Michele Cataudella, Milena Montanile e Maria Luisa Nevola. *Letteratura e cultura a Napoli nell'età aragonese*. Salerno: Gentile, 1991. Pp. 157.

The chief aim of the Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento meridionale, under the direction of Michele Cataudella, is to correct a traditional view that the Renaissance in Italy was principally a Tuscan phenomenon. Ironically, this concept has been promulgated by two of the greatest southern Italian critics, as Cataudella has stated: "Per De Sanctis il Rinascimento si concretizzava unicamente in Poliziano, Ariosto e Machiavelli, e per Croce il Rinascimento era configurabile in un imprecisato periodo culturale valido per i caratteri comuni nazionali" (11).

The fresh approach to the Southern Renaissance encouraged by the Istituto is the basis for this volume which offers a critical introduction to and a representative anthology of texts in both the "volgare aragonese" and Italian.

The volume is introduced by its (general) editor, Cataudella, who describes in an interesting way the history and culture of Naples in the Aragonese period (1442, Alfonso V d'Aragona - 1501, Federico I), a brief yet important era of artistic flourishing: "... in sostanza l'età aragonese durò appena circa mezzo secolo epperò incise fortemente nella storia culturale di Napoli e del suo regno, e determinò caratteri autonomi suoi propri e chiaramente riconoscibili, determinando assieme all'autonomia dinastica un'autonomia culturale notevole" (8).

Indeed, it was in 1465 that King Fernando I (Ferrante) re-opened the Studio napoletano as a state institution in order to provide the southern intelligentsia with an academy or centre for higher education. The focus of the volume, however, is the presentation of the literary production of the period — the prose and poetry of authors such as Masuccio Salernitano, Francesco Del Toppo and Pier Jacopo De Jennaro as well as the theatre of Pietro Antonio Caracciolo and Giosuè Capasso. The essays on the various "letterati" are an ideal starting point for further research in this less explored area of the Italian Renaissance and are complemented by the anthology that follows. Thus we discover two distinct currents in Aragonese cultural life: the literature in the Aragonese vernacular which is completely autonomous of the contemporary Tuscan model and, at the same time, the restoration of the Studio and consequent flowering of the *studia humanitatis* that promoted philological research.

Thus there emerges a portrait of the southern Renaissance that highlights its distinct character and links it to the political reality of the city. The environment was "... anti-academico e antipedantesco e fondamentalmente legato all'esperienza pragmatica che di necessità riflette, nel discorso politico come in quello etico o pedagogico o finanche filosofico, i caratteri e l'ideologia della corte monarchica" (10). This new view of the richness of the southern Renaissance promoted by Cataudella and the Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento meridionale will undoubtedly encourage further study of this period and lead to new and more accurate assessments of its value.

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