradox is merely the reversal of opinion, of the doxa, the reader knows that the author seeks only, by his virtuosity, to overcome the difficulty of the initial enterprise imposed upon him ... In declamation, the reader cannot determine the author’s adherence, or non-adherence, to the thesis that he advances or to the arguments that he promotes.

The declamatio becomes, in Larsen’s opinion, a way for the author to ‘experiment with a daring line of reasoning whose consequences he doesn’t really have to assume’, allowing one to bring up delicate topics, to step safely into potentially dangerous territory, while still protecting oneself from criticism. However familiar with and even enthusiastic about the use of ironic and unorthodox themes Mascardi’s audience at the Umoristi may have been, such an audience was still largely composed of princes, powerful individuals, and potential patrons. It was an audience, that is to say, that may not have reacted well to a blunt rant on the present state of courts and courtiers. The protective stratagem provided by the genre would have granted Mascardi an opportunity to denounce the wrongdoings of princes and the corruption of the court without excessively exposing himself.

Yet Larsen also highlights that in the declamatio the paradoxical position can in some cases become ‘a serious, “true” one’. To explain this point, Larsen quotes Linda Woodbridge’s analysis of Cornelius Agrippa’s declamation De nobilitate et praecellentia sexus foeminei, underlining how Woodbridge sees the presence of a volta in the text, a point where the author takes a precise stand. What makes Che la Corte è vera scuola particularly interesting is that it represents Mascardi’s first attempt to try out some of his notions of the relationship between the intellectual and the court that he will further elaborate in his later writings on courts, while also being a testimony to the energetic cultural panorama of Rome in the early years of Urban VIII’s papacy. The point that makes the text stand out is represented precisely by its volta: the depiction of intellectuals at court as domesticated lions. Mascardi had already employed a very similar metaphor, picturing court literati as tame lions and elephants, in Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi. In this text, written after his split with Cardinal d’Este, in the moment of Mascardi’s bitterest disappointment with the world of the court, the image is used solely to denounce the unhappy state of intellectuals in contemporary courts, and to blame the princes who ‘ tengono avvinti i letterati alla lor servitù, per acquistarne fama di protettori delle lettere’, while ‘ nel resto, poco, o di lor nulla si vagliono’. The use of the metaphor of tamed animals in Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi is part of the general anti-court theme of the text, which also results in complaints over courtly subjugation and in a denunciation of the arbitrariness of princely favour. The memory of Mascardi’s recent rupture with the Este court prompts a resentful tone and a pessimistic attitude towards the possibility for the court intellectual to hold an active role at the side of his prince.
In contrast to what is stated in *Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi*, in *Che la Corte è vera scuola*, while comparing the courtiers to the lions domesticated by the Carthagenian Hanno, Mascardi urges the princes to consider

se sia lor grandezza dicevole l’avvilir gli huomini d’alti pensieri per nascita, o per virtù riguardevoli; perché senza partirsi dalla simiglianza del leone domato, i Cartaginesi punirono Annone con giustissimo esiglio, perché lo stimarono, da questo fatto, persona di tirannico genio, e fra le pompe del Campidoglio si videro sotto il giogo de’ carri trionfali i leoni, l’infamia di coloro, ch’il regio animale a tal bassezza condussero è senza dubbio bastevole a far detestabile l’esempio. (p. 112)

In addition to this admonishment, modern princes are also reminded of that notorious boy-tyrant Heliogabalus, well known for perpetuating such a brutish tradition.

**THE EVOLUTION OF MASCARDI’S WRITINGS ON THE COURT**

*Che la Corte è vera scuola* is Mascardi’s last venture into paradoxical territory as a way to address the condition of the intellectual at court. Mascardi’s later writings on courts and courtiers openly state the notion of a court intellectual who can uphold an active role in social and political life. Such a notion, moreover, is presented as being realizable only in virtue of the existence of a precise supporting structure: the *accademia*. The institution of the Accademia dei Desiosi, a court academy sponsored by a young and energetic patron, also gave Mascardi the opportunity to explore such ideas further. The two orations on the court that Mascardi presented to the Desiosi, *Che gli esercitii di lettere* and *Della giudiciosa congiuntione*, underline the importance of the academy, and, more specifically, of the literary education that the academic gatherings provide, for the courtly milieu and for society at large. Mascardi’s later writings on courts go as far as representing the academy as the only possible hope for a reform of the court: a congregation of sages which alone can provide the fruitful union of power and knowledge, and that will eventually become the sole antidote to tyranny.

*Che gli esercitii di lettere*, delivered in 1624 at the first meeting of the Desiosi, intends to defend the value of a literary education for both the prince and his courtiers. According to Mascardi, it is crucial that princes, who receive their power from God, are able to put such power to a good use, ‘accioché la forza non degeneri in violenza, e ’l principato non si tramuti in tirannide’. A prince without letters can be compared to the Cyclops blinded by Ulysses, whose brute force was not tempered by wit and knowledge. Only ‘la dottrina, che somministra all’animo il lume’, can guide the actions of the powerful. The dangers of an uneducated ruler are further explained by highlighting that

...
The courtier as well is in need of literary education, although for different reasons related to his different social status. Intriguingly, the *esercitii di lettere* are here presented as a useful tool for the courtier in learning and mastering the art of courtliness. Mascardi is very careful in pointing out that such education will by no means represent a threat to the social hierarchy of the court. In this sense, Mascardi seems to have well assimilated the advice for prudent dissimulation of talent in order to avoid arousing the envy of one’s fellow courtiers, or even of one’s prince, that is a common feature of late sixteenth-century writings on courts. As Mascardi underlines, ‘è osservazione sottilissima di Corte, l’adoprar negli affari più grandi ogni sforzo d’ingegno, e con industria, ma con tal dissimulazione della propria virtù, che non si conosca il valore in altro, che negli effetti’. Education will thus be of great help to the courtier: ‘la dottrina insegnà al Cortigiano il modo di nasconder quei meriti, che possono recargli danno.’ As in *Che la Corte è vera scuola*, Mascardi underlines that flexibility, or the ability to accommodate oneself to different people and situations, is essential for a courtier, and it is precisely from the study of literature and of philosophy that the courtier can acquire such an indispensable quality.

Statements such as the ones regarding the need for flexibility and dissimulation may justify a reading of *Che gli esercitii di lettere* as proof of the resignation of seventeenth-century courtiers, of their willing submission to the structures of power. However, the last pages of the oration introduce a surprising change in tone. Significantly, such change happens when Mascardi confronts the topic of the interaction between the academy and the court. Interestingly, Mascardi declares that the academy is nothing less than ‘un’ordinanza di persone intendenti, che di tempo in tempo, in guisa di ben ordinata Repubblica, adivisar di materie importanti s’assembri’. Mascardi’s Genoese background and his experience in service to the Republic may have played a role in constructing the idea of the academy as a republic of sages. What is particularly intriguing in this picture is that the court academies, where, according to Mascardi, ‘il men valevole’ is ‘accompagnato al più valoroso nel mestier delle lettere’, become the only place in which to produce ‘il corpo d’una famiglia virtuosa, e perfetta’, since ‘in ogni ben regolato governo vivono i savi, che promulgan le leggi, ed i sudditi nati per ubidire’. The defence of the *esercitii di lettere*, therefore, also eventually becomes a defence of the academy as a corrective for the evils of the court.

Mascardi will further investigate similar issues in *Della giudiciosa congiuntione*, presented (according to his biographer Filippo Luigi Mannucci) at the opening of the second cycle of the meetings of the Desiosi in 1625. Mascardi states that the oration represents an attempt to disabuse those who deem it unsuitable to introduce ‘trattenimenti di lettere’ in the courts of such a perspective. Eraldo Bellini has described Mascardi’s works of the early 1620s as characterized by the tendency to depict the academy and the court as two diametrically opposite poles. By contrast, *Della giudiciosa congiuntione* questions such antithesis right from its title. Mascardi justifies the merging of different realities such as the court and the academy by pointing out the beneficial influence of the latter on the former. The court is once more depicted according to the anti-court *topoi* already present in *Che la Corte è vera scuola* — as a ‘campo di fatiche e di stenti’, a ‘publico hospedal delle speranze’, a place where men are deprived by Zeus of half their brains upon entering it, and wherein moral depravation spreads like a
contagious disease.\textsuperscript{64} However, Mascal\-di highlights that the academic ‘discorsi di lettere’ can become the ‘medicina dell’animo’ that, alone, has the power to cure such courtly corruption.\textsuperscript{65}

Mascal\-di also describes what he believes to be the real nature and the true goals of courtiers. Courtiers, Mascal\-di explains, are driven by a constant search for pleasure, which allows them to put up with their life of daily hardships at court. Ambition, riches, and power are just ‘gloriosi vocaboli’ employed by courtiers to cover their actual aims. In reality, a courtier ‘altra fiera non caccia, che il diletto’.\textsuperscript{66} Nothing, therefore, can be more appropriate than the conjunction of the academy and the court, since it is precisely ‘a piaceri […] de’ Cortigiani’ that ‘in Corte s’aprono le Accademie’.\textsuperscript{67} Mascal\-di’s definition of the academy as a place devoted to the pursuit of pleasure could support an understanding of academic gatherings as merely trivial. Such an interpretation, moreover, would be consistent with the widespread tendency among scholars of early modern Italy to consider the academies as a mere curiosity, and to look at their role in the society of the time as merely a futile pastime for the educated elite.\textsuperscript{68} Contrary to that view, Mascal\-di points out that the pleasure that courtiers can experience within the academies is the only pure and honest one, in that it consists in the search for truth. Pleasure, according to Mascal\-di, grows stronger as it nears perfection. Since the search for truth is the only way through which we can reach perfection, it will lead us to genuine pleasure as well:

Onde perché quell’operation è più dilettosa, che è più perfetta, ed è più perfetta quella, che da migliore, e meglio disposta Potenza nascendo, intorno a miglior oggetto s’aggira, perciò si conchiude, che le operationi dell’intelletto ricercante la verità nelle Scienze, o contemplatrici, o attive, saranno come le più perfette, e così anche le più dilettose.\textsuperscript{69}

The pleasure that courtiers incessantly seek becomes one with intellectual investigation, thus placing letters and sciences, and the intellectual with them, at the centre of academic life. In the academy, Mascal\-di seems to imply, the intellectuals have a leading role, and, thanks to the allegiance of the academy and the court, they may eventually be able to extend their influence to the courtly milieu as well. The academy becomes the place where the letterati are no longer exhibited like exotic animals in a triumphal procession; instead, they can attempt to exert their influence over those holding power, and strive to operate for the well-being of society. Mascal\-di thus transforms the project of the courtier-counsellor who acts as an advisor to his prince, imagined by Baldassare Castiglione in his \textit{Libro del cortegiano}, into a collective enterprise made possible by the existence of the academic gatherings.\textsuperscript{70}

The difference in tone between the ambiguous statements of \textit{Che la Corte è vera scuola} and the more straightforward, almost programmatic-sounding orations for the Accademia dei Dei\-siosi becomes especially interesting when one considers that \textit{Che la Corte è vera scuola} and \textit{Che gli esercitii di lettere} were most likely written and delivered only a few months apart. According to Merolla, the absence of \textit{Che gli esercitii di lettere} from Mascal\-di’s 1624 \textit{Orationi e discorsi}, and its presence in the 1625 edition of the \textit{Prose Vulgari} reveals that the work must have been composed in late 1624 or early 1625 — that is to say, less than one year after the
carnival week of 1624 when *Che la Corte è vera scuola* was delivered.\(^7\) It is therefore compelling to question why Mascardi would have composed, in a relatively short timespan, a forthright text such as *Che gli esercitii di lettere*, and a work so complex and equivocal it can easily be mistaken for passive acceptance of the subjugation of the intellectual at court. One reason for such a disparity can be found in the different settings wherein the orations were delivered. The Accademia dei Desiosi was a very particular space, hosted by an enlightened young prince within the walls of his private residence. According to Debora Vagnoni, the Accademia dei Desiosi and its patron, Cardinal Maurizio di Savoia, although supervised by Urban VIII (whose cultural politics they were supporting), were also trying to construct an area of autonomy from papal power.\(^7\) When Mascardi’s inaugural lecture *Che gli esercitii di lettere* opened the path to an animated debate on the role of the intellectual at court, such a debate found an excellent setting in the cultural atmosphere of the Desiosi.\(^7\) The presence of a young and ambitious patron, the dynamic environment created by the Accademia dei Desiosi, and the moment of personal success after many tribulations that Mascardi was enjoying in the early 1620s may have led him to experiment with a more ambitious notion of the role of the intellectual at court.

**CONCLUSION**

The Accademia dei Desiosi was, however, destined to be short-lived. When in 1627 Cardinal Maurizio di Savoia suddenly left Rome to avoid paying his debts, the academy was forced to close.\(^7\) A short history like that of the Desiosi was not uncommon among Roman academies of the time. As Biagioli has pointed out, the academic and courtly scene of the early seventeenth century was a sort of volcanic archipelago, constantly subjected to sudden changes. In a similar scenario, ambiguity and flexibility were more essential than ever.\(^7\) By being open to different, contrasting interpretations, *Che la Corte è vera scuola* was giving a practical example of the flexibility that it was, paradoxically, at the same time praising as the quintessential strategy for success at court and condemning as a necessary by-product of the hardships of contemporary court life.

The ambiguity and flexibility of Mascardi’s oration not only conformed to the cultural atmosphere of the times, but seem also to have suited Mascardi’s professional persona. After the prosperity of the early 1620s, Mascardi’s fortunes shifted again with Cardinal Maurizio’s departure and the closure of his academy. Nevertheless, Mascardi was shortly thereafter able to secure a job as professor of rhetoric at the local university, and to find employment under Cardinal Carlo de’ Medici. In these difficult years, Mascardi was criticized for the inconsistency of his allegiances. Mannucci quotes testimony according to which Mascardi’s efforts to advance his career resulted in his scandalizing the court, ‘che non lo vorrebbe così volubile, non sapendosi oramai, con tante mutazioni di servitù, se sia pesce o carne, e quali siano le sue vere dipendenze’.\(^7\) What prompted such criticism was Mascardi’s attempt to keep his position in the service of Cardinal Carlo de’ Medici while also reassuming his role as secretary to Maurizio, who was about to return to Rome.\(^7\) Interestingly, Mascardi’s plan was eventually successful. He rejoined Cardinal Maurizio as his secretary in 1637, and was later allowed to work for both patrons in different capacities. From this moment on, his career enjoyed an
upward spiral. At the time of his death, in 1640, Mascardi’s literary fame and influence in the social and cultural circles of Rome were at their apogee.

Such flexibility in professional allegiances was a feature that Mascardi had demonstrated since the earliest stages of his career, while serving his native Republic of Genoa, a position that he considered ‘una servitù temporaria’, to the point of stating, when declaring himself ready to go back to the Este court at anytime, ‘io poi sono e non sono al servigio della Repubblica. Ho trattenimento il quale posso lasciare senza commettere mancamento, e lo lascerò, se da altra parte verrà corrisposto al mio devotissimo affetto.’ 78 Mascardi’s double appointment can be interpreted as a way to assert his role as a professional of court service who was not indissolubly linked to any specific patron, or even to one single patron at a time.

The energetic climate of Rome in the early seventeenth century, and the opportunity for cultural exchange provided by the academies, allowed letterati like Mascardi to carve out some spaces for autonomy within the court system, to foster their active participation in the social and political life of the time, and even to explore the possibility of a reform of the court thanks to the beneficial influence of the academic environment. More than resigned subjection to the political system, reflections on court life such as Mascardi’s show the struggle of early modern intellectuals to use academic gatherings as a way to define, and often to defend, an active role for themselves amidst the increasing pressures of absolutism.

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NOTES

1 Examples of praise and idealization of the court are traceable through the prologues of Matteo Bandello’s Novelle. Very eloquent representatives of negative depictions of the court include Pietro Aretino’s Ragionamento delle corti and Ludovico Ariosto’s Satire (see in particular Satire I and Satire III). See Matteo Bandello, Novelle, ed. by Francesco Flora (Milan: Mondadori, 1966); Pietro Aretino, Ragionamento delle corti, ed. by Fulvio Pevere (Milan: Mursia, 1995); Ludovico Ariosto, Satire, ed. by Guido Davico Bonino (Milan: BUR, 1990).

2 Matteo Peregini, Difesa del savio in corte, ed. by Gian Luigi Betti and Sandra Saccone (Rome: Argo, 2009).

3 Agostino Mascardi, Prose Vulgari di Monsignor Agostino Mascardi, Cameriere d’Honore di N. Sig. Urbano VIII (in Venetia: per Bartolomeo Fontana, 1625); Saggi Accademici dati in Roma nell’Accademia del Serenissimo Principe Cardinal di Savoia, da diversi nobilissimi ingegni. Raccolti e pubblicati da Monsignor Agostino Mascardi, Cameriere d’Honore di N. S. Urbano VIII (in Venetia: per Bartolomeo Fontana, 1630); Discorsi Accademici di Monsignor Agostino Mascardi (in Genova: per Gio. Battista Franchelli, 1705).

4 The oration was first published in the first edition of the Prose Vulgari di Monsignor Agostino Mascardi, Cameriere d’Honore di N. Sig. Urbano VIII (in Venetia: per Bartolomeo Fontana, 1625). All references are to the 1626 edition of the oration, in Prose Vulgari di Monsignor Agostino Mascardi,
Cameriere d’Honore di N. Sig. Urbano VIII (in Venetia: per Bartolomeo Fontana, 1626), pp. 86–116, and are given after quotations in the text.

5 Mascardi addresses the topic of the court in *Che la Corte è vera scuola non solamente della prudenza, ma delle virtù morali*, delivered at the Accademia degli Umoristi in 1624, included in the *Prose Vulgari*; *Che gli esercitii di lettere sono in Corte non pur dicevole, ma necessari*, delivered at the Accademia dei Desiosi in 1624, included in the *Prose Vulgari*; *in Della giudiciosa congiuntione dell’Accademia, e della Corte*, said to have been delivered at the Accademia dei Desiosi in 1625, included in the *Discorsi Accademici*; *Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi, perché veggia piú favorito in corte l’ignorante, che’l dotto, il plebeo, che’l Nobile*, an extract from the essay *Il genio di Socrate* written in Genoa in the early 1620s, included in the *Prose Vulgari*; *Della Speranza della Corte*, another extract from the essay *Il genio di Socrate*, included in the *Discorsi Accademici*. On *Il genio di Socrate*, see Francesco Luigi Mannucci, *La vita e le opere di Agostino Mascardi* (Genoa: Atti della societá ligure di storia patria, 1908), p. 615. Mascardi also briefly mentions issues related to court life in *La lettione sopra un testo del quinto libro della Politica d’Aristotele*, included in the 1625 edition of the *Prose Vulgari*. On the contrast between the values of the academy and the life of the court in the *Lettione*, see Eraldo Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei: letteratura e scienza a Roma nell’età di Galileo* (Padua: Antenore, 1997) pp. 174–78.

6 On the Umoristi, see Michele Maylender, *Storia delle Accademie d’Italia*, 5 vols (Bologna: Cappelli, 1926–30), V, pp. 370–81; Piera Russo, *L’Accademia degli Umoristi: Fondazione, strutture e leggi: il primo decennio di attività*, *Esperienze letterarie*, 4:4 (1979), 47–71; Laura Alemanno, ‘L’Accademia degli Umoristi’, *Roma moderna e contemporanea*, 3 (1993), 97–120.

7 Alemanno, ‘L’Accademia degli Umoristi’, pp. 103–04.

8 In *Prose Vulgari* (1626), pp. 1–35.

9 In *Discorsi Accademici* (1630), pp. 13–52.

10 Mannucci, *La vita e le opere di Agostino Mascardi*, pp. 140–41; Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei*, p. 195; Riccardo Merolla, *L’accademia dei Desiosi: storia e testo* (Rome: Carocci, 2008), pp. 27–28.

11 For a complete biography of Mascardi, see Mannucci; Eraldo Bellini, ‘Agostino Mascardi’, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* < http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/agostino-mascardi_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29 > [accessed 16 January 2013]; Maria Luisa Doglio, ‘Mascardi, Agostino’, in *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Vittore Branca, 3 vols (Turin: UTET, 1973), II, pp. 547–49; and Barbara Zandrino, ‘Agostino Mascardi’, in *La letteratura ligure: La Repubblica aristocratica* (1528–1797), ed. by Fulvio Bianchi et al, 2 vols (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1992), I, pp. 333–50.

12 Mannucci, pp. 67–68.

13 Mannucci, p. 69; Zandrino, p. 333.

14 Aretino, p. 114.

15 The comparison would be even more significant if Mascardi, as some biographers maintain, had voluntarily left the Society of Jesus in order to acquire more freedom. On this hypothesis, see Mannucci, pp. 67–68.

16 Mannucci, pp. 99–130; Zandrino, p. 334.

17 On intellectual life in Rome during Urban VIII’s papacy, see Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei*, pp. 172–73; and Mario Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 245–48, 259–62.

18 Biagioli, pp. 261–62.

19 Lucan, *Pharsalia*, VIII, 493–94.

20 Mascardi is here directly quoting Seneca’s *De providentia*, II, 2.

21 Alemanno, ‘L’ Accademia degli Umoristi; p. 114.
22 Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei*, p. 185.
23 Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei*, p. 184.
24 Riccardo Merolla, ‘Dal “Cortegiano” al “Servidore”: Modelli primo-secenteschi di trattatistica sul comportamento’, *Esperienze letterarie*, 19 (1994), 3–36 (p. 11).
25 Merolla, ‘Dal “Cortegiano” al “Servidore”’, p. 27.
26 Merolla, ‘Dal “Cortegiano” al “Servidore”’, p. 27.
27 Merolla, ‘Dal “Cortegiano” al “Servidore”’, p. 17.
28 *Avvisi di Roma*, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Urb. Lat. 1094, 8 febbraio 1624. Quoted in Filippo Clementi, *Il carnevale romano nelle cronache contemporanee* (Rome: Tipografia Tiberina di F. Setti, 1899), p. 369.
29 Mascardi used a similar strategy while chairing the Accademia dei Desiosi, scheduling a risky speech in support of Galileo during carnival week. On this point, see Merolla, *L’accademia dei Desiosi*, p. 34.
30 The second oration has been interpreted as a ‘mascherata della verità’ that, through the use of irony, allowed the author to simultaneously affirm and deny both a truth and its opposite. On this point, see Florinda Nardi, ‘“Letture” in Accademia: esempi cinque-secenteschi’, *Sesquicentennale Studi e Testi italiani*, 9 (2002), 105–22 (p. 120).
31 Clementi, p. 369.
32 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (Milan: Società editrice Dante Alighieri, 1962), p. 4.
33 Mascardi seems to have been one of the main promoters of Stoic theses in seventeenth-century Rome. On this point, see Ezio Raimondi, *Anatomie secentesche* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1966), p. 37.
34 Agostino Mascardi, *Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi*, perché veggia più favorito in corte l’ignorante, che’l dotto, il plebeo, che’l Nobile, in Prose Vulgari (1626), pp. 36–85 (p. 36).
35 Mascardi, *Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi*, pp. 37–38.
36 Mascardi, *Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi*, pp. 56.
37 Giuseppe Bruno, ‘Introduzione’, in Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, pp. 7–19 (p. 14).
38 Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1976). On early modern paradoxes, see also Anne R. Larsen, ‘Paradox and the Praise of Women: From Ortensio Lando and Charles Estienne to Marie de Romieu’, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 28 (1997), 759–74; Marc Van der Poel, ‘The Latin *Declamatio* in Renaissance Humanism’, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 20 (1989), 471–78; Antonio Corsaro, ‘Introduzione’, in Ortensio Lando, *Paradossi, cioè sentenze fuori del comun parere*, ed. by Antonio Corsaro (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2000), pp. 1–25; Patrizia Grimaldi Pizzorno, *The Ways of Paradox from Lando to Donne* (Florence: Olschki, 2007); Peter G. Platt, *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
39 Colie, pp. 11–12.
40 Larsen, p. 764.
41 Larsen, p. 764.
42 Larsen, p. 764.
43 Larsen, p. 764.
44 Alemanno, ‘L’Accademia degli Umoristi’, p. 111.
45 Larsen, p. 764.
46 Mascardi, *Che un Cortigiano non dee dolersi*, p. 46.
47 On Maurizio di Savoia and the Desiosi, see the essays collected in Merolla, *L’accademia dei Desiosi*, and Michela Di Macco, “L’ornamento del principe”: Cultura figurativa di Maurizio di Savoia’, in *Le collezioni di Carlo Emanuele I di Savoia*, ed. by G. Romano (Turin: Editris, 1995), pp. 349–74.
48 For a detailed analysis of both texts, and of the relationship between the academy and the court proposed by Mascardi, see Eraldo Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei*, pp. 169–243; and Merolla, *L’accademia dei Desiosi*, pp. 38–40.
49 Eraldo Bellini, *Agostino Mascardi tra ‘ars poetica’ e ‘ars historica’* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 2002), p. 15.

50 Mascardi, *Che gli esercitii di lettere*, p. 7.

51 Mascardi, *Che gli esercitii di lettere*, p. 7.

52 Mascardi, *Che gli esercitii di lettere*, p. 8.

53 The most eloquent examples of such an attitude are Torquato Tasso’s dialogue on the court, *Malpiglio overo de la corte* (1585), and Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio’s *Discorso intorno a quello che si conviene a giovane e nobile e ben creato nel servire un gran principe* (1569).

54 Mascardi, *Che gli esercitii di lettere*, p. 13.

55 Mascardi, *Che gli esercitii di lettere*, p. 14.

56 Mascardi, *Che gli esercitii di lettere*, p. 26.

57 Mascardi, *Che gli esercitii di lettere*, p. 29.

58 Mannucci, pp. 140–41; Merolla, *L'accademia dei Desiosi*, pp. 27–28.

59 Agostino Mascardi, *Della giudiciosa congiuntione dell'Accademia, e della Corte*, in *Discorsi Accademici*, pp. 13–52 (p. 16).

60 Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei*, pp. 174–78.

61 On this evolution in Mascardi’s works, see also Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei*, p. 186.

62 Mascardi, *Della giudiciosa congiuntione*, p. 17.

63 The sentence ‘publico hospedal delle speranze’ is here attributed to an unnamed ‘faceto Cortigiano’. The quotation is taken from a *capitolo* by Cesare Caporali entitled *La corte*, published in *Rime piancevoli di Cesare Caporali, del Mauro, et d’altri Autori* (in Ferrara: per Benedetto Marello, 1590), p. 295. The definition of the court as the ‘spedal delle speranze’ originates from Pietro Aretino’s *Ragionamento delle corti*, p. 50.

64 Mascardi, *Della giudiciosa congiuntione*, pp. 21–22.

65 Mascardi, *Della giudiciosa congiuntione*, p. 23.

66 Mascardi, *Della giudiciosa congiuntione*, p. 26.

67 Mascardi, *Della giudiciosa congiuntione*, p. 28.

68 On the risks of such a dismissive view of the academies, see Amedeo Quondam, ‘L’Accademia’, in *Il letterato e le istituzioni*, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa, *Letteratura italiana*, 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), 823–89 (p. 840).

69 Mascardi, *Della giudiciosa congiuntione*, p. 40.

70 On the relationship of Mascardi’s writings, as well as of other contemporary texts, with the Cortegiano, see Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei*, pp. 188–94.

71 Merolla, *L'accademia dei Desiosi*, p. 27.

72 Debora Vagnoni, ‘Motivi iconologici e immagini simboliche nel Diario dell’Accademia dei Desiosi di Maurizio di Savoia’, in Merolla, *L'accademia dei Desiosi*, pp. 130–51 (p. 134).

73 On the debate at the *Desiosi*, later collected by Mascardi in the *Saggi Accademici*, see Bellini, *Umanisti e lincei*, pp. 195–97; Merolla, *L'accademia dei Desiosi*, pp. 24–43; and Laura Alemanno, ‘La politica culturale di Maurizio di Savoia’, in Merolla, *L'accademia dei Desiosi*, pp. 118–29.

74 Merolla has hypothesized that, in the best-case scenario, the academy may have been able to survive only as an organization consisting of sporadic meetings during Cardinal Maurizio’s visits to Rome.

75 Biagioli, p. 261.

76 Mannucci, p. 192.

77 Mannucci, pp. 192–94.

78 Quoted in Bellini, *Agostino Mascardi tra ‘ars poetica’ e ‘ars historica’*, p. 10.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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