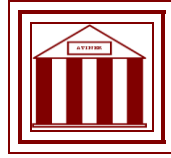


**Athens Institute for Education and Research  
ATINER**



**ATINER's Conference Paper Series  
LIT2015-1500**

**Verbal Politeness in Italian Twentieth  
Century. Books of Manners**

**Giovanna Alfonzetti  
Associate Professor  
Department of Human Sciences  
University of Catania  
Italy**

An Introduction to  
ATINER's Conference Paper Series

ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. This paper has been peer reviewed by at least two academic members of ATINER.

Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
Athens Institute for Education and Research

This paper should be cited as follows:

**Alfonzetti, Z. (2015). "Verbal Politeness in Italian Twentieth Century. Books of Manners", Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: LIT2015-1500.**

Athens Institute for Education and Research  
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece  
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209 Email: info@atiner.gr  
URL: [www.atiner.gr](http://www.atiner.gr)  
URL Conference Papers Series: [www.atiner.gr/papers.htm](http://www.atiner.gr/papers.htm)  
Printed in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research. All rights reserved. Reproduction is allowed for non-commercial purposes if the source is fully acknowledged.  
ISSN: **2241-2891**  
06/07/2015

**Verbal Politeness in Italian Twentieth Century.  
Books of Manners**

**Giovanna Alfonzetti**  
**Associate Professor**  
**Department of Human Sciences**  
**University of Catania**  
**Italy**

**Abstract**

The paper aims at analyzing the concept of politeness in some Italian books of manners (*galatei*) written in a stretch of time going from the period after the First World War up to the 1970s. The main aim is to show that *galatei* – wrongly neglected in pragmatic research – express a complex concept of politeness, which is not only of a normative type but includes also strategic and instrumental components. This implies that the *galatei* perspective on politeness encompasses a certain awareness that people abide by the social code of *good manners* for a multiplicity of reasons that vary in relation to the wider political, ideological and socio-cultural changes occurring in a given society

**Keywords:** Politeness, Books of Manners, Morality, Positive and Negative Face.

## Introduction

By showing the standards of customs and behaviours that society tries to impose on its members in each historical time, books of manners, *galatei* in Italian, work as a sort of kaleidoscope, reflecting on a small scale the complex functioning of the social cosmos. For this reason, books of manners have attracted much attention within Italian socio-historical research, which has shown the deep transformations that they have undergone in diachrony: moral treatises in the Italian post-unification time, etiquette books from the end of nineteenth century, social engineering instruments during the Fascist era, practical guides after the Second World War; counter-galatei during the 1970s, do-it-yourself handbooks and dictionaries of manners today (cf. Botteri 1999, Tasca 2004, Turnaturi 2011).

And yet, although books of manners deal by definition with polite behaviour, they have been ignored in recent pragmatic research on verbal politeness, mostly because considered to be expression of an inadequate idea of politeness, which exclusively corresponds with the social-norm view (Fraser 1990: 234) and/or with negative politeness within Brown and Levinson's face-saving-view (1987: 130-1).

My paper aims at demonstrating that this opinion is too reductive by showing:

- a) the greater complexity of the notion of politeness in books of manners;
- b) its considerable diachronic variability in relation with broad socio-cultural and ideological changes.

A wide corpus of Italian books of manners will be analyzed, covering a stretch of time that goes from the first postwar period to the counter-galatei written during the 1970s.

## Normative View of Politeness

According to Fraser (1990: 220-21) the normative view that is typical of manuals of etiquette identifies politeness with good manners and considers it to be associated «with speech style, whereby a higher degree of formality implies greater politeness». For this reason, according to Fraser, the social-norm approach has few adherents among current researchers.

Now, if it is true that books of manners, being prescriptive texts, cannot but adopt a normative perspective on politeness, it is also true that this perspective shows interesting similarities with the *discernment politeness view* elaborated by Eastern scholars, who are quite negative towards the strategic notion prevailing in Western research, in which they do not recognize themselves. They rather consider politeness as a form of behaviour based on *discernment* (Japanese *wakimae*), i.e. on the speaker's ability to identify the

expressions appropriate to the situation and to the relationship among participants (cf. Ide 1989). Consequently, maxims of politeness are always dependent on social conventions such as the following:

- (i) *Be polite with older people*
- (ii) *Be polite with higher status people*
- (iii) *Be polite in formal situations.*

A similar principle characterizes also *galateï* written after the First World War, in which the main ingredients of politeness are considered to be upbringing, grace, deference, compliance, etc. Thus, *be polite with older people*, either within or outside the family, is a rule to be found without fail in all *galateï* of those days and even later.

Fiorentina (1918: 20), for example, reminds Enrichetta, one among the many young girls she addresses in her book, that «the tender familiarity» one has with parents «must never be free of respect», and also that one has to be respectful towards the good old people who are a godsend for the house».

Pierazzi (1922: 72) tells young ladies to hold a discreet conversation during visits, particularly with men; to talk little; not to speak if they are not spoken to; not to ask questions but restrict themselves to answering somebody else's questions with pleasantness and brevity.

As to the duty of politeness towards people of higher status, all *galateï*, especially those of the post First World War time, regulate in detail the relationship between masters and servants. According to Pierazzi (1922: 216-17), for example, servants should not dare to address masters first or to interrupt their speech if not asked to do so; mistresses, on their part, should not allow themselves to confide in servants; furthermore, servants are not allowed to greet visitors verbally but only by bowing; coachmen, in particular, greet by raising vertically the whip, laying its handle on their knee; even governesses are obliged to observe serious and proper talk and to restrain from speaking and laughing too loud (25).

Books of manners written after the Second World War show a deeply changed reality: Piccini (1951: 536-7) recommends considering the «domestic help», «as our indispensable collaborator», deserving respect. She gives the «wise precept» of allowing them to take some initiative, in order that they will not have «the impression of being machines», but will be satisfied if they feel they are appreciated as intelligent and competent.

Ten years later, *Il saper vivere di Donna Letizia* [*Savoir vivre by Donna Letizia*] (1960: 139-40) deals with this topic in a slightly ironic key: «a displeased and morose housemaid can be disastrous both for ornaments and for the lady's nervous system». Anyway this *galateo* recommends a more asymmetrical relationship than Canino's: the lady should not be «supercilious but not even too familiar; she has to open her heart only with friends, otherwise she would not be entitled to be surprised if, during a party, the housemaid got involved in the general conversation. On her part, the «domestic help should address masters using the third person, i.e. asking the mistress: "Does madam

wish white coffee?”». This rule should be even extended to «masters’ children», except in case of «small children».

Consistently with her intention to write a *countergalateo* (cf. 3), the topic of domestic workers is just hinted at by Gasperini (1975). In the same ironic key of the whole book, she only recommends to the mistress not to ask her maidservant – if there is one – to wear, during a dinner party, «a starched cap and apron if she is not used to do so» and not to terrorize and confuse her with «flaming looks » or «sybilline gestures».

To illustrate rules prescribing politeness in formal situations, I will report part of a narrative insert taken from Fiorentina (1920). Here Corradino – one of the many young boys who populate her *galateo* – reviews together with his mother the behaviour he is expected to hold during a banquet of honour:

[Corradino] I’ll wish bon appetit only to those sitting next to me, instead of shouting it to everybody, as I usually do. [...]

[Mother] As concerns talking, you better refrain, if you are not spoken to: the less you talk, the less poppycock you’ll say. At most you may exchange some kind words with your neighbour. [...]

[Corradino] Don’t worry Mum [...] I’ll keep still like a stone [...] and dumb as a fish, even if my usual “why?” should tickle my lips; and I’ll bite my tongue not to ask for a second slice of cake, as I do with you who indulge me.

#### *Address Maxim*

Within *discernment politeness*, great importance is given to the *address maxim* (cf. Gu 1990), which prescribes to address one’s interlocutor by using the appropriate title. This principle is to be found also in the *galatei* under study here, but, even in this case, *il va sans dire*, with remarkable diachronic variation.

*Galatei* written after the First World War limit themselves to recommend the use of the right terms of address in conversation and in writing letters:

To ladies one can say *gentilissima* [very kind], *eminent*, *illustrious*, if she actually is; to gentlemen put *eminent* or *illustrious* before Sir, i.e.: *Illustrious Sir Professor*, *Eminent Sir Lawyer* (Fiorentina 1918: 169).

In the *galatei* written during the Fascist era, titles acquire more social relevance, also because this issue had assumed legal implications after Mussolini’s decree of 2 february 1929 (mentioned by Rocco Muzzati 1933: 433, who was a Fascist activist), which punished any abuse in their use by people not entitled to. Brelh dell’Asta (1931: 98-102), for example, although he almost ignores Fascism, nevertheless stresses the great relevance of honorific and professional titles, which existed also in ancient times and among primitive

people and are necessary to «spur human ambition to reach higher ideals and stronger efforts».

After the Second World War, the end of Fascism and of the monarchy, in Piccini's (1951) *galateo* the question of titles reduces dramatically its importance: a clear sign of the earthquake which had subverted Italy and of the spread of new models, beliefs and ideologies. Also in Donna Letizia (1960: 184) there are few short remarks on the use of titles in introductions, still showing strong asymmetries between genres: on introducing two couples, one *has to* mention the husband's professional title and say *Doctor Vieri* or *Engineer Sarti* but without fail only *Mrs. Vieri* or *Sarti*, with no professional title, even if she has got one. Furthermore, during a party «*professoressa Bianchi* and *dottorossa Rossi* [i.e. the feminine forms of professor and doctor] should temporarily abandon their degree [and] be satisfied with being only "Mrs. Bianchi" and "Miss Rossi"».

According to Gasperini (1975: 52), once, «to omit titles or to use the wrong ones» in introducing people was a grave mistake; today, if it is still not nice to confuse one title with another, to omit them altogether is even «smarter». Moreover, women's academic titles have to be used only in professional meetings and, except for *dottorossa*, «should maintain the masculine gender». In case of more titles, a possibility that is contemplated only for men, one has to mention the one which is supposed to please more the interlocutor or «more practically, the one you remember».

The address maxim is only one among many more examples which can reveal the great relevance of the diachronic dimension in *galatei*: the normative rigour considerably attenuates and at the end of the stretch of time under investigation, i.e. the 1970s, rules not only become flexible but are moreover given in a clearly ironic key.

#### *The Ethical Component of Politeness*

Some of the books of manners written after the First World War are permeated by a strong moral Christian component which is clearly expressed in the evangelical maxim – *Love your neighbour as you love yourself* – echoed by many *galatei* since the post-unification time. According to Fiorentina (1920: 6), for example, politeness is the «younger sister of charity»; it is a virtue which springs from a set of positive qualities such as kindness of the soul, moderation, goodness, generosity, parsimony, altruism, humility, modesty but also education.

The ethical character of politeness reveals itself also in the contrast between *real politeness*, on one hand – i.e. «spontaneous emanation of the soul» (Fiorentina 1918: 7) – and *etiquette*, on the other – «a mask to hide the nothingness of mind and sentiment» (Fiorentina 1918: 5), i.e. mere «superficial courtesy » (Pierazzi 1922: 22).

This dichotomy is to be found also in the *galatei* written during the Fascist time, although with some differences, not only terminological. Bortone (1938: 5) uses the word *signorilità* ('gentility') – which is also the title of Rocco Muzzati's *galateo* (1933) – that he defines as «a complex of qualities, of gifts

by means of which, anything one thinks, says or does, one is always “in tune”». He counterpoints «authentic *signorilità*» against «the exhibitionism of *signorilità*», which is mere «ostentation», or, even worse, «a sort of social fraud», phrase which reminds us of Mussolini’s decree (cf. 2.1.). This contrast implies the belief that *real politeness* cannot but be sincere. According to Fiorentina (1918: 264) «your politeness must not be a varnish [...] which hides a coarse and worm-eaten piece of furniture to cheat simpletons».

The authors of *galatei* written after the First World War, facing the conflict between politeness and sincerity, privilege without fail the latter, that they identify *tout court* with *truth*. To tell the truth, therefore, is considered to be an integral part of being polite, with the exception of some white lies one is allowed to tell out of compassion:

But ... some truths hurt! – and yet they are necessary. When you happen to have to scold a friend because of a deed you think is not good, do it openly for her benefit. Only be careful to tell what you mean in the right way: this is the virtuous thing  
(Fiorentina 1918: 30).

Therefore, one must definitely reproach a friend, but because this is a *face threatening act*, it needs softening by means of a device which is metaphorically represented as «a veil» wrapping words up to prevent them from hurting, while propitiating the listener’s soul (Fiorentina 1918: 39).

A more disenchanted attitude transpires in the *galatei* written after the Second World War, which progressively reduce the ethical Christian component. Vescovi (1954: 12) gives a relevant turn to the issue of the identification between politeness, morality and sincerity: she recognizes that not everybody has always «nobility of the soul» and acknowledges that nonetheless «the acts of outward politeness are not always a hateful facade»; indeed she ends up legitimizing, on political grounds, the imitation of decorous manners and words of those with whom one interacts, imitation which can lead to even out at least this kind of difference among social classes. The admission of the importance given to appearance is made clear already in Vescovi’s *galateo* title: *Come presentarmi in società* [*How I have to present myself in society*]. Consistently with this opinion, Vescovi suggests replying to condolences and congratulations stating one’s gratitude and «expressing belief in the speaker’s sincerity» (79).

In a similar way, a few years later, Donna Letizia (1960: 187) gives some suggestions on the way to behave at the end of a dinner party: i.e. to refrain from yawning in front of the guests who delay in going away; not to detain those who on the contrary want to leave early (because if they were willing to stay longer they would do); guests will thank hosts for the delightful evening, and hosts, on their part, will declare to be happy for guests’s having accepted their invitation; at the end, a very friendly good bye should be exchanged. «Then, once the door has been shut, everybody will say what he/she likes».



This sounds as an implicit and yet unmistakable admission that politeness up to a certain degree and in some circumstances cannot but be a mask. The distinction between politeness and sincerity is thus ratified: the issue stops being discussed as if it were no longer that relevant. This implies a strong reduction of the ethical component of politeness in *galatei* and their transformation in practical guides, as is after all made apparent by the secondary titles of some of the *galatei* written in those days: *Guide for modern women* (Piccini) and *Practical guide of good manners* (Canino).

### Strategic Politeness

The conception of politeness that characterizes *galatei* is not exclusively normative in nature: strategic ingredients are deeply intertwined with normative ones in the whole corpus, even if in different proportions in each historical period. It may not be useless to briefly recall here that *strategic* or *instrumental* or *volitional* politeness refer to those theoretical models which – beyond any even remarkable differences among them – envisage politeness as a set of means-to-ends strategies which speakers use in order to attain specific objectives, goals or intentions: i.e. the conversational-maxim view (including either Lakoff 1973 or Leech 1983) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) *face-saving view*. Volitional politeness is typical of atomistic societies – like Western and Northern European, in particular – which give priority to individuals' privacy and independence rather than to one's obligations and solidarity towards the other members of the group.

Fiorentina (1918: 6), for example, in her *Preface*, tries to persuade readers to follow her advice by using a very attractive economic metaphor and an equally tempting comparison:

*Politeness is the gift which costs least and yields most. Whatever social class you belong to, you can make use of it as a second beauty, as a graceful dress which [...] will attract others' respect and fondness and will make your life more pleasant [my italics].*

The title of Pierazzi's (1922) *galateo* – *Per essere felici* ['To be happy'] – conceptualizes politeness in strategic terms, as will be explained at the end of the *Preface*, where «an old saying» is quoted according to which «*the art of politeness is the art of making oneself loved*», to which Pierazzi adds that «*the art of making oneself loved is the art of happiness*». A promise is made here to the readers: follow what this *galateo* suggests and you will become polite, therefore loved, therefore happy!

Also Brelih dell'Asta's title (1931: 6) *Il successo nella vita* – ['Success in life'] – refers to the goal one can achieve by putting into practice the content of the *galateo*. The *Preface* starts with a long quote from Schopenhauer, where human beings are compared to hedgehogs, which come closer to warming up, until they start feeling each other's quills and drift apart. Therefore, politeness

is defined as «the average distance» which human beings need to hold in order to make coexistence possible. It is a compromise between the «extreme need of one's fellows» and the need of solitude and independence: «laws, norms and precepts» of politeness are compared to «smooth tracks on which traffic and relations among human beings can drive their way with no dangers and friction».

It may be interesting to note that hedgehogs' movements seem to recall the notion of *face* in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theoretical model, derived both from the folk term existing in many languages and primarily from Goffman (1967: 5). The latter defines the term *face* as «the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself», or as «an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes». According to Brown and Levinson, the *face* consists of two specific kinds of desires attributed by interactants to one another and constantly attended to in polite interaction: *positive face*, i.e. the desire to be approved, understood, liked and admired by others (hedgehogs' coming closer), *negative face*, the desire to be unimpeded in one's action (hedgehogs' distancing).

In Rocco Muzzati (1933: 498 and 454), politeness pursues a political goal: her *galateo* intends to be indeed a guide helping «new Italian women» to perform their duties, in order to give their contribution to the construction of the «magnificent tower that the magnificent Duce is building»: i.e. to increase the population, to be disciplined and cautious housewives and above all good «organizers», because «organization saves time, money and servants; it gives wellness, serenity and family peace».

The mix of normative and strategic aspects of politeness is to be found also in the *galatei* written during the 1950s, where, anyway, remarkable changes can be detected, related to the deep social transformations occurring at the time and concerning mostly women. Piccini (1951: 587) allows a certain amount of individual freedom with respect to the social conventions of good manners. Social ties, she writes, grow from human beings' need for help, comfort and support. They entail duties – either of fairness or pure courtesy – which both have to be fulfilled, but she warns not to go as far as «to lose and destroy for society's sake one's independence and personality», not to be caught into «an entangled net» of obligations and strains, disregarding which would not harm anybody; not to become «slaves of a tyrant who exists only in our own imagination».

According to Vescovi (1954: 15-16), politeness is «the art of being liked by others». The Gospel mystic precept – «“Gentle people be blessed because they will own the earth”» – is reinterpreted in mundane and instrumental terms as «those who have agreeable manners will be able to become masters of other people's hearts and will often make their own fortune».

Gasperini (1975: 6), in her *Preface*, critically discusses the term *galateo*, which recalls a «stereotypical choreography», a set of fixed rules and ritual gestures, that have lost all vitality and authenticity. Instead of a traditional *galateo*, she intends to write a *countergalateo*, based on flexibility, spontaneity, critical attitude, humour and with no didactic purpose, at least in her explicit

statements. Her *countergalateo*, in other terms, should be «just a series of notes based [...] on everyday observation of our neighbor [...] I look at reality as it is, not as I would like it to be». It would seem as if the book Gasperini wrote had given up the normative nature inborn in *galatei* as a textual genre, turning into a mere descriptive text of practices and customs. And yet, paradoxally, Gasperini ends up reviving the most typical *leit motiv* of traditional *galatei* from which she intended to keep her distance. The real difference is indeed summarized like this: «if the traditional galateo is “a guide to the way of appearing”, the new galateo, or *countergalateo*, is “a guide to the way of being”». Thus the old contrast between real politeness and «outward politeness» – just «an empty shell, to be thrown away» according to Gasperini (1975: 5) – is put in the foreground again, although reinterpreted in the light of the deep sociocultural and ideological transformations that occurred in Italy in the stretch of time from the end of the Second World War to the 1970s: now rules have become relativist, the generation gap is much more insisted upon, changes in social relations are taken into consideration much more than before and, above all, a marked ironic key is pervasive, starting from the secondary title itself: *The most popular and amazing guide to the mysteries of “savoir-faire”*. Even the titles of the various chapters are ironic (e.g. *Let’s call it engagement*, with a long terminological discussion on the possible synonyms of the word *fiancé*, such as *friend*, *partner*, *lover*, and so on.), at times even desecrating of things which, like maternity, are commonly considered as inviolable (e.g. *A not always happy event*) or formulated as questions (e.g. *Shall we send wedding-cards or shall we not?*) in order to put into doubts practices held as unavoidable in traditional *galatei*.

Also in this *countergalateo* there are many signs of the strategic view of politeness:

Do not talk of yourselves if not asked to and briefly in any case. I understand that for many people this is a cruel sacrifice: everyone is for him/herself the most engaging topic. But this is the reason why to talk to others of themselves, instead of ourselves, is *the best way to be considered delightful interlocutors*  
(Gasperini 1975: 95) [my italics].

This suggestion is not new at all: Fiorentina (1918: 26) already recommended her «young ladies» to behave «like the small wave, which mixes up into the infinite water of the sea». Moreover she gave them an identical suggestion as Gasperini’s: «Forget yourselves, in writing, as well as in talking. And this temporary sacrifice will be for your benefit; because it is the secret to inspire fondness and benevolence» (Fiorentina 1918: 168).

Actually *all galatei* – no matter whether traditional or “modern” ones – recommend not to talk of oneself. So what topics do books of manners allow or even suggest? What other topics do they forbid? This question introduces one last issue that will be dealt with here, that is *positive politeness* in Italian *galatei*.

*Positive Politeness*

Books of manners do not express exclusively what in Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework is defined *negative politeness*: they do not confine themselves to prescribe norms and behaviours based on the principles of non imposition and distancing; respect and deference; nor do they, on the verbal level, recommend performing only indirect conventional illocutionary acts or mitigating, anyway, all acts that might threaten the interlocutor's *negative face*, such as orders and requests, advice and suggestions, and so on, as Brown and Levinson (1987: 130-1) write about *etiquette books*:

When we think of politeness in Western cultures, it is negative politeness behaviour that springs to mind. In our culture, negative politeness is the most elaborate and the most conventionalized set of linguistic strategies for FTA redress; *it is the stuff that fills the etiquette books*" [my italics].

On the contrary, *galatei* recommend many acts and gestures falling within *positive politeness*, in so far as they aim at satisfying other people's positive face desire for approval, understanding, listening, solidarity and sympathy. Among the fifteen positive politeness strategies or «techniques» listed by Brown and Levinson (1987: 103-129), only two will be mentioned here, complementary one to the other: *Seek agreement* (by raising 'safe topics') and *Avoid disagreement*, that are somehow similar to the two submaxims of the *Agreement Maxim* in Leech's (1983: 119) *Principle of Politeness*, stating respectively to minimize disagreement and to maximize agreement between oneself and others.

All books of manners, starting from Monsignor Giovanni Della Casa's prototype (1558), whose title, *Galateo*, became the name of the genre itself, recommend raising topics that can foster harmony among participants during a meal or a social gathering and to avoid those that on the contrary can cause disputes.

Brelih dell'Asta (1931: 110), for example, suggests as a general rule, to choose topics that do not hurt anybody, that anyone will be able to deal with and that can prevent any clash among different opinions. He recommends taking into account in particular the hostess's mentality: so that it will be a good thing not to discuss philosophy if she has low-education, or, on the contrary, not to talk of trifles if she is an intellectual. Moreover, he recommends during a meal not raising «difficult topics» concerning politics, religion, etc.; not mentioning illnesses, misfortunes, crimes and thefts; avoiding disgusting topics that would spoil tablemates' appetites and not mentioning things that might «get on the more susceptible ladies' nerves», such as ghosts, mice, spiders, nightmares, witches (140); furthermore, among large groups, it is better not to discuss professional or academic issues, that not everybody would be able to follow.

Similar suggestions are to be found in the various *galatei* of the corpus, although with a different key. Canino (1969: 61) points out, with a slightly

ironic tone, that in a social gathering «our own troubles, for example, our beloved children, our excellent or vile husband have to be left out together with all personal affairs, domestic staff, beloved pets». Whereas Gasperini (1975: 93), consistently with her non normative intent, maintains that during a «respectable» social gathering, to be understood as «normal, intelligent, sensible», «it does not matter what one talks about but the way one talks about it». One is thus allowed to talk even about politics or religion, but only in a tolerant way. However, despite this general principle, some topics continue to be banished even by this *countergalateo*, although with an ironic key: illnesses (especially our own); obscene or horror tales; detailed account of novel or film plot; family struggles and dreams, which are «an insufferable bore» for others. With regard to this last topic, one cannot but remember the identical suggestion given by Della Casa, who, being light years apart from Freud's re-evaluation of dreams, had good reason to blame the habit of telling dreams in conversations, because he thought they were a very boring, foolish and petty subject.

There are two interesting aspects in Gasperini's *galateo* that are worth brief consideration here, because they show that the strategies used to perform a directive function change diachronically as much as the object itself of rules and prescriptions.

First, behind the proclaimed flexibility of what intends to be a *countergalateo*, suggestions and advice are given by drawing upon sharp judgments and even at times detrimental qualifications that almost sound as insults and that were hardly to be found in previous *galatei*. Let us see some examples:

Do not behave seriously on principle, as some people do [...] believing they 'look English'. They don't. They rather seem to be idiot or deaf.

To speak ill of absentees is typical of "vicious dwarves"  
(Gasperini 1975: 97).

Second, those who do not intend or are not able to adapt to the way of behaving considered as *normal* by the author (the word *normal* occurs several times in this *galateo* as a sort of synonym of *polite*) are sometimes branded not only as impolite or uncivilized but also as «mentally disturbed», «psychologically abnormal», afflicted with «pathological shyness» or with «some other not elegant personality disorder»:

There are people who take delight in foisting on tablemates, even during digestion time, detailed descriptions of crashes, mutilations [...] intestinal occlusion and its consequences, drowned mice, cockroaches in the soup [...] These people, in the best of cases are ill-mannered. In the worst, *mentally disturbed*  
(Gasperini 1975: 94) [my italics].

It may be interesting to note that to consider as «mentally disturbed» people who like telling stories that it would be rather *normal* to skip because «horrific and disgusting» can be interpreted as a confirmation of one major argument of Norbert Elias' (2000) view on civilization: according to Elias, during the civilization process, certain norms regarding the body, from social constraints, which the individual was pressed to comply with by an external requirement, became self-constraints, working upon the individual even if he/she would intend not to. This would be the mark that society has left within the human being, i.e. the *superego*.

If we apply this idea to Gasperini's *galateo*, we will understand why certain behaviours, like enjoying oneself in talking during a meal of «intestinal occlusion and its consequences» are branded as a «pathological aberration» or «perversion» instead of being considered just as the breaking of a rule of politeness.

### Concluding Remarks

Books of manners express a complex view of verbal politeness: on the background of a basically normative perspective, various other ingredients are combined in variable doses; and this can be interpreted as a sign of a more or less implicit awareness of the wide range of reasons which lead people to abide by a code of behaviour conventionally labeled as *good manners* and of their variability according to time as well as to different situations.

The distinction between normative and strategic politeness cannot be conceptualized as a sharp dichotomy but as a continuum which goes from total prescription, on the one hand, to total volition, on the other (cf. Watts 2003). Each society and therefore each language represent a certain point along this continuum, according to the higher or lower degree of compulsoriness of social norms: some cultures – the so called “open societies” – are more oriented towards the volition end; whereas in others the degree of imposition is higher. The positioning of each society along this axis changes according to time, in correlation with wider political, ideological and socio-cultural changes, as emerges from the analysis of the *galatei* that have been examined here.

### References

#### *Books of Manners*

- Bortone, G. 1938. *Il codice della cortesia e della gioia*, Ticci, Siena.  
 Brelih dell'Asta, M. 1931. *Il successo nella vita. Galateo moderno*, Milano, Palladis.  
 Canino, E. 1969. *La vera signora. Guida pratica di belle maniere*, Milano, Longanesi.  
 Della Casa, G. 1558, *Galateo*, edited by S. Prandi, 2000, Torino, Einaudi.  
 Donna Letizia 1960 *Il saper vivere*, Milano, Mondadori.  
 Fiorentina, F. 1918. *Le belle maniere. Nuovo galateo per le giovinette*, Torino, SEI.  
 Fiorentina, F. 1920, *Il libro della cortesia. Nuovo galateo pei giovinetti*, SEI, Torino.

- Gasparini B. 1975. *Il galateo. La più famosa e divertente guida ai misteri del "savoir-faire"*, Milano, Sonzogno.
- Piccini, V. 1951. *Il tesoro. Guida per la donna moderna*, Milano, Cavallotti.
- Pierazzi, R. M. 1922, *Per essere felici*, Bologna, Licinio Cappelli.
- Vescovi, E. 1954. *Come presentarmi in società*. Brescia, Vannini.

*Other References*

- Botteri, I. 1999. *Galateo e Galatei*, Roma, Bulzoni.
- Brown, P. and S. C. Levinson 1987. *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fraser, B. 1990. Perspectives on politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics* 14(2): 219-36.
- Goffman, E. 1967, *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York, Anchor Books.
- Gu, Y. 1990, Politeness Phenomena in Modern Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 14(2): 237-57.
- Lakoff, R. 1973. The Logic of Politeness. *Papers from the Ninth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, University of Chicago, Chicago.
- Leech, G. 1983. *Principles of Pragmatics*. London/New York: Longman.
- Ide, S. 1989. Formal forms and discernment: two neglected aspects of linguistic politeness. *Multilingua* 8(2/3): 223-248.
- Morozzo della Rocco Muzzati, E. 1933. *Signorilità*, Lanciano, Carabba.
- Norbert, E. 2000. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, rev. edn, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Tasca, L. 2004. *Galatei. Buone maniere e cultura borghese nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Le Lettere.
- Turnaturi, G., 2011. *Signore e signori d'Italia. Una storia delle buone maniere*, Milano, Feltrinelli.
- Watts, R. 2003. *Politeness*, Cambridge University Press.