

Renaissance poetics and epistemology. By using ekphrasis in the sense to be found in ancient rhetoric, Eisendrath avoids some of the aesthetic essentialism potentially inherent in *paragone*-style debates, but she also ignores the ways in which the traditions of ekphrastic poetry—in the sense of verbal representations of visual representations—have, since the days of Homer, themselves generated some of the interesting effects Eisendrath is prone to attribute to a supposed shift toward an early modern interest in objectivity and materiality.

These objections notwithstanding, Eisendrath convincingly demonstrates the importance, complexity, and ongoing fascination of early modern ekphrasis.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.339

Meditations on the Life of Christ: The Short Italian Text.

Sarah McNamer, ed. and trans.

The William and Katherine Devers Series in Dante and Medieval Italian Literature 14.
Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018. clxxx + 264 pp. \$65.

For students of late medieval devotional writing, and of literature inspired by Franciscan ideals, the Latin *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (*MVC*) is a work of major importance, surviving in over a hundred manuscripts (not counting partial versions and translations) and posing a set of difficult questions. The most debated of these has been the question of authorship, still not resolved: after an original attribution to Bonaventura, and then to pseudo-Bonaventura, more recent proposals for the identity of the author are the Franciscan friars Johannes de Caulibus and now Jacopo de Sancto Geminiano. Possibly more consequential, however, is the question of the relation of the Latin *MVC* to a number of other contemporary texts that contain recognizably the same material, but are of varying length and, in several instances, composed in an Italian vernacular. This volume by McNamer upends and revises, with three principal, well-defended claims, the main debates regarding the Latin *MVC*.

First, for McNamer, the original form of the text is not the long Latin form of the *MVC*, but the shortest of all the versions, which she calls the *testo breve*, surviving in a single MS (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Canonici Italiani 174). This was originally set down, as McNamer reckons, between 1300 and 1325 in a west Tuscan, likely Pisan, dialect, though in its present form is replete with Venetian and North Italian forms, since it was copied in Venice or the Veneto toward the end of the fourteenth century. This text, with a prologue and thirty chapters, McNamer assigns to writer A. Second, writer A was a woman, almost certainly a nun, perhaps a Poor Clare, living in a Pisan convent, perhaps the convent of Ognissanti (no longer extant). Although the *testo breve*

is not as explicit as later versions in emphasizing Franciscan elements, it nevertheless shows clear signs of arising from a Franciscan and Clarissan context.

Third, the subsequent versions—including a vernacular *testo minore* (prologue and forty-one chapters) and *testo maggiore* (prologue and ninety-four chapters), along with the subsequent standard Latin text (*MVC*), including a prologue and 108 chapters, probably composed after 1325 and before about 1340—are all attributed by McNamer to author B, a Franciscan friar of still-uncertain identity, and significantly edit the *testo breve*. These recensions lengthen the original (the *testo maggiore* adds the entire section on Christ's ministry, absent in the *testo breve*), and at numerous junctures alter the *testo breve*, reflecting, in McNamer's view, both the imposition of orthodoxies of doctrine and strategic reductions of parts of the *testo breve* that might, in modern terms, reflect too marked a female-gendered perspective.

McNamer's edition of the *testo breve* includes a critical edition, English translation, commentary, glossary, linguistic analysis, and a nearly book-length introduction (pages xvii–clxxviii) laying out the main issues of debate. Her arguments draw on many kinds of evidence and lines of reasoning: paleographic (clearing away old prejudices regarding the dating of the *testo breve*); narratological (exposing clumsy transitions in the later versions that suggest less than thorough adaptation); gender sensitive (distinctively feminine imagery in the text points to its being conceived by a nun); literary-critical and aesthetic (the *testo breve* version is more consistent in tone, mood, diction, and figurative language; the others are less so); and theological (among passages suppressed in later versions are those that emphasize Christ's humanity at the expense of his divinity). Whatever the outcome of the debates, which with the present volume would seem now to tilt in favor McNamer's hypotheses, her multifaceted approach is a model of what a thorough and up-to-date scholarly argument in medieval studies should look like, and can be held up as an example for students in training.

One could argue that the commentary on the text is somewhat arbitrary in its choices of what to explain, probably necessarily so; and perhaps not enough is said about possible liturgical aspects (or paucity thereof) in the *testo breve*, given that the modern edition of the long Latin version indexes nearly seven hundred references to liturgy. As McNamer's introduction makes clear—while expressing a refreshing openness to further discussion—there are many voices arrayed in favor of preserving the traditional view of the textual history of the *MVC*. But if McNamer's claims are sustained by further research, she will have restored a classic to early fourteenth-century devotional literature. Her work is a groundbreaking contribution to vernacular devotional writing in Italian, and will both stir and shape debate on the *MVC* for years to come.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.340