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review of: *Moretum*, Introduzione, testo, traduzione e commento a cura di Carmela Laudani, (Studi Latini, 52)
Loffredo editore, Napoli 2004;
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The *Moretum* is a charming poem in the *Appendix Vergiliana* about the poor farmer or daylabourer Simulus, who after getting up for another day of hard work, starts by preparing a sort of rustic pesto with much cheese, vegetables and loads of garlic. The 122 lines of the Latin poem picture this daily routine in great detail, thereby creating a deliberate contrast of polished, epic language and the rather unheroic existence of the countryman.

Several useful editions of the poem are available, notably that of E.J. Kenney (Bristol 1984), but the new edition by Laudani (L.) is a welcome addition. L. presents her readers with a sound Latin text, a facing Italian translation in prose (rather curiously printed line for line, as if it were poetry), a commentary (47 pages), a separate body of extensive notes on the text (15 pages) and a rich bibliography. The introduction (37 pages) deals with the structure of the poem, the intentions of the poet, and the constitution of the text, while some special attention is paid to the reception of the poem in Italian literature. According to L., the poet wishes to present a realistic view of country life and poverty, as a reaction to some more idealised views in Roman poetry. L. even suggests that the poet describes a reality he knew from personal experience (p.14-15).

In terms of literary theory, this seems dangerously close to a biographical approach. Perhaps accordingly, the notion of parody, that almost imposes itself on a modern reader of the poem, is rather downplayed: although the poet=s words are interpreted as a literary game, it appears to be a rather serious game with only little room for irony and wit. To give a telling example: in line 84 Simulus is said to eat lots of rocket, a herb well-known for its qualities as an aphrodisiac. One might explain this as a humorous allusion to Simulus= rich sexual life (his female servant Scybale is mentioned repeatedly), but L. tersely remarks that the herb may rather be part of Simulus= diet simply because it was easy to find. Earlier in the poem, Simulus wakes up in the dark and blindly reaches out in search of the hearth, *laesus quem denique sentit* (7). L. makes *laesus* rather prosaically refer to Simulus= burning his hand at the hot hearth. However, the humour of the scene might be that the poor farmer, as a proper anti-hero, bumps into a chair or stumbles over some other object before achieving his goal.

L.=s sense of irony may be not very outspoken in this book, her notes are, on the whole, informative and to the point, serving to explain the text rather than to illustrate the editor=s erudition. Many difficult turns in the text are briefly explained, while *Realien* of country life are duly clarified. This is of great help to the reader of the Latin poem. Matters of textual criticism are dealt with in another set of notes distinct from the explanatory and interpretative notes. Here, L. takes a >conservative= stand, defending readings of the MSS rather than conjectures, even where they are accepted by many. For example, she defends *fumus* in line 8, *dictas* in 97, and *vestem* in 9, instead of the more commonly accepted conjectures at those instances.

The new commentary will surely not be the last word about the interesting poem that is the *Moretum*. Notably its playful, literary qualities allow for some further research. But L. has certainly produced a helpful edition of the poem that will be of practical use to anyone who wishes to read it. The book can be recommended for both institutional and private libraries.