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Francesco Borghesi, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Lettere. Studi pichiani, 19. **Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2018. Pp. xii, 190. ISBN 9788822265746. €26,00.**

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One of the most peculiar aspects of the intellectual era that we commonly define “Renaissance” or, with a more appropriate geographic overtone, “Western Renaissance”, was the revival of the classical epistolary genre. Private correspondence among the literati of the 15th and 16th centuries became the object of profound interest for both their style and content. Not that in previous periods letter exchanges did not exist or did not exert an influence on the development of contemporary intellectual trends. However, it was with Petrarch (1304-1374) that scholars began to adopt a more refined language (especially Latin) in their correspondences, creating a nonfictional prose whose ultimate goal was to represent the writer’s personality as he or she wished to be seen. From that point on, intellectuals drew inspiration for their epistles from ancient classical authors and included both doctrinal themes and detailed descriptions of their daily life in this literary production which was mainly composed with an intended readership far larger than the nominal addressee.

In their letters authors could display their vast knowledge, at the same time revealing their passions, sentiments, and adhesion to the highest moral values of their time. This is why letter collections are so important for us because they allow us to learn about the most personal aspects of the humanists’ lives, all the more so when on their basis we are able to reconstruct the chronological development of the writers’ psychology and attitudes toward contemporary trends in education and intellectual knowledge.

Many letter collections were edited for publication by the authors themselves, while in other cases they were arranged by external editors, who might be more or less close to the writers in terms of scholarly attitudes or rhetorical patterns. In both cases, the revision process that took place years after the original writing of a document often altered the meaning and situation that had triggered its composition.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s (1463-1494) letters were collected for the 1496 Bologna edition by Pico’s nephew, Giovan Francesco (1469-1533), who undoubtedly intended the publication to enhance his uncle’s intellectual prestige after his sudden and premature death in 1494. Giovan Francesco’s praise of Giovanni’s learning and moral behavior meant to redeem him from all accusations leveled at him during his life. In order to build a sort of myth around his cultured relative, Giovan Francesco highlighted his uncle’s choice of a religious segregation from mundane affairs. It was probably with this goal in mind that Giovan Francesco made his selection from Giovanni’s handwritten material to publish. Besides this “hagiographic intention”, Giovan Francesco constructed his uncle’s correspondence according to the intellectual motifs that animated the cultural life of his own generation, when pietistic elements played a major role, under the strong impact of Girolamo Savonarola’s preaching. The

Dominican friar (1452-1498), who was partly responsible for Giovanni Pico's deeply religious attitude in the very last years of his life, was known for his anti-intellectual zeal and continued to be held in high esteem both in the Florentine milieu where Pico had spent a significant part of his life and in Northern Italian scholarly centers.

For his edition of Giovanni Pico's letters, Francesco Borghesi (University of Sydney) had to take all this into account: he had to highlight the humanist dimension of the writer's education, the reasons that made the first editor of Pico's letters select some documents instead of others, and, in addition, the extraordinary abundance of modern editions of Pico's correspondence and the scholarly weight such outstanding editors still exert on present-day academia. In particular, Eugenio Garin, one of the main contemporary investigators of Pico's thought and possibly the most responsible for Pico's renaissance in the 20th century, had already remarked on the importance of the humanist's letters in the introduction to his 1942 edition of Pico's works (*De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*. Firenze: Vallecchi). There Garin observed that "Pico's letters, except for the ones addressed to Lorenzo (the Magnificent)... to (Ermolao) Barbaro... and to Giovan Francesco... are not especially relevant for intellectual history, though they are very important for better understanding the author's biography and, in more general terms, the spiritual life of his epoch" (pp. 46-47). Garin classifies the letters of Pico according to addressees and contents, thus guiding the reader in the interpretation of Pico's scholarly achievements: by so doing Pico emerges totally purified from the hagiographic re-reading superimposed by Giovan Francesco.

More recently Francesco Bausi studied and made critical editions of two of the longest letters of Pico's collection – the one addressed to Lorenzo and the most famous of his letters, the one to Ermolao Barbaro. Bausi has also published a digital edition of all of Pico's letters, thus taking the corpus of the humanist's letters to 121 documents (including the letters by Pico and those sent to him): however, in the digital publication there was no apparatus.

Borghesi's edition takes its start from such impressive literature and aims to solve questions that are still debated by scholars. To achieve this, the author carries out a detailed analysis of both the manuscript and the print tradition of Pico's letters: he especially focuses on Vatican Ms. Capponi 235 (meticulously described in the volume by Maria Agata Pincelli), and on the 1496 Bologna printed edition. He then proceeds to a careful survey of the modern and contemporary scholarly literature that has dealt with Pico's correspondence. The second and third part of the volume contains the critical edition of 74 Latin and Italian letters by Giovanni Pico.

A summary of the contents of the single documents with an index of their subjects might have been helpful to the reader who, in my opinion, would better understand the exact chronology of the composition of the letters if there were a chronological table: these tools might have clarified the relations between the author's life and the contents of the documents, all the more so since the editor decided not to publish the responses to Pico's letters. Some minor typos (also in the Latin text of the epistles) do not undermine the extremely significant work carried out by Borghesi.

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