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Sergio Audano, *Classici lettori di classici. Da Virgilio a Marguerite Yourcenar. Echo, 8. Foggia: Edizioni Il Castello, 2012. Pp. 314. ISBN 9788865720806. €20.00 (pb).*

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This book by Sergio Audano brings together six essays and three short notes [“note di lettura”] concerning the reception of Classical literature from a number of perspectives. It is the eighth volume of the series *Echo* (Collana di studi e commenti diretta da Giovanni Cipriani). According to the author’s words, a number of the papers here included had been formerly published and are now the subject of a more thorough review.

The topics developed throughout the different chapters are manifold and varied, but all of them may be said to deal with the fortune (or misfortune) of classical texts in their journey through the highs and lows of Western history, considering the ways in which they have been read and, sometimes, misread, in order to favour certain trending ideologies or individual interests prevalent in those times. From the single Virgilian verse that departs from its original context and travels in the shape of a *sententia*, up to the usage of the imperial myth of Rome to support the fascist interwar discourse, every chapter of this book contains a little story in which literature is not merely a subject, but rather the main character performing an active role.

The first chapter focuses on the interpretation and reception of a well-known verse of Virgil: *inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artis* (*Aen.* 6.663), a tribute to artists — in a wider sense of the word — as those talented men who contribute with their creativity to ennoble the human condition. As the interpretation of the statement does lend itself to difficulty (for the deified status of artists suggested by this passage does not easily harmonize with Virgil’s mind), Audano provides in the first part of this chapter an important number of parallel contexts (from Cicero, Lucretius, and Virgil’s *Georgics*), shedding light on some hidden intertextual dialogues that help to clarify such a puzzling question. Moreover, the exposition highlights some of the salient points in terms of the historical reception of this verse, from Seneca and Silius Italicus to Dante and Petrarch. A short note concerning its use in the Nobel Prizes’ motto brings the chapter to a close.

The second chapter also follows the journey of a single verse extracted from its original place and spread as an isolated sentence: *vincet amor patriae laudumque immensa cupido* (*Aen.* 6.823). As Audano states, the verse centres around an issue — Brutus’ parricide and the establishment of Roman Republic — that becomes a matter of historical judgment so that the history of the interpretation of this passage moves necessarily together with the ideologies employed in every case to facilitate support.

The third chapter of Audano's book continues the second one, attending to some of the most important names involved in this historical process of exegesis: Augustine, Thomas, Machiavelli, Bartoli and Alfieri.

Chapter four is devoted solely to Massimo d'Azeglio's (1798-1866) memories, *I miei ricordi*, an autobiographical work that gives rise to a wide range of moral considerations and political reflections concerning the new concept of Italy. Audano undertakes an analytical approach to different passages of d'Azeglio's notes, focusing on the discussion of the view of the 'Classic' in catholic education and the role of ancient Rome from the standpoint and mindset of a politician and committed intellectual, growing up in the midst of European developments centred on nationalism of that era.

Moving forward again in time, chapter five studies the work of the Jewish-Italian writer Carlo Levi, a notorious opponent of Mussolini's regime condemned to live in exile in a small village in southern Italy. Audano's detailed analysis of Levi's main work, *Christo si è fermato a Eboli*, shows with clarity how the writer uses the Virgilian background to exemplify an anti-myth of Rome. Thus, against the political appropriation of the imperial history of Rome, as well as its mythical apparatus, by the supporters of Mussolini's government, Levi emphasizes the stranger condition of the Trojan hero — a foreign conqueror, an invader — and defends the local *Volksgeist* of the southern villagers as the only heirs of authentic Italy, in opposition to the fascist imperialist speech grounded on the legend of Aeneas and the hegemony of Rome within the Augustan period.

Chapter six returns to comparative literature, and traces the vestiges of Heraclitus' philosophy in the pages of Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien*. Audano portrays a splendid analysis of the complex intertextual relationships between the French novelist and the Greek philosopher, in the middle of which stands the figure — from both historical and fictional perspectives — of the Roman emperor. The picture is completed by the addition of the Stoic tradition and its reading of the Heraclitean legacy in the times of Hadrian, a reception phenomenon of which Yourcenar, a declared admirer of Zeno's philosophy, was certainly aware.

Three minor reading notes close the book, all somehow related to consolatory literature, Audano's favorite theme. All three exhibit an intelligent exercise of comparison for the better understanding of these texts and are definitely worth reading. The volume includes a general bibliography followed by an *index locorum*. A number of inaccurate references within the index are then corrected by the author through the means of an errata note.

The pages of *Classici lettori de classici* are an invitation to experience immersion into the inner dialogue established by literature across time. The informed reader will find an erudite analysis of sources and an intense approach to the use of the quotation and its values in the construction of literary identities. The reader, in turn, will discover a window through which appear the numerous relations that flourish between texts from different periods and trends. For literature is but one single stream in which the many voices of those who have ever taken part never fade to silence.

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