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Di Benedetto, Sergio. «Depurare le tenebre delli amorosi miei versi». La lirica di Girolamo Benivieni

Olga Zorzi Pugliese

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enjoyed encountering this sort of information in the introduction as part of a fuller initial description of what actually went on.

Yet, such objections are probably churlish. This is a substantial achievement and ought to whet appetites for further detailed analysis of the more arcane dimensions to papal ritual still. As Rihouet acknowledges in her introduction, the *possesso* currently lacks the in-depth, comprehensive exploration of its visual representations that it surely deserves. One would think she is the ideal person to provide that, and it is gratifying to read that the full run of *possesso* prints from 1589 down to 1846 forms the subject of her current research.

MILES PATTENDEN

Australian Catholic University

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Di Benedetto, Sergio.

«*Depurare le tenebre delli amorosi miei versi*». *La lirica di Girolamo Benivieni.*

Università della Svizzera Italiana: Istituto di Studi Italiani, Officina 5. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2020. Pp. xi, 310. ISBN 978-8-8222-6706-1 (paperback) €35.

This is a detailed examination, long overdue, of the 1500 edition of poetry with prose self-commentary by Girolamo Benivieni (1453–1542), a pivotal figure in Florence at the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Savonarola, and philosophers Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. Prior to Di Benedetto's monograph, the sole book-length study on Benivieni dated from 1906. In the intervening century scholars have published briefer studies on specific aspects and sub-genres of the Renaissance author's poetic production, or on prose works by him that are inscribed in other literary genres. Now, with his thorough analysis of Benivieni's voluminous tripartite prosimetrum, Di Benedetto does not simply fill a lacuna in Benivieni scholarship but, with excellent philological and hermeneutical skill, he provides new and more profound interpretations of the author and the overall meaning of his poetry.

Carefully dissecting the 1500 edition from beginning to end, he conveniently divides the discussion into sections with clear headings that indicate the chief topic or current reflected in each group of poems under consideration. Di Benedetto identifies the important sources, not simply literary

but also biblical, philosophical, and theological, that underlie the individual poetic texts and accompanying prose commentary—an achievement that in itself constitutes no mean feat. But, neither a study of sources for its own sake nor a reconstruction of the various intellectual contexts in which the poet operated from a purely historical perspective, his analysis demonstrates how these multifarious elements contributed to Benivieni's development and especially how they converge into a common ideological thread. As he traces the stages in Benivieni's writerly career, Di Benedetto disproves the earlier facile view of a Benivieni who converted sharply from early secular Neoplatonism to later Savonarolan religiosity. Arguing instead for greater consistency, he convincingly shows that the common denominator synthesizing the multiple sources and various traditions is the strong sentiment of Christian spirituality that inspired the author. The early Neoplatonic strain was never completely abandoned; rather, it was preserved and eventually harmonized with Savonarolan thought. According to Di Benedetto, Benivieni's work is basically an *itinerarium animae in Deum*. Even the work *Amore: stanze*, found in the appendix of the edition and interpreted by Di Benedetto, functions effectively as a summary, reflecting the spiritual journey expressed in the poems of the collection. Closely related to this deep spirituality is another fundamental unifying principle that, according to Di Benedetto, permeates Benivieni's works, namely, an educational goal that accounts for the general abstract nature of Benivieni's writing and his tendency to eliminate precise historical references in the reformulation of his poems in order to confer greater universality on his personal experience. Although Benivieni never claimed to be a mystic himself, he did aim to lead his readers on the path to God. In his admirably original assessment of the single poems, Di Benedetto also detects in them liturgical references and elements of prayer not recognized by previous readers. His observations on the stylistic, metrical, and linguistic features of Benivieni's poems further help elucidate the texts, characterized as they are by complex syntax and a markedly Latinate form of the vernacular. As an example, Di Benedetto interestingly attributes the frequency of usage of the interrogative mode to the influence of Savonarola's sermons.

Di Benedetto excels equally in his examination of a major facet of the poet's work involving what the scholar, at one point, aptly labels re-semanticization ("risemantizzazione") (146), a process of rewriting that engaged Benivieni throughout his long career. The quotation from Benivieni appropriately cited in the very title of Di Benedetto's book, "depurare le tenebre" (1500 edition, fol. 3r,

and discussed by Di Benedetto on page 71) indicates the need felt by the poet to explicate and re-interpret his poems, not only by providing a commentary, but also by rewriting the poems themselves, so that the true meaning could “emerge from the shadows.” In order to trace that poetic process, Di Benedetto applies his philological and palaeographical skills as he examines all the variants from the earliest extant youthful collections found in various manuscripts to the 1500 edition, and from the corrections made in Benivieni’s personal copy of the printed edition to the later version of it found in the Riccardiana manuscript, and even to the handwritten corrections inserted by the poet in the latter manuscript.

This excellent scholarly work on Benivieni, well organized and clearly written in flowing Italian prose, also boasts a solid apparatus: Di Benedetto substantiates his assessments throughout with long quotations from the poems as well as ample footnotes providing references to the poet’s sources, other critics’ views, and supporting frameworks such as Certeau’s theories on mystical language. A complete bibliography of manuscript and printed works, along with online sources, is found at the end of the book.

For readers interested in knowing more about Benivieni’s poetry, this volume could be supplemented with some key essays by Di Benedetto that have appeared elsewhere, such as the substantial 2018 article on the “Deploratoria” poem that is part of the Appendix of the 1500 edition but is only summarily described in the present study. Even without the additional material, Di Benedetto’s volume on its own represents a most significant contribution to Renaissance studies, not just for the interpretation of Benivieni that it offers but also as a model of scholarly methodology successfully providing an exhaustive and enlightening analysis of the structure and meaning of a complex prosimetrical composition published at the very midpoint of the Italian Renaissance in the year 1500.

OLGA ZORZI PUGLIESE

University of Toronto

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