

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Soranzo, Matteo. Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples

James Nelson Novoa

Volume 37, numéro 3, été 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1090687ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v37i3.22487>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Novoa, J. (2014). Compte rendu de [Soranzo, Matteo. Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 37(3), 317–319. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v37i3.22487>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2015

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

speakers represent four different ways of growing old: Glycion is healthy and happy; Polygamos (much married), unstable and unhappy; Pampirus, even more unstable after a rambling life; and Eusebius, calm and dutiful. Skenazi also relates the study to Montaigne's "De l'expérience" and "De la vanité," with again much reporting of Foucault. I particularly like the suggestion that the A B C layers of Montaigne's text resemble the different strata of Rome's ruins (161).

Each chapter has a conclusion—that of chapter 4 charmingly relates Montaigne's views on aging to the process of aging Château d'Yquem wine—but, unsurprisingly, there is no general conclusion. I had no idea that the critical literature on aging was so abundant, but are the frequent references to it really essential? The constant recourse to Foucault also seems unnecessary; Skenazi's viewpoint is sufficiently interesting without all this support. Each of her chapters contains a lively assortment of material new to me, and her comparisons of very different authors constantly open up new perspectives; the book as a whole is a stimulating and instructive read.

BARBARA C. BOWEN
Vanderbilt University

Soranzo, Matteo.

Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples.

Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. viii, 169. ISBN 978-1-4724-1355-0 (hard-cover) £60.

Matteo Soranzo's book provides an original and welcome take on a series of texts from a specific period, the cultural world of Aragonese Naples. Though dealt with by historians such as Jeremy Bentley, Giuseppe Galasso, David Abulafia, Carlo de Frede, and Joana Barreto, and by scholars of literature such as Gianfranco Folena, Pasquale Sabbatino, and José Carlos Rovira, it remains a period largely neglected by scholars. Soranzo demonstrates a thorough knowledge of this unique cultural moment: an Iberian court established in Naples, intent on integrating itself as a veritable cultural and political power in the Italian peninsula, while maintaining ties with Aragon before its incorporation into the Spanish Empire as a viceroyalty in 1504. As such, the book is a must

read, as much for scholars of Neapolitan history as for those interested in neo-Latin literature and Italian studies.

In six chapters, drawn from articles he has already published and returned to, revisited, and reworked over the last few years, Soranzo displays a rare command of philological acumen, able to grapple with the complexities of the neo-Latin texts he deals with and original theoretical perspectives that rely on a host of authors. Though indebted to New Historicism in its identification of the social and historical contexts in which texts are produced, Soranzo refuses to be identified with any one school or approach. Instead, his approach is interdisciplinary, looking to history, sociolinguistics, and sociology. His fundamental concern is the relation between poetry and identity, examining poetic texts as manifestations of cultural identity, as texts that produce meaning through a system of codes. Thus Soranzo does not limit himself to the erudition of traditional philology but gives these texts a new lease on life, as exercises in rhetoric and the creation of self. As he writes, “Latin poetry was not the isolated *divertissement* of an erudite individual, but rather the result of the collaborative effort of an intellectual community, and also a practice charged with crucial social meaning” (3–4). The poetic works, in his view, are infused with a social meaning, intimately linked to their interactions with society.

Each chapter deals with different texts of two authors—Giovanni Pontano (1426–1503), the court poet, diplomat, and chancellor from the duchy of Spoleto and founder of the prestigious academy that bore his name, and Jacopo Sannazaro (1458–1530), the Neapolitan aristocrat and poet, Pontano’s intellectual heir—who show themselves to be closely linked to the elaboration of identity. Soranzo is concerned with the production of both men, the first who, as a foreigner, had to legitimate his presence and role in the Neapolitan society he chose to join, and the second who was born into it. Soranzo presents their poems as not simply lofty academic exercises with a view to flaunting erudition reserved for an elite group but intimately linked into a rhetorical strategy of self-construction.

The first chapter, “Latin at the Castle,” deals with the elaboration of Pontano’s *Parthenopeus* and the problem of the role of Latin in the context of Naples under the rule of the first Aragonese king, Alfonso the Magnanimous (1442–58), to whom Pontano was a trusted political and cultural counselor. Chapter 2, “Poetry and Patria,” provides a look at Pontano’s strategies for self-legitimation through his choices of poetical genres and models. The third

chapter, "Elegies for a Bride," takes up the elegiac poetry (*De amore coniugali*) that the poet from Umbria composed on his marriage to his wife, Adriana Sassone, a prominent Neapolitan aristocrat, a marriage that allowed him to fully become Neapolitan and ensconce himself as a legitimate cultural and political figure in the city. The poetry is seen as a calculated strategy to be able to interact with the worlds of Naples' aristocracy and its civic institutions, and is thus intimately linked to Pontano's own search for legitimacy in a host society that he could claim as his home. Chapter 4, "Pastoral Affiliations," studies Sannazaro's two elaborations of his pastoral poem in *volgare*, *Arcadia*, in the evolution of which Soranzo clearly sees the openness to Pontano and his cultural circle in addition to the Neapolitan poet's own personal involvement with the tumultuous years at court. Chapter 5, "Written in the Stars," deals with the question of astrology and in particular with Pontano's elaboration of a theory of poetic authority based on astrology as a means of assuring his own position and legitimacy—threatened as they were by the influence of Ficino, as evinced in his poem *Urania*. The last chapter, "The Cloud-Shrouded Tower," deals with Sannazaro's complex reception of Pontano's legacy, as revealed in his *De partu virginis*. Soranzo sees in the work the influence of the Neapolitan cultural circle centred on the Augustinian monastery of San Giovanni a Carbonara, of which the erudite Augustinian Giles of Viterbo was a member. Sannazaro's embrace of the New Testament theme and his outward submission to papal authority (which he flaunted) suggest a spiritual transformation that, according to Soranzo, cannot but be seen as a final refutation of his master, Pontano's, teachings.

In choosing to deal with the two towering poetical and cultural figures from a period spanning the consolidation of Aragonese rule to its conclusion, Soranzo sheds new light on the work of both men and the complex society in which it was produced. *Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples* takes into account the interplay between its two topics, poetry and identity—an interplay that is constantly at work in the Naples of the second half of the Quattrocento. Soranzo's masterful book is of interest not only to scholars of Naples but as an original exercise in the study of the relationship between artistic creation and the elaboration of identity. As such, it is a valid contribution to literary theory.