

Antonio Beccadelli. *The Hermaphrodite*.

Ed. and trans. Holt Parker. The Villa I Tatti Library 42. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. xlv + 299 pp. index. bibl. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-674-04757-0.

The Villa I Tatti Library grows apace, and its forty-second volume offers readers the lascivious poetic anthology *Hermaphroditus* of Antonio Beccadelli (1394–1471), more commonly known as “Panormita” (after the Greek name of his native Palermo), as well as a number of letters that document this *succès de scandale*. The introduction traces Pamormita’s checkered career in the late 1420s, a turbulent

period before his permanent move to Naples, where he established a humanist circle that survives today as the Accademia Pontaniana, named for Panormita's more celebrated successor Giovanni Pontano.

The poems are divided into two books of forty-three and thirty-eight poems in elegiacs. Both books begin and end with poems dedicated to Cosimo de' Medici, and the penultimate poem of Book 1 (1.42) explains that the two parts of his work are dedicated to male and female genitalia: "In binas partes diduxi, Cosme, libellum: / nam totidem partis Hermaphroditus habet. / Haec pars prima fuit, sequitur quae deinde secunda est: / haec pro pene fuit, proxima cunnus erit." (I have divided my book into two parts, Cosimo, / For the Hermaphrodite has the same number of parts./ This was the first part, so what follows is the second. / This stands for the cock, the next will be cunt [55, tr. Holt]).

In addition to such pornographic themes, there are satirical epigrams directed (like Martial's) against ludicrous individuals, as well as personal notes to fellow humanists. For the text of the *Hermaphroditus*, Parker relies on the critical edition of Donatella Coppini (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1991); but while both editors print the three letters of Guarino, Poggio, and Panormita that the author himself added to his collection, Parker has added an appendix of some thirty poems and letters composed in reaction to the *Hermaphroditus*. These feature a veritable pantheon of Quattrocento humanists: besides Guarino of Verona and Poggio Bracciolini, we find Pier Candido Decembrio, Maffeo Vegio, Antonio da Rho, Lorenzo Valla, and Giovanni Pontano, as well as lesser figures like Giovanni Lamola, Bartolomeo Della Capra, Giacomo Bracelli, and the rival poet Porcellio Pandoni. There are also prose excerpts from writings of Bartolomeo Facio, Paolo Cortesi, Paolo Giovio, and Lilio Gregorio Giraldi that offer judgments of Panormita's works. Most of the texts demonstrate the popularity (or notoriety) of the collection, and a few suggest a certain hypocrisy, as when the friar Antonio da Rho couches a fiercely obscene denunciation of the poet as the outcry in elegiacs of the prostitutes of Pavia!

The antepenultimate poem of Book 1 (1.41) is interesting for two reasons. First, it asks Panormita's fellow Sicilian Giovanni Aurispa to lend him a copy of Martial, who is naturally one of the principal models for the obscene Latin epigram. (In 2.23, the poet similarly requests a text of Catullus from a certain Galeazzo.) Second, it is introduced by a prose apologue derived from Homer's *Iliad* 9.502–12. In that passage, Homer describes Prayers (*Litai*) as the lame and purblind daughters of Zeus. As they walk, they are preceded by Atê, the god of destructive delusion, who punishes anyone who spurns them. This Greek allegory serves two purposes: it both qualifies Panormita as a scholarly colleague of the Hellenist Aurispa, and reinforces his request for Martial.

Parker is to be congratulated for providing a reliable translation and valuable notes, and for assembling diverse texts illustrating the controversy that surrounded the *Hermaphroditus*. Panormita's text is often quirky and cryptic, but Parker has done his homework. For example, on Panormita's use of the noun *femur* Parker comments: "Beccadelli . . . seems to employ it primarily in the sense of 'cunt', 'pussy', crotch' or the like. So Tuscan *feme*, defined by Florio (1611, 183) as 'the

upper and forepart of the thigh. Also the privy parts of a woman'. . . . For *femur* in Christian Latin to mean metonymically 'generative organs' (male and female) see, e.g., Jerome, *Ep.* 65.10.2, Vulgate Num. 5.21. Isidore of Seville (11.24) derives the word *femina* from *femur* 'since there the appearance of the sex is distinguished from the man'" (213).

Like Panormita's contemporaries, today's readers will no doubt react in different ways to this audacious, if uneven, work. In any event, the translator is to be praised for his courage in not mincing words, and in making this *cause célèbre* available to the modern reader within its broader cultural context. Like Panormita (and this current reviewer), Parker may say that "si mea charta procax, mens sine labe mea est" ("if my page is salacious, my mind is spotless" [2.11.4]).

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