

La corrispondenza bucolica tra Giovanni Boccaccio e Checco di Meletto Rossi. L'egloga di Giovanni del Virgilio ad Albertino Mussato. Crit. ed. with commentary and introduction by Simona Lorenzini. Firenze: Olschki, 2011. xxii–229 pp. With 6 b/w images. €27. ISBN: 978-88-222-6065-9.

Simona Lorenzini provides in this slim volume the first critical edition, based on all the extant manuscripts, of Giovanni del Virgilio's eclogue addressed to Albertino Mussato (1327) and the bucolic correspondence between Giovanni Boccaccio and Checco di Meletto Rossi (ca. 1347–48). Although Boccaccio's *carmina* have been conscientiously edited before now (most notably by Massèra in 1928 and by Velli in 1992), Lorenzini returns to this literary exchange afresh, this time setting the letters into their proper epistolary context in order to illustrate “[i]l loro significato complessivo che emerge solo dalla considerazione dei rapporti interni e della rispondenza reciproca tra le quattro egloghe, le quali sono da considerare come un *unicum* poetico appartenente al sottogenere delle ‘corrispondenze bucoliche’” (viii). To understand the real contribution of this edition, one must recall that these brief poems represent an important chapter in the history of fourteenth-century humanistic culture.

While Vergil's *Eclogues* never passed totally into oblivion, one would be hard-pressed to find examples of their medieval literary descendants before the 1300s.¹ That the post-Vergilian pastoral was an impoverished genre was recognized by Boccaccio who, in his self-glossing letter to Fra Martino da Signa, wrote:

Theocritus syragusanus poeta, ut ab antiquis accepimus, primus fuit qui greco carmine bucolicum excogitavit stilum, verum nil sensit preter quod cortex ipse verborum demonstrat. Post hunc latine scripsit Virgilius, sed sub cortice nonnullos abscondit sensus [...]. Post hunc autem scripserunt et alii, sed ignobiles, de quibus nil curandum est, excepto inclito preceptore meo Francisco Petrarca [...].²

¹ Cf. Macrì-Leone: “Nessuna traccia, per quanto io sappia, ci rimane di bucolica in questi secoli, non dirò per scopo puramente letterario (cosa che richiederebbe condizioni fiorenti di cultura), ma nemmeno per scopo morale o religioso” (*La bucolica latina nella letteratura italiana del secolo XIV*, Torino: Loescher, 1889, p. 22).

² “The Syracusan poet Theocritus, as we know from the ancients, was the first to invent the bucolic style in Greek poetry, yet he invested no deeper meaning in it than what was contained in the outer layer of the words themselves. After him, Vergil wrote in Latin but concealed certain meanings beneath that layer. [...] After him, however, several wrote in that style but they were undistinguished and unworthy of consideration except for my renowned teacher, Francesco Petrarca” (*Ep.* 23.1).

These words are rather more meaningful than they appear at first glance. Theocritus was for Boccaccio little more than a name. Vergil's *Eclogues*, on the contrary, were well known to him and were a stylistic model no less than a repository of allegorical information and hermeneutic inspiration (esp. *Ecl.* VI). Of the *ignobiles* mentioned here, some certainly deserved that title; however, others surely did not. This group of overlooked authors comprised not only Giovanni del Virgilio and Dante, but also Boccaccio himself. The possible factors that led Boccaccio to describe the history of the pastoral genre in these terms range from strict criteria regarding a collection's ideal length or appropriateness for correspondence to simple modesty. Yet, Petrarca's meaning-drenched verses did not arise from nothing. What happened, then, that changed the poetic landscape? It was precisely the correspondence between Giovanni del Virgilio and Dante that reawakened the genre and ultimately set the stage for the bucolic works of Petrarca and Boccaccio, not to mention those of Sannazaro in the following century and of dozens of additional poets afterwards. For those familiar with Boccaccio, such as the readers of these pages, it will come as no surprise that he had copied four of the five epistles of this exchange into the Laurentian Zibaldone (Plut. XXIX.8, cc. 67v–72v) some time before he met Petrarca. In fact, these copies remain the oldest exemplars of those four texts. Indeed, they are of such remarkable value and rarity that they inspired a heated debate in the 1960s and early '70s over their very authenticity. These pastoral epistles lie at a fundamentally important moment in the rebirth of bucolic poetry and, even beyond the remarkable significance of their content, represent a turning-point in the history of humanistic literature.

The epistolary exchange between Boccaccio and Checco di Meletto Rossi is, of course, a part of this history as well, insofar as it sought to imitate the poetic correspondence between Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio, although Rossi was admittedly not as erudite as del Virgilio and both Boccaccio and Rossi were actually living in the same city at time of these exchanges. The volume here under review responds to a genuine scholarly need, as its editor explains (9–10):

Se per la corrispondenza tra Dante e Giovanni del Virgilio possiamo contare su un discreto numero di edizioni, manca, ancora adesso, un'edizione integrale della corrispondenza bucolica tra Giovanni Boccaccio e Checco di Meletto Rossi che permetta di ricostruire i reciproci rapporti interni tra le quattro epistole-egloghe e di indagare le effettive dipendenze dal modello dantesco, come pure i rapporti con la successiva e matura scrittura bucolica del Certaldese.

In her introduction, which occupies the first half of the volume, Lorenzini explains quite clearly some of the main points that an informed reader should keep in mind in order to be able to appreciate the value of the critical editions presented in the volume's second half. In other words, she seeks to elucidate: the influence of the Dante-del Virgilio correspondence on that between Boccaccio and Rossi; the Petrarchan themes — and Boccaccio's reactions to them — that moved Boccaccio to make certain changes in his second epistle to Rossi, which became the pastoral poem known as *Faunus* in his *Buccolicum carmen*; and the constituent parts of what we may call Boccaccio's bucolic style.

This third group, I believe, forms the most stimulating section of Lorenzini's introduction, inasmuch as she provides in it a brief sketch of some possible avenues of influence that, belonging to the inadequately studied world of the fourteenth-century commentary tradition, are as important as they are regularly overlooked. Although far from exhaustive, the pages she dedicates to Nicholas Trevet's commentary on Vergil's *Eclogues* and to Petrarca's own glosses (on Vergil and Servius both) in the *Virgilio ambrosiano* offer an intriguing glimpse into the difficulty of creating a prescriptive set of criteria for the reconstruction of the pastoral genre. The handful of quotations she provides is enough to illuminate at least the tip of this exegetic iceberg and to form authentically meaningful hypotheses related to the inner workings of Boccaccio's bucolic style. Lorenzini draws for her reader the contours of a neglected area of Boccaccio Studies: the “evoluzione, morfologico-linguistica e stilistica, dalla fase sperimentale della corrispondenza con Checco alla maturità del *Buccolicum carmen*” (68). She additionally provides several pages dedicated to a comparative overview of the pastoral lexicon as employed by Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio. Despite being rather constrained by the necessarily brief length of an introduction, Lorenzini does a fine job at putting a series of items on the table that are essential to any intelligent reading of the texts at hand.

The book's second half is divided into two parts. The first begins with a thirty-page overview of the manuscripts and print editions that contain the correspondence between Boccaccio and Rossi as well as some reflections on their *stemma codicum*. Lorenzini then presents her critical edition of the four eclogues: the three contained in the Zibaldone Mediceo Laurenziano Plut. XXIX.8 (L), cc. 56r–59r, and a second response from Rossi based principally on the version preserved on cc. 115v–16v of the BML's ms. Plut. XXXIX.26 (L₁), which is a late fourteenth-century codex that contains a selection of bucolic works including Vergil's *Eclogues*, Petrarca's *Buccolicum carmen*, Boccaccio's *Buccolicum carmen* — together with his explanatory epistle to Martino da Signa — and the noted exchange between

Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio. The first three texts rely heavily, of course, on L (the autograph), but Lorenzini does provide an occasional variant from L₁ and the ms. 2D4 of the Castle Library in Kynžvart, Czechoslovakia (K), which are essential for the fourth. The brief series of references printed below the variants is mostly very profitable, but, as is the case with all such suggestions, the object of the *confer* sometimes seems coincidental more than an actually plausible source phrase. The notes, however, make up for that uncertainty and are truly a great boon to anyone seriously interested in the mostly meaningful allusions that may be located in these letters.

In the second part of the volume's second half, Lorenzini offers a new, revised critical edition of Giovanni del Virgilio's eclogue to Albertino Mussato (another work that Boccaccio had copied into his *Zibaldone*, Plut. XXIX.8, 46v–50r). Although Lorenzini presents this eclogue after the correspondence between Boccaccio and Rossi, it was actually penned a couple decades earlier and so functions here as a sort of appendix to the main texts. Far from being simply auxiliary, however, its appearance is a perfectly rational and highly useful inclusion. Giovanni del Virgilio, about whom we know really so little, no doubt exercised a notable influence on Boccaccio, not only in his interactions with Dante at the rebirth of the bucolic genre, but also as a kind of cultural mediator between Boccaccio and the fruitful environment of early humanism in Padua. Lorenzini's is the first edition of the poem to be published in a hundred years and builds upon earlier ones. Most readers are no doubt familiar with that of Wicksteed and Gardner (1902) and some also with Albini's (1905), upon which the editions of Lidònnici (1925) and Pighi (1965) were based.³ Lorenzini's, in contrast, is the first to benefit from the discovery in 1960 of the Kynžvart manuscript, transcribed by Boccaccio's nephew Giovanni di Iacopo Boccaccio. Lorenzini has provided bountiful notes to this epistle as well, most of which are completely new.

The final product, then, is a highly reliable edition that will prove useful to scholars who turn to it in their studies of Boccaccio's *Bucolicum carmen* in particular and of the nascent pastoral genre in general. In fact, its notes are wide-ranging enough for it to be handy in the study of all Boccaccio's Latin works, especially as a firsthand guide to understanding some of the more interesting aspects of his intellectual maturation, and in

³ See Giuseppe Albini, "L'egloga di Giovanni del Virgilio ad Albertino Mussato" (*Atti e memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le provincie di Romagna* 23 [1905]: 246-83), which he prepared as a sort of appendix to his *Dantis eclogae Ioannis de Virgilio: Carmen et ecloga responsiva* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1903).

research on Giovanni del Virgilio, a character whose other works (including his commentary on Ovid, ignored since Ghisalberti, and his *Diaffonus*, ignored since Carrara) are still underappreciated and poorly understood. Let us hope, indeed, that Lorenzini's new contribution will spur others to return to related figures who seem to have faded from our collective memories in the years after Billanovich's passing. The book is rounded out by an updated bibliography, an index of names and six black-and-white images on glossy paper. The first two are cc. 56r and 56v of the BML's ms. Plut. XXIX.8 (L), which contain Boccaccio's first pastoral epistle to Rossi, Rossi's reply and then the first twenty-eight verses of Boccaccio's response (that is, of *Faunus*' first version). The third image is a photo of c. 114v of the BML's ms. XXIX.8 (L₁), which contains vv. 273–80 of Giovanni del Virgilio's eclogue to Mussato, with *explicit*, and the fifteen initial verses of Rossi's first reply (with the heading: "Viri conspicui Checchi de Mileto forliviensis Buccolicum breve Carmen incipit egloga I in qua ipse solus auctor loquitur"). The last three images, from the Kynžvart ms. 2D4 (K), are photos of cc. 66v, 70v and 75r. In the first, we see vv. 124–44 of *Buccolicum carmen XVI (Aggelos)*, with *explicit*, and the *incipit* and first four verses of Dante's first response to Giovanni del Virgilio. The second of these images from K shows vv. 69–97 of del Virgilio's second eclogue to Dante, with *explicit*, followed by the first two verses of his eclogue to Mussato. K's final image, c. 75r, gives us vv. 1–30 of Rossi's first response to Boccaccio.

Although an index of works alluded to in the poems would have been a very useful inclusion, a patient reader will be rewarded by a wealth of citations and sources that have until now been largely unnoticed or buried in the bibliographies of books and articles not commonly found on our bookshelves. In sum, Lorenzini's efforts are a much appreciated gift to *studiosi* of all stripes.

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