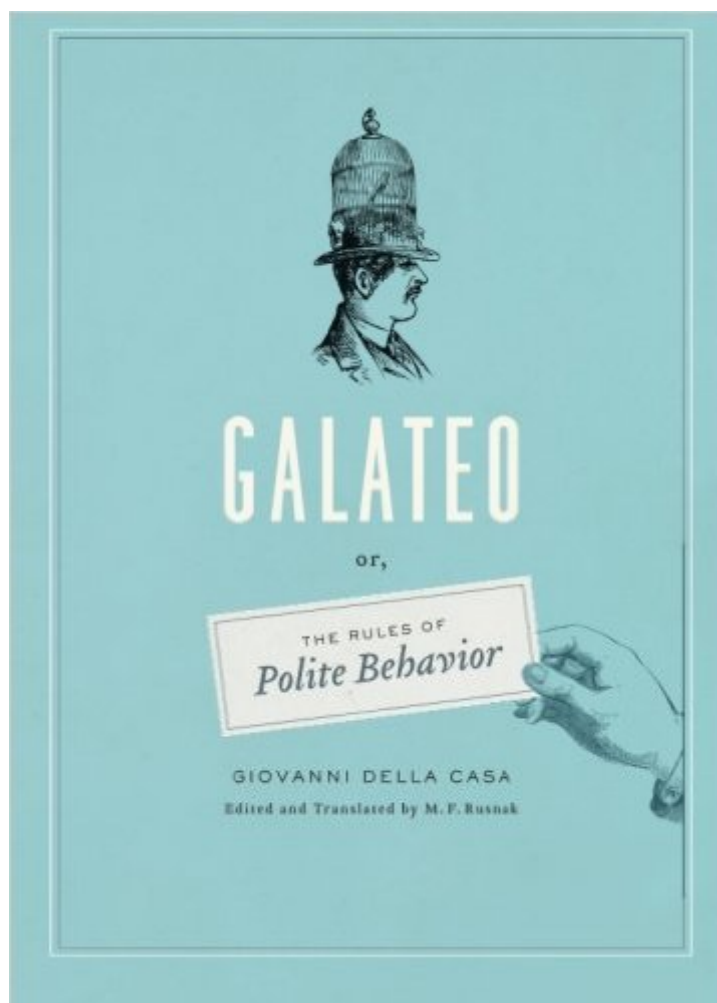


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Galateo: Or, The Rules Of Polite Behavior



Synopsis

“Since it is the case that you are now just beginning that journey that I have for the most part as you see completed, that is, the one through mortal life, and loving you so very much as I do, I have proposed to myself “as one who has been many places” to show you those places in life where, walking through them, I fear you could easily either fall or take the wrong direction.” So begins *Galateo*, a treatise on polite behavior written by Giovanni Della Casa (1503–56) for the benefit of his nephew, a young Florentine destined for greatness. In the voice of a cranky yet genial old uncle, Della Casa offers the distillation of what he has learned over a lifetime of public service as diplomat and papal nuncio. As relevant today as it was in Renaissance Italy, *Galateo* deals with subjects as varied as dress codes, charming conversation and off-color jokes, eating habits and hairstyles, and literary language. In its time, *Galateo* circulated as widely as Machiavelli’s *Prince* and Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*. Mirroring what Machiavelli did for promoting political behavior, and what Castiglione did for behavior at court, Della Casa here creates a picture of the refined man caught in a world in which embarrassment and vulgarity prevail. Less a treatise promoting courtly values or a manual of *savoir faire*, it is rather a meditation on conformity and the law, on perfection and rules, but also an exasperated “often theatrical” reaction to the diverse ways in which people make fools of themselves in everyday social situations. With renewed interest in etiquette and polite behavior growing both inside and outside the academy, the time is right for a new, definitive edition of this book. More than a mere etiquette book, this restored edition will be entertaining (and even useful) for anyone making their way in modern civilized and polite society, and a subtle gift for the rude neighbor, the thoughtless dinner guest, or the friend or relative in need of a refresher on proper behavior.

Book Information

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; Reprint edition (October 8, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022621219X

ISBN-13: 978-0226212197

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.5 x 7 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars See all reviews (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #751,086 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #44 in Books > Literature &

Fiction > World Literature > European > Italian #70 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Ancient & Medieval Literature > Medieval #492 inÂ Books > Reference > Etiquette > Etiquette Guides & Advice

Customer Reviews

This book is really timeless. Though written in Renaissance Italy, in Rusnak's translation it's just as fresh and pertinent to daily living as an advice column in a magazine or on the Web. The real title should be "How to Avoid Making a Fool of Yourself in Society," with plenty of examples. It has the wisdom and frankness of Dear Abby with the punch of a talk-radio host. Evidently people haven't changed much in 500 years. Read and enjoy. One word of advice: there's not a lot of structure. Don't feel that you need to read it from beginning to end. Begin anywhere: the book is a great sendup of social bores, bores, and blunderers.

A kind of guidebook to manners, *Galateo* is a delightful read. As a previous reviewer suggested, dip into it anywhere--it needn't be read in sequential order. It is not a novel, though it reads with the ease of one. Rusnak is a smooth and fluent translator. And his introduction is written with a scholar's care, and helpfully provides Renaissance context to *Galateo*'s savory advices. The price is right, too, for a university press book presented in such a fine format.

I've just completed my second reading of M. F. Rusnak's excellent translation of *Galateo*, and each time I've enjoyed the subtleties of Giovanni Della Casa's "rules" for behaving politely under social conditions rife with all kinds of subterfuge harmless and otherwise. Giovanni's repeated call for self restraint and introspection in pursuit of good conduct is shadowed by warning against too strict conformity, proof that we are witnessing a persona in conflict beneath a placid stream of good-will advice. Della Casa is shrewd indeed, for while hypocrisy in matters of etiquette is merely a social nuisance, it has serious implications within the context of psychology. The satirical mirror in which we see ourselves makes us laugh and wince at the same time. This is a challenging and instructive book on several levels of concern, including the historical, and I look forward to reading it again.

Historically speaking it is a great read. Guess the feeling when you touch the first ever manual on polite behaviour and good manners. I truly recommend it to all those in need of a pigmalion touch in their lives.

We would all do well to heed the advice in Galateo --"Every action of ours, instead, must suggest reverence and respect toward the company we keep," as we make our way through the 21st century. This delicious little book resonates with good sense, attention to the subtleties of social life, and kindness of expression. M. F. Rusnak's translation enhances Giovanni Della Casa's voice without intrusiveness while retaining the delightful aspects of the work. It is a pleasure to read this book, which transcends time and place. Don't miss the impressive scholarship of M. F. Rusnak's introduction.

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