

On Married Love. Eridanus. Giovanni Gioviano Pontano.

Ed. Luke Roman. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 63. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. xxvii + 386 pp. \$29.95.

With the recent publication of Giovanni Gioviano Pontano's *Baiae*, a conspicuous selection of his dialogues, and the Latin poetry of Jacopo Sannazaro, the I Tatti Renaissance Library has provided readers with important documents of the short-lived yet artistically splendid humanistic culture of Aragonese Naples. In line with this trend,

Roman's elegant translation and erudite commentary of *De Amore Coniugali* and *Eridanus* contributes to the series with perhaps the most innovative, albeit largely neglected, products of Pontano's literary corpus. Grounded on a solid knowledge of ancient elegy and the evolution of this poetic genre in the Renaissance, Roman's translation and annotations thoroughly illustrate the extent of Pontano's poetic experiment. Whereas the masters of Latin elegy had generally fashioned themselves as unmarried young lovers living on the fringes of society, Pontano addressed a theme that his ancient models, fellow humanists, and contemporaries writing in Tuscan vernacular had either neglected or often abhorred: married and senile love. If Roman's edition will certainly contribute to scholarship on Neo-Latin poetry and Renaissance humanism in general, the availability of Pontano's Latin elegies in English translation might challenge standard literary histories of Quattrocento Italy.

Roman's edition opens with an introduction, which includes an updated life of Pontano, an overview of his works, a summary of *De Amore Coniugali* and *Eridanus*, an evaluation of the author's approach to classical elegy, and a short critical assessment. The central section of the volume comprises the Latin text and English translation of the three books of *De Amore Coniugali* and the two books of *Eridanus*. Pontano's texts are followed by a useful summary of their rather intricate editorial history and a number of exegetical annotations. The Latin text is based on J. Oeschger's 1948 edition, but it also incorporates corrections found in L. Monti Sabia's 1964 anthology of Pontano's poems, together with a few new textual amendments. As for the English text, Roman's edition offers an accurate and readable verse translation, which evokes the alternating rhythm of hexameters and pentameters with English iambic verses, while conveying Pontano's often-tortuous syntax by means of rhetorical figures such as prolepsis and anaphora.

The introduction, translation, and footnotes interpret Pontano's poems in light of their classical models and of Ovid and Propertius in particular. This exegetical principle allows the reader to appreciate how, for instance, *De Amore Coniugali* (1.3) reinvents the elegiac topos of the excluded lover (*paraklausythiron*) by describing the bride as she crosses the threshold of her new husband's home (vv. 39–40: *limen*). Also, by systematically detecting Pontano's allusions to the masters of classical elegy, Roman's commentary shows how the lullabies found at the heart of *De Amore Coniugali* (2.8–19) readjust the erotic jargon of ancient elegy to a description of the poet's baby son and his desire for his mother's or his nurse's milk. This exegetical principle, moreover, allows the reader to understand Pontano's puzzling considerations as to the relative artificiality of his poetic enterprise as a whole — a kind of detachment that can be found in other humanists as well, and more specifically in Angelo Poliziano. In *Eridanus*, for instance, Pontano enigmatically dismisses his love affair with the young courtesan Stella as a consolatory fiction (2.31, v. 69: *ficta iuvant*), and he also characterizes it as a kind of fictional game (2.1, v. 18: *ficto in amore*). Roman's erudite footnotes to these passages, in this sense, contribute to rediscovering a layer of meaning that an established tradition of historically oriented critics interested in the realism of Pontano's poetry have often tended to underestimate.

Roman's edition is an indispensable tool for approaching Pontano's elegiac poetry. One wonders, however, whether a closer dialogue with Pontano's philosophical and astrological works would have enriched the volume's otherwise impeccable footnotes. Pontano, after all, systematically used verses from *De Amore Coniugali* to back up the philosophical arguments outlined in his *De Obedientia*, thus suggesting that this collection's ambitions might have gone beyond the imitation of Latin elegists. Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid, moreover, are not always sufficient to decipher obscure mythological references, such as the recurrent description of Venus and Mars hiding in the water of Eridanus, by which Pontano always means the Po river together with an extrazodiacal constellation found in the vicinities of Taurus (*Eridanus* 1.1; 1.36). If matched with the planetary etiologies and astrological theories discussed in Pontano's *Urania*, *De Fortuna*, and *De Rebus Coelestibus*, *Eridanus* — analogously to, or perhaps in competition with, Petrarch's *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* — disclose a philosophical meaning transcending a sylloge of erotic *nugae*.

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