



1991

Review Essay: Leon Battista Alberti, *Dinner Pieces: A Translation of the Intercenales*

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Recommended Citation

Blanchard, W. Scott (1991) "Review Essay: Leon Battista Alberti, *Dinner Pieces: A Translation of the Intercenales*," *Quidditas*: Vol. 12 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rmmra/vol12/iss1/23>

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significant conclusions about the influence of the question of the virtuous pagan on the literary art of the later Middle Ages. What different impulses are apparent in the folklore and in structured works like *Piers Plowman*? How did the question of the virtuous pagan play into some of the anonymous accounts of the Harrowing? Where did it appear in the sermon literature that might have popularized the question? In short, this study is only a preliminary step; deeper, more penetrating studies are needed to examine the place of the virtuous pagan in Middle English literature beyond the boundaries Vitto has set.

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RENAISSANCE

Leon Battista Alberti, *Dinner Pieces: A Translation of the Intercenales*, trans. and ed. David Marsh, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies and The Renaissance Society of America, 1987, ix, 268 pp., ill., biblio., index, \$20.00.

Leon Battista Alberti's writings have always commanded a central place in the history of Italian Renaissance art and architecture, but Alberti, whom Jacob Burckhardt more than a century ago proposed as a prototype for the "universal man" of the Renaissance, has in recent years emerged as a central figure in literary studies as well. Though we still lack an English translation of his important political satire, the *Momus*, David Marsh's new translation of his short satires, which Alberti in his autobiography described as "dinner pieces" to "be read over dinner and drinks," goes far in recovering for English readers his reputation as a satirist and moralist. Marsh's skill as a translator is evident throughout. He has performed great service to Renaissance studies in assembling a manuscript tradition that is not without some confusion, providing what is without question a definitive edition of the *Intercenales* works.

Dinner Pieces shows the influence of Lucian's satires in a number of places, making Alberti an important early proponent of the tradition of Menippean satire that would flourish in the sixteenth century, but they also reveal some debts to the fables of Aesop, a genre Renaissance humanists referred to as the apologue. Two of the satires, "The Slave" and "The Deceased," included orations that might be most accurately considered in the tradition of the mock or paradoxical encomium, praising, respectively, the condition of servitude and the superiority of death to life. A rhetorical genre often classed with Menippean satire

by humanists, the mock encomium would also become a favorite form in the repertoire of later humanists, and Alberti's revival of the form is again a mark of his importance as a literary tastemaker. Because Alberti's satires became available in printed editions only in the nineteenth century, we may never be able to assess explicitly the influence of Alberti on other writers of Menippean satires, such as Pontano, Erasmus, Rabelais, and Calcagnini (who also wrote a handful of apologues), but given the fairly extensive manuscript transmission some of them enjoyed, and Ariosto's use of the satire entitled "The Dream," we can assume a certain measure of influence on later writers. Many of the *Intercenales* seem quite close in sensibility to Erasmus's *Colloquies* (one of them, "The Shipwreck," shares a common title). Marsh's edition will no doubt prove fruitful for future scholars of Renaissance satire.

But there is material of interest here for other scholars as well. Intellectual historians will find an interesting blend of both stoical and cynical moral positions taken in many of the satires, and early anticipation, perhaps, of the more troubling strains of skepticism that emerged in the later Quattrocento. Alberti's dialectic of *fortuna* and *virtù* ("The Deceased"), with which readers of the *Momus* are already familiar, may interest political historians in its anticipation of Machiavelli. Book 10 in particular will be of interest to this last group. Though Marsh sees Alberti as being conservative in his remarks about revolution ("The Temple"), I sensed a deeper ambivalence in the author, and Alberti's comments on tyrants in the allegorical fable "The Lake" make clear his sentiments about despotism in the fifteenth century. *Dinner Pieces* also contains materials that will interest art historians, such as the allegorical program described in "Paintings."

This handsome and relatively inexpensive volume is not without its tiresome moments—no fault of the translator—but it will prove valuable for years to come.

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Tom Scott, *Thomas Muntzer: Theology and Revolution in the German Reformation*, Macmillan, 1989, xix, 203 pp., ill., biblio., index, \$29.95.

Thomas Muntzer has long been an important figure in the research of Marxist historians and those interested in early modern revolutionary movements. In recent years, numerous studies have appeared examining different aspects of the reformer's career. Interest was also evident in the years 1989 and 1990, which commemorated the approximate 500-year anniversary of the reformer's birth.