

Francesco Tateo. *Modernità dell'Umanesimo*.

Nuovi Paradigmi. Collezione di Studi e Testi oltre i confini 1. Salerno: Edisud Salerno, 2010. 174 pp. index. €18. ISBN: 978-88-95154-84-8.

Due to a persistent view of Italian literature as limited to a canon of texts written in the vernacular, it is often difficult to introduce humanistic texts in the curriculum of Italian Studies. In the last few years, the publication of anthologies of humanistic texts in Italian translation has partially filled this lacuna. In line with this editorial trend, this collection of short essays and primary texts provides teachers and students with a useful and stimulating textbook.

The book comprises two parts, in which Tateo brings forth his views on the scope of humanism (7–58) and illustrates them with an anthology of primary sources (59–167). At present, the author points out, the relationship between humanism and modernity needs to be reassessed. Therefore, humanism needs to be approached as a tradition, rather than a forerunner of modern thought (11). In doing so, the author sums up the multiple manifestations of this tradition under nine general themes such as “Rinascita e Renovatio” (13–19), “Ragione e Natura” (19–24), and “Storia” (37–43). Although not openly stated, Tateo’s notion of humanism seems to recall the work of Garin and Baron for its emphasis on the role of this intellectual trend in shaping civic life (50–55). The author’s special interest in the rebirth of rhetoric, philology, and other *studia humanitatis*, however, reconciles this definition with the lesson of Kristeller (19–24). In general, the historiographical debate that surrounds the concept of humanism is taken for granted. Also, contemporary reassessments of controversial concepts such as Sez nec’s view of allegory are overlooked or only briefly mentioned (33–37). Perhaps it would have been pedagogically very useful to find these discussions referenced in the footnotes.

The selection of primary sources generally succeeds to illustrate the opening essays and to offer complex portraits of Italian humanists. Students of Italian literature, whose knowledge is often limited to the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, will certainly benefit from the selection of Petrarch’s moral philosophical and political writings. In line with the recent work of Ferrà, who has contributed to shed new

light on this often neglected area of Petrarch's works, Tateo originally selects Petrarch's letter to Acciaiuoli on the education of the prince — an unusual choice, if one considers the importance generally attributed to Petrarch's letter to Francesco da Carrara (59–66). Analogously, the choice of Alberti's writings perfectly represents his philosophical, pedagogical and scientific expertise, thus enriching the conventional image of vernacular writer and promoter of the *certame coronario* often found in Italian anthologies (79–87). In contrast, crucial figures such as Ficino are only briefly discussed and represented by a rather conventional passage from his *De Vita* (92–94). Also, a longer section of texts on the dignity of women might have been useful to illustrate this important element of the humanistic tradition (165–66).

The selection, furthermore, benefits from Tateo's rare expertise in the history of humanism in Southern Italy. If one would expect to find texts by Petrarch, Bruni, and Alberti in the anthology, the presence of long excerpts from Pontano, Sannazaro, and Antonio Ferrariis productively contributes to challenge a persistent grand narrative in Renaissance history. In particular, Tateo's selection and translation of passages from Pontano's dialogues *Antonius* and *Actius* along with the treatises *De Sermone* and *De Fortuna* brilliantly manages to shift the reader's attention from Florence to Aragonese Naples. Also, the selection illustrates Pontano's unique combination of natural philosophical, rhetorical, and ethical interests, often overlooked by many studies exclusively focused on his poetry and moral philosophy (107–25). At the same time, the presence of Antonio Ferrariis and the solid contextualization of his works effectively exemplify this original thinker, whose ideas on language and social behavior would deserve further attention in contemporary scholarship (129–31).

Teachers and students of Italian literature will certainly benefit from Tateo's stimulating essays and well-edited anthology, which constitute a valid introduction to the problems and texts of the body of literature now known, thanks to the book of Christopher Celenza, as the "lost Italian Renaissance." Also, it will contribute to draw scholarly attention on lesser known areas of the Italian humanism such as the Kingdom of Naples.

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