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Preview

The 48th volume in the steadily growing and renowned I Tatti Renaissance Library Series is a useful edition and translation of Lilio Gregorio Giraldi’s *Dialogi duo de poetis nostrorum temporum* by John N. Grant. In this work, consisting of two well-crafted dialogues, Giraldi (1479-1552) gives an overview of a great number of contemporary poets from Italy and the rest of Europe (mainly Latin, but also some of the vernacular poets are mentioned) in a form that Giraldi defines as a catalogue (*catalogus*). Over three hundred poets are mentioned and briefly described in no fewer than 107 pages of Latin text in the current edition. It will be easily understood that this makes not for very exciting reading, all the more since Giraldi’s language is very repetitive and the discussions of the poets are almost never accompanied by a specimen of their works. Therefore, Giraldi’s text has not much to offer for the general reader, but it is often used and cited by scholars of Renaissance literature, since it offers valuable information about the opinions on 15th- and 16th-century European poets in their own time and the circulation of their works, sometimes even on poets solely known from a mention in Giraldi’s work. Grant’s excellent edition, translation and notes will make the consultation and understanding of Giraldi’s work easier.

In accordance with the series format, Grant offers a succinct and factual introduction in which he discusses the life and works of Giraldi and comments in greater detail on the date(s) of composition, literary qualities and Latinity of the dialogues. All important information for the novice reader of this work has been included; expert readers will appreciate Grant’s discussion of the model for Giraldi’s work, Cicero’s *Brutus*, and his useful remarks on the peculiarities of Giraldi’s Latin.

The edition has been based, as is often the case in the I Tatti series, on the main Latin text of a recent critical edition from Italy (ed. Claudia Pandolfi (Ferrara: Corbo editore, 1999)), but Grant has also consulted the sources (two contemporary editions) and an earlier critical edition (ed. Wotke, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1894) for his edition. Moreover, Grant has emended the text at some places where he judged it necessary, most often to clarify incomprehensible grammatical constructions, which he considered as printing errors. He admits that this approach to the text may be tricky given Giraldi’s slightly distorted Latin and, indeed, it is not fully clear why some strange constructions are not emended, where others are. Yet, the Latin text that Grant offers is very readable and his few ‘emendations’ are always well accounted for. Furthermore, the edition is admirably free of typos and other mistakes.
The facing English translation is commendable for its accuracy and reads pleasantly. Grant has chosen to partly refrain from the repetitive language and superfluous constructions of Giraldi by varying the translation of often used Latin words and not always translating tautologic phrasings. However, in the case of the Latin word legere, probably the word used most often by Giraldi, which Grant does not always translate with ‘read’, this variation seems less felicitous, since it partly obliterates an important and remarkable aspect of the work: Giraldi’s discussion of the poets is not based on who is writing, but on who is being read, and being widely read is one of the most important parameters in the evaluation of the poets. An inevitable problem in translating a work discussing the writings of more than three hundred other authors is that, for a fully accurate translation, one would have to be an expert on all these, often obscure, poets. That this is impossible, even for the informed translator that Grant is, is for instance noticeable in I.68 (p. 48), where the poetry of Sulpizio da Veroli is touched upon. Here, Grant thinks that argumenta in Lucanum indicates Sulpizio’s ‘commentary on the poet Lucan’ (p. 49), but Giraldi, discussing Sulpizio’s poetry, surely meant the eleven lines that Sulpizio added to the abrupt ending of the Pharsalia (and possibly also his Querela de interitu poetae).

Arguably the most essential parts of an edition of an encyclopedic work like this are the notes and other contextualizing material, and Grant does an excellent job in providing these. The most useful is the extensive biographical glossary (pp. 251-344), in which short biographies with essential information and some bibliographical references (understandably, only reference works have been used for most entries) can be found for all poets who make their appearance in Giraldi’s work. In the notes, Grant provides other than biographical information that is necessary for understanding the text. The notes are factual and illuminating, but I would have preferred some more comments on the occasional literary strategies of the work (e.g. the sometimes occurring wordplays: Lippi/lippos (I.136-7 (p. 80)) and Portus/portu (I.173 (p. 98)), to name just two). In the notes too, Grant makes an occasional mistake in clarifying Giraldi’s sometimes obscure remarks about three-hundred-plus poets. For example, when the author of the work writes about two brothers of Johannes Secundus who also wrote poetry, he is not talking about Nicolaus Grudius and Everardus Nicolai (p. 246 n. 40), but about Nicolaus Grudius and Hadrianus Marius, who, together with their brother Johannes, became known as the tres fratres Belgae very early.

The volume is concluded by a useful index, which is very complete and will not only help in finding the poets discussed, but also in finding place names and literary genres. The only thing that could have been improved upon in my view is the bibliography, which would ideally list every scholarly contribution on Giraldi, but which, in fact, does not even list all recent literature on the edited work.

To conclude, Grant offers a very accessible and trustworthy new edition and translation of this important work for scholars of Renaissance poetry. Of course, this new edition in the I Tatti format does not answer all questions about Giraldi’s dialogues. Thus, one may wonder how Giraldi collected and used his source material: the author has obviously pillaged other books (and their title pages) at many places, sometimes noted by the editor (e.g. p. 227 n. 22), but more often not. A complete study of the uses of sources by Giraldi could offer new insights in the editions he consulted and thus in the circulation of prints in the sixteenth century. One also wonders about the social circumstances in which a work like this, which now seems rather boring to write and read, could function. A general study of this and similar catalogue-like works may open our eyes for the interplay of forces in the literary and social circles of
Renaissance Italy. This, however, is no criticism of the current edition, but an illustration of the fundament for further research that it will hopefully be.

Notes:

1. I have not been able to consult this work, since it is out-of-print and not readily available in libraries outside of Italy. This underscores the need for this new edition by Grant. The Latin text of Pandolfi’s edition is available at www.bibliotecaitaliana.it (unfortunately, this very useful website is currently down. Given the financial situation in (Italian) Academia, it can only be hoped that this is a temporary problem).

2. Of Grant’s emendations, I would question the following: * the addition of dicitur quod before legi in I.57 (p. 44): it is easier to read legitur instead of legi; * the correction of omni to omnis, based on the grammatical difference between suus and eius, seems too sophisticated given Giraldi’s Latinity.

3. I only noted the following typos and mistakes: * I.133 (p. 78): after caeci ambo et ambo, lippi seems to be necessary (as in the Leiden 1696 edition, and followed by Wotke); * I.159 (p. 90): read nonnumquam instead of nonnum quam; * II.30 (p. 124): read nobilissima ... familia instead of nobilissimus ... familia (the source text has the abbreviated form nobiliss.).

4. I noted the following mistakes in the translation: * I.11 (p. 22): ut in iis videretur voluisse has not been translated (but it could be considered redundant Latin); * I.43 (p. 38): ut sic dicam has not been translated; * I.144 (p. 84): dea translated as ‘god’ instead of ‘goddess’; * I.171 (p. 96): christiani has not been translated; - II.30 (p. 124): cum commentariis has not been translated; * II.88 (p. 156): Ultrix iniustae tertia caedis erit not ‘The third was the avenging goddess that brought unjust slaughter’, but ‘The third will be the avenger of the unjust slaughter’; * II.114 & II.144 (p. 172 & 192): the vocative Lili has not been translated; * II.174 (p. 208): solitus fuit has not been translated; * II.182 (p. 212): in hoc stadii curriculo has not been translated.

5. leguntur (I.I.102 (p. 62)) translated as ‘are written’; leguntur (I.176 (p. 100)) as ‘are’; leguntur (II.20 (p. 120)) as ‘is’; legissent (II.159 (p. 200)) as ‘saw’; legitur (II.180 (p. 212)) as ‘can be found’.