

Teofilo Folengo. *Baldo: Volume 1, Books 1–12.*

Trans. Ann E. Mullaney. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 25. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. xxiv + 472 pp. index. map. bibl. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-674-02521-9.

Teofilo Folengo. *Baldo: Volume 2, Books 13–25.*

Trans. Ann E. Mullaney. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 36. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. xii + 544 pp. index. bibl. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-674-03124-1.

The variety of subject matter in The I Tatti Renaissance Library is expanded considerably by the inclusion of the first facing-page English translation of Teofilo Folengo's *Baldus* (here oddly titled in Italian). This mock epic is presented in the 1552 Venetian redaction edited by Mario Chiesa in 2004. A masterpiece of macaronic, its stylistic hybridization impresses as an inclusive discourse on literature and art. Folengo is a rival of Virgil in the courtly self-fashioning of Mantua as an alternative to Rome. Within the I Tatti series, *Baldus* is close to Alberti's *Momus*, to which it is structurally connected by the occasional use of Apuleian Latin and by the role of the trickster, who in Folengo's poem is the sardonic and mischievous Cingar. The poem's plot, unnecessarily summarized in these volumes as progressively convoluted (vii), is neatly anchored around three kernels: a municipal epic (books 1–10), a Lucianic voyage (11–20), and a descent to hell (21–25).

Ann Mullaney's introduction connects macaronic origins with itinerant medical practitioners; investigates liminal materials in print; and offers a sympathetic portrait of the author, which emphasizes anticlerical propensities (xi) and, somewhat unconvincingly, questions his misogynist fury (xvi). Mullaney rightly observes: "it is difficult to imagine Folengo's work without Pulci's" (xvii); she also notes an absence of Renaissance literary allusions to Folengo, besides Bruno (xix). Yet *Baldus* was translated in Castilian, fueling the coalescing picaresque novel and Cervantes, and in early modern England Folengo's image was diffused and manipulated at least by Coryat and Donne. In the sea tempest, Mullaney suggests, "the comic image does not come fully into focus until Folengo's final versions" (xv); but the flamboyant episode from 1521 inspired Rabelais, and Mullaney's point is unsubstantial. Folengo's European career and the historical trajectory of the poem's four prints should have required a more critical engagement.

Mullaney's translation gives an accessible prose rendition of Folengo's extravagant inventions; it was an intimidating task and her efforts ought to be praised as convincing on many levels. Diverse regional elements, which Folengo telescoped into an otherwise classicizing hexameter, are handled with precision, both in the translation and in the explanatory notes that follow each volume. Folengo's playful attitude with respect to the antics of the chivalric romance emerges vividly in Mullaney's fresh prose, a combination of "childish" and "mythical" as she acknowledges (ix). On the other hand, what makes this translation readable is also a deliberate tempering of the poem's most fantastical conceits, liverish sarcasm, and downright vulgarity. Folengo's outrage, worthy of Juvenal's satire, sounds less savage and unforgiving than in the original, and so does

the ponderous, acoustic rivalry with the Latin classics against which the poem is fashioned. Mullaney's register is less Virgil's melancholy than Homer's stupefaction.

A few examples can show the general reader the tantalizing problems *Baldus* presents. In the first volume, the rustic town of Cipada abounds in rogues and "scatters her treasures everywhere" (43). In the original "sparpagnat ubique tesoros," the syllabic mass of the verb *sparpagnat* is literally "squandered" through the orbic coordinates of *ubique*, but in translation the Panurgic force of that neologism is boiled down to a tiny "scattering." Later in book 7, a peasant dance reaches a trembling uproar, and we share the translator's delight in alliteration: "full flip," "tongues trilling" (215); Folengo's graphic blasting of the pipes, "flatum pifari," can aptly be compared only to Correggio's *Allegory of Vice*. In the second volume, Mullaney's translation appears less comfortable with the ekphrastic design of several passages describing works of art, but has the virtue of merging into the full and grisly details of Folengo's descent to hell without degenerating into jingles. Too much distance separates "wide rings in the bowl of the colosseum" (71) and the actual "colossaei gyramina larga tinazzi" envisioned by Folengo: in the closed "barrels" of that line (as within a wooden theater) the dialectal *gyramina* and *tinazzi* resonate eerily and jarringly. Similarly, in book 13 we find a description of the alchemic "machinery of the universe" (15) that does not gain much annotation or energy in translation. Folengo is alluding to Ovidian physics and to Lucan's concept of *machina mundi*, which is made to "swirl" with the Lombard verb *pirlare*. Mullaney's approach could have allowed more Senecan bombast: Folengo's text deserves a type of "Marlowe effect," even if it is bought at the cost of some conflation.

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