

Tommaso Campanella. *Lettere*.

Le Corrispondenze letterarie, scientifiche ed erudite dal Rinascimento all'età moderna 12. Ed. Germana Ernst. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2010. xxxi + 726 pp. index. append. tbls. €74. ISBN: 978-88-222-5912-7.

Germana Ernst's studies on Tommaso Campanella and editions of his works (including, in the last decade, alone, *The Book and the Body of Nature* [2010], *Del senso delle cose e della magia* [2007], *Syntagma dei miei libri e sul corretto metodo di apprendere* [2007], *L'ateismo trionfato* [two volumes, 2004], *Opuscoli astrologici* [2003], and *Il carcere, il politico, il profeta* [2002]) constitute an inspiring legacy of scholarship, now crowned by this collection of all of Campanella's extant correspondence. She brings together Campanella's formal and informal letters from archives spanning continents and written in at least three different languages (Latin, Italian, and Spanish, not to mention the occasional Calabrian expressions) in order to provide, as she states, the testimony of Campanella's life and the pages of a diary of a soul (vi).

While she correctly notes a portrait of Campanella exuding “*composta dignità*” and “*orgoglio*” (xxi), what also emerges most strikingly from these 172 letters is Campanella’s unshackled optimism (which from anybody else’s pen would be foolhardy, if not suicidal, boasting promises) joined with dogged tenacity. He repeatedly asserts in missives to King Philip III of Spain, to Pope Paul V, to the Emperor Rudolph II, as well as to various cardinals and apostolic nuncios, that given the opportunity, in a few months’ time on pain of the loss of his hand or on the pain of death, he would write a series of works on anti-Machiavellian politics, theology, astronomy, natural science, philosophy, and prophecies; he would teach, find new sources of revenue, and leave four of his relatives in prison while completing seemingly impossible diplomatic missions abroad; he would also promise probable outcomes of his new inventions (including a means for ships to be propelled without wind or oars, wind-powered chariots, and a means for a cavalry soldier to dedicate both hands to warfare without having to hold on to the horse’s reins). Leaving aside the inventions, the prison exchanges, and the generation of new sources of revenue, Campanella actually did manage to fulfill his promises of writing books on all of the aforementioned subjects and many others besides, mostly from prisons, as well as of providing important diplomatic contributions late in his life as part of the court of the King of France, all in spite of the lack of concessions from his addressees.

Ernst departs from Vincenzo Spampanato’s 1927 edition of 121 letters and three appendices, and the mass of unedited material that Luigi Firpo had not been able to turn into the second volume of Campanella’s collected works (the first and only volume appeared in 1954). She was also able to include other archival contributions by Rodolfo De Mattei, Giorgio Fulco, Gianfranco Formichetti, and her own discoveries to present a chronologically cohesive collection of letters, with crucial emendations to earlier editions, helpful annotations, and Firpo’s Italian translations of the letters that Campanella originally penned in Latin. Happily, this volume more than fulfills the modest hope expressed by Ernst, “*che la presente edizione dell’epistolario contribuisca a togliere parte degli strati di ruggine, per restituire alla campanella il suo suono argentino*” (xxiii).

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