Gadda’s attempt is seen as revealing the contradictions of Gadda’s true nature and preparing his future “vicenda” as a writer.

Isella follows a common method in this book. He succeeds in establishing the importance and true character of some past writers and their works. We may sometimes wonder whether a true Lombard culture, as such, is established, but we certainly see various cultural and literary tendencies and the position of writers in regard to them and, in general, we may be able to speak of a Lombard “function.”

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Lorenzo Magalotti’s Relazione d’Inghilterra dell’anno 1668 has been rather fortunate during recent years; after the two critical editions of the Italian original, the first by Walter Moretti (in L. Magalotti, Relazioni di viaggio in Inghilterra Francia e Svezia. Bari: Laterza, 1968), in the second by Anna Maria Crinò (in L. Magalotti, Relazioni d’Inghilterra 1668 e 1688. Edizione critica di editi e inediti [Firenze: Olschki, 1972]), Professor Middleton provides now the English public with an accurate translation of the text. He follows rather closely Crinò’s edition, which corrects several mistakes of the previous one; but, in order to simplify the task of the readers, he prefers to reproduce Moretti’s division of the work into different paragraphs under specific headlines. The spelling of English names, largely incorrect in the Italian manuscripts, is reinstated in the legitimate fashion; and as for the “Index of Some Exceptional Books by English Authors,” Middleton, as he explains in a footnote, abandons the original and expands “Magalotti’s rather cryptic references into titles cited in the usual form” (p. 145, footnote 33).

The Florentine writer was in England for the first time from February 18 to April 6, 1668; he returned there the following year, accompanying Prince Cosimo de Medici on a long trip through several European countries; and for the rest of his life (he died in 1712, at 74) he maintained an interest in the political and cultural situation of that country. It is not certain for whom and when he actually wrote his Relazione: according to Crinò (pp. 8-11), the recipient might have been Apollonio Bassetti, one of Grand-Duke Ferdinand’s secretaries, and, most likely, it was written after his return from the second voyage, in late 1689. Middleton, in his “Introduction,” accepts this year pointing out that it was not written as of May 15, 1668 (when Magalotti was in France) and that, referring to 1667, the author speaks of “two years ago” (pp. 13-14). Personally, I think that the Relazione, as we have it in the two manuscripts of the Archivio di Stato of Florence and the British Library, puts together some material written and/or elaborated at different times by Magalotti; for instance, his comments on “the Dutch ambassadors” (p. 65) could very well have been different after his 1669 stay, when the arrival of a “Residente degli Stati
d’Olanda” was shortly expected in London (see Un Principe di Toscana in Inghilterra e in Irlanda nel 1669. Relazione ufficiale del viaggio di Cosimo de’ Medici tratta dal “Giornale” di L. Magalotti, con gli acquerelli palatini, a cura di A. M. Crinò. [Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1968], p. 56). Also, if the lacunae that we occasionally find in both manuscripts (such as the amount of the Queen’s dowry, p. 30, and the pay of the lieutenant-colonel of the cavalry regiment, p. 89) are to be attributed to blanks in the original, one is inclined to presume that Magalotti wrote his Relazione adding eventually information which was not available to him at all times. One should not, however, be tempted to look everywhere for internal evidence confirming the date of 1669: Middleton finds it in a sentence, which he translates as: “When I was in England before. . . .” (p. 64, see footnote 94), while the Italian original reads simply: “Mentr’ero in Inghilterra. . . .” (Crinò, p. 75).

It is quite evident that Magalotti, during his short stays in England, could not possibly have formed such detailed and personal opinions on the persons he mentions in his work; rather, he repeats very often what he was told or found written somewhere. Speaking of the Dutch ambassadors, he does not hesitate to admit: “I did not often remember to ask about them” and “as far as I have heard them casually discussed” (p. 65). To this second-hand information one may attribute his frequent mistakes in giving the age of the persons he met at the English court: for instance, he states that Sir William Morice, sixty-six years old in 1668, “is a decrepit old man” (p. 57), while shortly after he writes that Lord Denzil Holles, who was in fact three years his senior, “is beginning to look old” (p. 59); and the Countess of Devonshire, seventy-three at the time, is described as “over eighty-six” (p. 117), which makes Crinò comment: “Magalotti ha l’abitudine . . . di aumentare l’età dei suoi conoscenti” (p. 128, footnote 6).

Nevertheless, his ability to collect information and provide a vivid, factual and precise portrait of the English court can hardly be questioned, and one can certainly share Middleton’s opinion that “the Relazione is the work of a young man who might have made a superb historian if only he had had any desire to do so” (p. 15). Even his indulgence “in retailing malicious gossip” (pp. 14-15), which somehow displeases the English editor/translator, should be seen as the consequence of his effort to furnish useful insights into the characteristics and weaknesses of the leading figures whom future travellers and Florentine politicians might meet in London. When he deems it irrelevant, he briefly drops the subject, stating, for instance, that “the tricks and private amours of all the maids-of-honour and the ladies who frequent the court” do not adduce “any consequence” or have “any connection with the interests of real people” (p. 82).

In conclusion, this brilliant, colorful work is quite interesting both for the historical information it provides and the vivacious outlook of a seventeenth century Italian on facts and personages of the contemporary English society. Middleton’s translation is undoubtedly an important addition to the study of that period.

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