

REVIEWS

On Human Worth and Excellence. Giannozzo Manetti.

Ed. and trans. Brian P. Copenhaver. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 85. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019. lii + 364 pp. \$29.95.

I hope you don't mind my starting this brief review with a simple (in fact, somewhat rhetorical) question for Renaissance scholars: wouldn't it be wonderful if a renowned authority in our field of studies published a book comprising an insightful essay on a crucial topic, an edition of a fundamental source on that same topic, a facing English translation (as well as translations of other similar sources from the same period), and an up-to-date bibliography? Well, I'm glad to report that such a scholarly dream has come true thanks to Brian Copenhaver's contribution to the I Tatti Renaissance Library. Volume 85 of this prestigious series (launched by James Hankins and the late Walter Kaiser almost twenty years ago) features all the praiseworthy and desirable characteristics mentioned above.

The book opens with a fifty-page introduction offering a precise assessment of Giannozzo Manetti's treatise (completed in 1452) by comparing it with similar (and, in the case of Pico's misleadingly titled *Oratio de dignitate hominis*, very different) works on these—or related—topics dating from the Italian Quattrocento. This allows Copenhaver to stress the novelty of Manetti's approach to the notion of *dignitas hominis* vis-à-vis the much more traditional interpretations by his contemporaries Antonio da Barga and Bartolomeo Facio. To sum up this stark difference in just one word, it is appropriate to speak of *progress*; not just the kind of spiritual progress that the Christian religion expects all of its followers to undertake (i.e., the medieval idea of *homo viator* striving to return to his heavenly homeland) but—in a much more mundane, practical vein—the improvement of living conditions. Manetti perceives and celebrates this gradual yet ineluctable trend in all fields throughout history, from science and technology to ethics and the arts. Significantly, Manetti regards art and architecture as indisputable evidence of what he aims to prove: in his eyes, human genius and beauty cannot but be joined, as best attested by Brunelleschi's dome of Florence Cathedral, which Manetti praises as a most elegant, efficient, and clever work of engineering. Literature and linguistics bear witness to the same view of history; a veritable polyglot (fluent in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, not to mention his native Italian and other modern idioms useful in his political as well as mercantile activities), this Florentine humanist does not hesitate to consider the fall of the Tower of Babel as a fortunate event leading to the birth, spread, and growth of a myriad fascinating languages, each one endowed with its own literary masterpieces.

Manetti's enthusiasm is so overwhelming that some of his laudatory statements in praise of humankind eventually had his *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* added to the *Index of Forbidden Books* in the late sixteenth century. For the opposite reason, the same fate befell the well-known *De miseria humanae conditionis* by Lotario de' Segni (future Pope Innocent III), the very text that Manetti criticizes in the fourth and last book of his treatise. Readers can now find a concise yet clear and informative assessment of the Giannozzo-Lotario controversy in Copenhaver's introductory essay and in the many notes to his English translation. The latter is an excellent example of stylistic ability founded on solid scholarship. These two qualities make it possible for Copenhaver to render Manetti's Ciceronian (and often quite involuted) Latin syntax into both refined and precise English prose. Though less exacting, the two texts translated in the appendix to this volume (Antonio da Barga's outline of the treatise on "human worth and excellence" that Bartolomeo Facio would write shortly afterward, just a few months before Manetti addressed this same topic) are further testimony to Copenhaver's outstanding scholarship and the spirit of intellectual generosity pervading this entire book.

Stefano U. Baldassarri, *International Studies Institute (ISI), Florence*
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Greek and Latin Poetry. Angelo Poliziano.

Ed. and trans. Peter E. Knox. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 86. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019. xx + 418 pp. \$29.95.

Over the past century and a half, Angelo Ambrogini, known as Poliziano in homage to his birthplace at Montepulciano, has figured securely in the canon of fifteenth-century Italian poetry, Florentine humanism, and Neo-Latin verse. Less known as a Neo-Greek poet, he echoed and imitated epigrams from a Hellenic anthology that had been compiled by Maximus Planudes in the thirteenth century and was prepared for publication by his own rival in the fifteenth century, Janus Lascaris. As a Neo-Latin poet, he took inspiration from Catullus, Ovid, Horace, and Martial in notably accomplished elegies, odes, hymns, didactic and epideictic verse, and scores of witty epigrams. He also fashioned a poetic genre of erudite discourse, which he denominated as a *Silva* or dense, forest-like assemblage of ideas. These ideas deal chiefly with poetry and poets such as Homer, Virgil, and Statius, whose texts he taught in the Florentine Studio. Charles Fantazzi edited and translated his four major *Silvae* for the I Tatti Renaissance Library in 2004. Now, for this series, Peter E. Knox has edited and translated the rest of Poliziano's Greek and Latin poetry with stylistic elegance and the highest scholarly standards.