



Amorum Libri: The Lyric Poems of Matteo Maria Boiardo by Matteo Maria Boiardo; Andrea di Tommaso

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Italica, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 409-411

Published by: [American Association of Teachers of Italian](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/480111>

Accessed: 24/04/2014 11:20

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pose. Ultimately he helps us see that the *Filocolo* reflects a teleology of desire: false desires are consistently redirected by Providence toward proper goals. To this he contrasts, in his final chapter, a work of Boccaccio's which owes much to the *Filocolo* and yet which reflects a world wherein desires are clearly not subject to divine influence: the *Decameron*. He concludes with a careful study of the *Decameron* stories V 6, X 4, and X 5, which derive from various episodes or *quistioni* of the *Filocolo*. Seen through the lens of the older work, these stories appear to reflect similar patterns of ambiguity, guile, desire, free will and the control of reason, despite their overall lack of the transcendent purpose which imbues the *Filocolo*. This approach allows him to postulate a palinodic function for the two novellas of the tenth day *vis-à-vis* certain novellas of the *Decameron*'s first nine days. In the end, we must note that this book on the *Filocolo* makes a substantial contribution to *Decameron* studies as well.

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Matteo Maria Boiardo. *Amorum Libri: The Lyric Poems of Matteo Maria Boiardo*. Trans. with introd. Andrea di Tommaso. Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 101. Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1993. Pp. x + 301.

Early in his preface, Andrea di Tommaso expresses the hope that the reader will come to his translation with the attitude of Petrarch toward Greek texts in translation: "So sharp is my hunger for great literature that like a starving man who needs no fancy cooking I shall welcome eagerly any sort of food for the spirit." This attitude, di Tommaso tells us, reflects the reader's ability to use the translation as a guide to see through to the original text. Yet I cannot help wondering if Petrarch's quotation is also meant to discreetly draw the reader's attention to the analogous situation between the scarcity of translations of Greek texts during several centuries and the five-hundred-year absence of a text in English which di Tommaso later notes "has often and deservedly been called the most important verse collection of the Italian quattrocento and the single best example of Italian lyric poetry in the Renaissance" (301). Indeed, if we in the English-speaking world do *not* approach Boiardo's text with the "hunger" of Petrarch, it only bespeaks the poverty of our own cultural interests.

This first appearance of the *Amorum Libri* in English after more than five hundred years did not occur in a vacuum but in the context of increasing knowledge of (and interest in) Boiardo on the part of American readers—a situation to which di Tommaso contributed as critic before taking on the role of translator. The volume provides a much needed accompaniment to the first English translation of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* in the bilingual edition of Charles S. Ross (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989). As di Tommaso aptly notes, "the *Amorum Libri* are to the *Orlando Innamorato* what Dante's *Vita Nova* is to the *Divine Comedy*: the microcosmic key to the elaboration of a macrocosmic history" (12). Yet the *Amorum Libri* is also worthy of study in its own right, as Claudia Micocci's recent volume shows in most convincing fashion (*Zanze e parole: Studi su Matteo Maria Boiardo* [Roma: Bulzoni, 1987]). Thanks to di Tommaso's translation, the *Amorum Libri* can now be read by non-Italianists interested in the greater context of Renaissance European verse. The publication is especially timely because it precedes by one year the quincennial of Boiardo's death, which will be commemorated by major conferences not only in Italy, but in English-speaking countries as well.

This first translation also has the advantage of being published in a bilingual edition with the Italian on facing pages. The Italian version closely follows the critical

edition of Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo (Bari: Laterza, 1964). (The minor revisions of this edition are explained on pp. 25–26.) Di Tommaso has adopted a blank verse translation with variations which he discusses in the preface. He has maintained the acrostics and the recurring end-words of the *sestina* (poem #115)—not an easy task, especially in the former case, since not only do the initial letters of the first fourteen poems spell the name of Antonia Caprara, but each verse of the fourteenth poem begins with a letter of the beloved's name as well. The translation is as a rule stylistically clear and readable, and yet generally avoids being overly mundane or prosaic. The following invocation to Love could serve as a representative sample:

Alto diletto che ralegri il mondo
e le tempeste e i venti fai restare,
l'erbe fiorite e fai tranquillo il mare,
ed a' mortali il cor lieto e iocondo. . . .

Ah sweet delight, who spread your joy on earth,
who soothe the winds and put great storms to rest,
who let the flowers bloom and seas grow calm,
and make the hearts of mortals brim with joy. . . . (#9)

The translator generally succeeds in maintaining the tone of the original, as in this metaphorical description of the precipitousness of the passions:

Qual capestro qual freno on qual catene,
qual forza tene el destrier ch'è già mosso
nel corso furioso, ed ha chi el sproni?

What rope, what rein, what links, what force can hold
the steed that has already set itself
upon a furious course, and is spurred on? (#33)

Although clarity of meaning systematically takes precedence over form, the poetic quality of the original is occasionally matched in the translation, as when “*Ampla beltade e summa ligiadria*” becomes “*Abounding beauty and unbounded grace*” (#14).

At times, however, the translation misses the mark, as in these examples: “*wanton pain*” for “*smsurato duol*” (#63); “*this unkind woman*” for “*questa crudel*” (#65); “*cheerful folks*” for “*zente lezadre*” (#145); “*A fool alone awaits another's aid*” for “*Fole è chi aiuto d'altra donna spera*” (#145). The reader would do well to consult the Italian whenever possible, not because di Tommaso is an unreliable guide, but because the English language simply does not have the flexibility of the Italian, and the translator is sometimes forced to compromise. For instance, Boiardo is able to retain the same word “*fera*” to refer to his lady even as the connotation becomes more negative, as though the emergent beast were hidden within the beloved all along. No English term, however, can match the polysemy of the original. Di Tommaso therefore translates Boiardo's “*fera*” as either “*fierce lady*,” “*creature*,” or “*beast*.” In this and other instances (e.g., “*cielo*” translated as both “*sky*” and “*heaven*” in poem #43, “*mercede*” as either “*mercy*” or “*favor*”), di Tommaso makes the wise choice: he allows himself to be guided by context and connotation in order to be true to meaning; the reader/interpreter should beware, however, that at times Boiardo repeats terms for effects that are not replicated in the English translation.

Aimed at the general reader unfamiliar with Boiardo, the introduction begins with a brief outline of his life and his place in the socioliterary scene of late Quattrocento Ferrara. Di Tommaso attributes the *Amorum Libri*'s absence from the official canon of Italian literature to the success of Bembo's program for the systematic Tuscanization of the written language which took place only a few decades after the completion of the *Amorum Libri*. (It is somewhat ironic, then, that the editor has chosen to set Boiardo's poems in a font type called Bembo.) This argument, advanced as well by

earlier scholars attempting to account for Boiardo's "sfortuna," has received convincing confirmation in a recent volume by Neil Harris (*Bibliografia dell'Orlando innamorato*, vol. 2 [Modena: Panini, 1991]). Incidentally, the same volume also corrects a misperception held by many and continued by di Tommaso that Domenichi belongs in the same category as Francesco Berni as a "rewriter" of the *Innamorato* (6–7). But rather than enter into a discussion of that tangential issue here, I would refer the interested reader to Harris's volume. The introduction then moves on to sections entitled "The Lady," "The Social Instrument," "Formalities," "The Poetics," and "The Text." The collection of poems ends with an index of first lines and a short bibliography.

The notes, conveniently placed after the individual poems, are kept to a bare minimum. They are usually clarifications of the text or explanations of mythological references. Assuming little or no knowledge of classical literature on the part of the reader, di Tommaso explains references to such figures as Circe, Medea, Ganymede, and Apollo. Occasionally the notes point out imitations of Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, and Petrarch or look ahead to later links to Boiardo's own *Innamorato* or, more rarely, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Admittedly, in order to place the notes after each poem rather than at the end of the volume, the translator would have to relinquish any attempt to be systematic or comprehensive. Nevertheless, additional useful information could sometimes have been provided with little space. For instance, di Tommaso's reference to Ariadne and Theseus (note to poem #92) could have directed the reader to the depiction of their tale on the walls of Morgana's cave in the *Innamorato*. And the note to poem #113, which cites Homer's *Odyssey* for the context of Boiardo's references to Ulysses and the siren, could have also referred the reader to the rewriting of the episode in the *Innamorato*'s Garden of Orgagna. I would also take issue with a few specific notes, such as the description of poem #39 as a Petrarchan vision poem and an example of ekphrasis, and the note to poem #117 which states that "like Petrarch's narrator, the poet here identifies his own suffering with that of Christ." But di Tommaso's stated premise regarding the general nature of his introduction could perhaps serve as an answer to any reservations about the sparseness of the notes: "an 'introduction' to the poetics of an author who is perhaps being read for the first time should orient the reader, but should not anticipate the revelations of the text itself" (19).

To conclude, this is without any doubt a much needed translation, consonant with the spirit of texts published by the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies. The translation itself is a more than adequate guide, and the Italian on facing pages allows for easy consultation of the original. The introduction is useful to the general reader and the brief explanatory notes are conveniently placed at the end of each poem. The volume itself is both sober and elegant, and is enhanced by illustrations of the incipit page of each of the three books of Boiardo's *canzoniere* from MS. It. IX, 545 from the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice.

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Paolo Viti. *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze: studi sulle lettere pubbliche e private*.
Roma: Bulzoni, 1993. Pp. xxii + 429.

Due eventi culturali di rilievo segnarono, nel 1987, la rinascita degli studi bruniani: uno, italiano, fu l'organizzazione del convegno tenutosi a Firenze dal 27 al 29 ottobre e dedicato a "Leonardo Bruni cancelliere della Repubblica di Firenze," i cui atti furono poi pubblicati per conto dell'Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento a cura di Paolo Viti (Firenze: Olschki, 1990); l'altro, americano, fu la pubblicazione, nella collana della Renaissance Society of America, del volume *The Humanism of*