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Rodney Lokaj

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Giannozzo Manetti. *Vite di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio*, a cura di Stefano U. Baldassari, Palermo: Sellerio 2003, Pp. 228, ISBN 88-389-1917-8, € 12.00.

The virtues of this tiny, yet elegant book are numerous and varied. The *Introduzione* by Baldassari is informed and informative in the tradition of Quattrocento studies (Burckhardt, Baron, Kristeller, Dionisotti, Garin, Trinkaus) and thus reflects *in nuce* the fine *Introduzione* introducing Baldassari's critical edition of the same text in the *I Tatti Renaissance Library* (Harvard University Press, 2003). The background information on Manetti himself and the milieu in which he grew and developed into a humanist are, however, somewhat cursorily traced together with the odd flaw. The parallel between Manetti and his Trecento models, Petrarch and Boccaccio, from the point of view of rebellion towards their respective fathers is instructive, but, in the case of Petrarch, it is also substantially misleading. It is true that Petrarch did not like the course in jurisprudence that his father had forced him to study at Bologna, but it is not true that Petrarch abandoned such study of his own accord. It was the untimely death of his father that cut short Petrarch's carefree days as a student à la mode and forced him to return to Provence. The parallel with Manetti is, therefore, not completely perfect. Though necessarily brief, in his *Introduzione* Baldassari might have, but does not, make the interesting parallel between the choice which Manetti makes to write, in one sole book — an absolute first for Italian humanism — about the lives of Florence's three most illustrious poets, on the one hand, and, on the other, his *Vita Socratis et Senecae*. Both sets of *Vitae* were written in the same year, 1440, and so a quick allusion to and explanation of the mental and cultural association that Manetti saw between these ancient philosophers might have proved illuminating for an understanding of his unprecedented choice to bind Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio together in one book as well.

Though drawing heavily (and inevitably) from the life of Manetti as told in an overtly laudatory manner by Manetti's own friend, Vespasiano da Bisticci, Baldassari does adopt, however, a critical stance concerning the fifteenth-century biographer. Manetti's prose, Baldassari points out, is not without certain repetitions, mistakes in both organisation and syntax, and long-windedness. Furthermore, despite the great novelty of the contents of his 1452 treatise *On the Dignity and Excellence of Man*, Manetti is also rather conservative and prefers the literary genre of biography. Indeed, this is the main strength of Baldassari's *Introduzione*. Setting Manetti's *Vitae* against the backdrop of such a literary tradition, Baldassari succinctly contextualizes them in a milieu in awe of the Greek epideictic tradition of parallel lives such as in the model offered by Plutarch and Helios Aristides' *Panathenaicus*. A city at war with its neighbours, as was Florence with Milan, would also sharpen its weapons by exalting the virtues of its citizens, past and present. Bruni's *Vite di Dante e di Petrarca* (1436) and Manetti's *Vitae trium illustrium poetarum florentinorum* are to be read in such a light of warring antagonism. The literary style of such weapon-sharpening would, however, also be the harbinger of the bombastic, somewhat laborious and repetitive style later adopted by a long line of academies founded during and after the High Renaissance.

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Baldassari's modern Italian text entirely respects Manetti's Latin text without, however, being a slavish translation. The surprisingly generous notes in such a small edition reflect the modern tendency in Italian philology, that is, to provide not only the references but also the texts so that readers may then begin their own reflection on Manetti's choices of cultural and linguistic models. Despite the odd misleading remark *passim*, though a reduction in size of the I Tatti edition, this tiny book has by no means been reduced in quality.

RODNEY LOKAJ UNIVERSITÀ DI PERUGIA