The Case for Lorenzo's Authorship of the *Epistola a Federico d'Aragona*

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The *Raccolta Aragonesa*, often considered the first anthology of Italian poetry, was sent by Lorenzo de' Medici to Frederic of Aragon, probably in 1476. The collection was accompanied by an *Epistola* which both introduces and comments upon the vernacular poetic tradition. Like several other works associated with the name of Lorenzo, they present the critic with immediate problems; in the case of the *Raccolta* and the *Epistola*, the most serious of these is the question of attribution. Although they were sent to Frederic *in nome di Lorenzo*, no autograph manuscript is known, and it has frequently been suggested that both the *Raccolta* and the *Epistola* are the work of another hand, perhaps that of Poliziano.

Because of the singular importance of these works, the question of their attribution is of far-reaching significance, especially as Lorenzo's own poetic production, as well as the extent of his involvement in the literary life of his time, remain difficult to assess. It is generally agreed that the *Raccolta* itself, in its selection of poems, reflects Lorenzo's poetic preference, and that the *Epistola* similarly reflects his general ideas; to consider them merely as evidence of his literary attitudes, as Bigi wrote, "non importa troppo in questo momento stabilire se l'*Epistola* sia stata stesa da Lorenzo stesso, o, com'è più probabile, con la collaborazione, almeno, dal Poliziano." However, the importance of the *Epistola* in its detail is more fundamental. It is no simple "cover letter" to introduce the collection of poems to its distinguished addressee, but rather an assessment of vernacular poetry which has merited the description of "primo documento, dopo il *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, di storia critica della nostra antica poesia." Furthermore, as a theoretical work, it demonstrates that the choice and grouping of the poems in the *Raccolta* "corrispondono ad un gusto e ad un criterio ben consapevoli." The question of attribution thus assumes major importance for the study of Lorenzo's own work. His contributions to the ascendancy of the vernacular have often been noted, with regard to his own use of it for all of his literary works, and to his patronage and active encouragement of vernacular writers. If in fact he authored the *Epistola*, we should have to attribute to him, along with that letter, the role of sensitive and deliberate critic, whose own choice and patronage, as well as his poetic direction, were determined by reasons both philosophical and aesthetic.

The authorship of the *Epistola* has been denied Lorenzo on largely negative grounds. Because of its style and erudition and the range of its interests, some have assumed without further consideration that Lorenzo could not have composed it. The fact that one contemporary codex lists Poliziano as author has set scholars on the trail of that poet, finding both ideas and stylistic traits in common with his other works. Barbi calls attention to the classical references in the *Epistola*, and especially "alla costruzione e alla connessione dei periodi, alla compostezza e alla dirittura del ragionamento, alla fiorita eloquenza." Cotton adds elements of Poliziano's *Nutricia* and *Ambra*, concluding that "questi contatti e somiglianze di pensiero, insieme agli altri paralleli già notati dal Barbi, paiono render certa l'attribuzione dell'*Epistola* a Poliziano." Both Santoro, through stylistic analysis of Poliziano's works, and Bigi, through an examination of the poet's
critical attitudes, conclude in favor of Poliziano's authorship. Ida Maier asserts that "si le choix des textes semble plus conforme au goût poétique de Laurent, la justification même de ce goût, qui est exposée dans l'épître liminaire, révèle à chaque instant la plume et la forme d'esprit de Politien." Nor, of course, would it be unusual to find Poliziano drawing up a letter to be sent in nome di Lorenzo; he served for a time as Medici cancelliere during this period, and both he and other members of the Medici circle frequently drafted letters for Lorenzo.

It must be readily acknowledged, then, that the attribution to Poliziano is not implausible. It is, nonetheless, not yet definitively established. Some scholars have urged caution in accepting it, in particular because of its probable date and because the Raccolta contains no example of Poliziano's own poetry, which he was composing in the vernacular in 1476. In any case, its importance is such that the attribution to Poliziano or to any other, however plausible, should not be accepted without careful consideration of the possibility of Lorenzo's own authorship. The arguments favoring Poliziano as author of the Epistola having been primarily of two types, that the work is consistent with what is known of his ideas and interests, and that it presents similarities to others of his works, these same two areas of investigation may aid in the assessment of Lorenzo's claims to authorship.

The place of importance accorded both the Raccolta and the Epistola in the history of Italian letters is based on their presentation and defense of vernacular poetry. They were composed in the century immediately following that of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio; but in the brief period after the death of these "tre corone," the apparent triumph of the vernacular had been seriously questioned. Concerning the fate of the volgare as a literary language, De Robertis notes "la sua validità, la sua stessa esistenza rimesse in forse. La grande eredità appare dispersa, abbandonata in mani oscure." Yet by the end of the fifteenth century, the "Questione della lingua" had again received an answer in favor of the vernacular, and the period when this linguistic crisis was resolved coincides in large part with that of Lorenzo's life. The lasting importance of his contribution during this critical phase is generally acknowledged; as Maier explains, "l'influence de Laurent sur ses amis joue, à propos du 'problème de la langue,' d'une façon déterminante." In considering the authorship of the Epistola, however, it is the motivation for this contribution which concerns us, as some have suggested that Lorenzo's sponsorship of the volgare was superficial, or even dictated largely by political concerns. The letter clearly appears within its literary context as a "profession de foi," and "comme le manifeste de l'école poétique renaissante; thus it is important to determine whether such attitudes are consistent with Lorenzo's literary position.

Lorenzo's preference for the vernacular was prepared from early childhood. In the house of his grandfather Cosimo he was on familiar terms with men who knew and appreciated its masterpieces, such as his first preceptor, Gentile Becchi, who communicated his love for Dante especially, while providing a solid classical education. Probably even more influential in the formation of the young Medici's taste were three other intimates of the Medici household: Luigi Pulci, who had a major role in the literary direction of Lorenzo's brigata; Cristotoro Landino, whose courses at the Studio Lorenzo probably followed from 1458; and Marsilio Ficino. The literary
attitudes of these men, so different in other respects, combined to develop in Lorenzo an interest in the expressive potential of the vernacular, while the influence of the latter two is directly visible in the Epistola: Landino's in his concept of the naufragio of culture resulting from the neglect of letters and in other details from the Orazione on Petrarch, and Ficino's in his appreciation of the poetry of Cavalcanti within the Neoplatonic framework.

Thus the general attitude of the Epistola with regard to the vernacular is entirely consistent with Lorenzo's early studies and experience. To approach the attribution more directly, however, it is necessary to examine the work in detail. Although the Raccolta was ostensibly put together to comply with a specific request by Frederic concerning vernacular poetry, almost half of the accompanying Epistola develops the general theme of the relationship between "li leggiadri ed alteri fatti" (p. 3) and poetry in general, and only then begins its presentation and assessment of vernacular verse. While the latter section is that generally discussed with regard to the Epistola, the ideas developed in the first section are of at least equal interest for the question of authorship.

In the introductory section, the author explores the relationship between greatness, fame and letters in "ancient times," and asserts that one of the greatest merits of those glorious days was "che nessuna illustre et vertuosa opera nè di mano nè d'ingegno si puote immaginare, alla quale in quella età non fussino e in publico e in privato grandissimi premi e nobilissimi ornamenti apparecchianti. Imperocchè, si come dal mare Oceano tutti li fiumi e fonti si dice aver principio, così da quest'una egregia consuetudine tutti i famosi fatti e le maravigliose opere degli antichi uomini s'intende esser derivato" (p. 3). Both the Greeks and the Romans celebrated high achievement in a variety of ways, because they recognized that the praise of greatness inspires mortals to greatness. And in turn, these great men naturally loved those who could immortalize "i valorosi e chiari fatti delli uomini eccellenti con la virtù del poetico stile" (p. 4). It was Homer who assured the fame of Achilles; for without him, "una medesima sepultura il corpo e la fama di Achille averebbe ricoperto" (p. 4).

This valuation of the poet as he who assures the fame of greatness, and the valuation of poetry as that which in its turn, by promising the immortality of fame, inspires to greatness, has a familiar ring; Petrarch, for one, had stressed it a century earlier, and as Maier points out, "dans l'apologie de l'antiquité qui récompensait et les héros et leurs poètes, c'est toute la pensée de Pétrarque humaniste qui est à la source du développement." The derivations are varied and striking; both the basic argument and a number of minor points are heavily indebted to Petrarch's works. The praise of those who "non saranno mai sanza fama, se l'universo pria non si dissolve" is a direct citation from "il nostro toscano poeta" (p. 4). The next step too, the praise of the poet who immortalizes these great men, begins with a paraphrase of Petrarch's verses on Alexander at the tomb of Achilles and includes the famous verses, "Oh fortunato che si chiara tromba/ trovasti, e chi di te si alto scrisse," (p. 4) this time without attribution. In the second section, Petrarch is again acknowledged, and not only as one of the two great poets who first demonstrated the worthiness of the volgare: one of his Latin letters is cited in asserting the use of rhyme among the ancient Romans (p. 6).
But in the *Epistola* this praise of hero and poet acquires an additional element. If it is true that the fame of Achilles would not have survived without a Homer, it is also true that the poems of Homer would not have survived without the aid of an enlightened prince, Pisistratus of Athens, who had the poet's works collected and preserved: "E sì come a quello dette perpetua vita, cosi lui a se stesso immortal gloria e clarissimo splendore acquistonne" (p. 4). Glory inspires men to great deeds, the poet keeps their fame alive, and now a third element in the sequence, the enlightened ruler, preserves the work of the poet.

The author of the *Epistola* then links his argument concerning the ancient times to the present, effecting a transition to his discussion of the state of vernacular letters. After the great period of antiquity there followed one in which rewards for great deeds were lacking, and with them greatness was lacking too; this in turn caused the poets to be neglected, and for this reason many of the great classical authors are lost to us. However, even in the midst of this general "nausfragio," there were many poets, "li quali primi il diserto campo della toscana lingua cominciorono a cultivare in guisa tale, che in questi nostri secoli tutta di fiorreti e d'erba è rivestita" (p. 5). The analogy carefully prepared in the introductory section becomes clear at this point: as the Athenian prince honored Homer, so the Renaissance prince honors these, his own outstanding poets.

To Maier, noting that the example of Pisistratus applies naturally both to Lorenzo who is collecting the works of the Tuscan poets and to Frederic who is thus indirectly solicited to honor and protect them, "l'idée même prouve, mieux que tout autre, que l'auteur de la lettre ne pouvait être que Politien." The question of patronage was of course one of major importance to Poliziano; furthermore, there is the fact that in his own *Prefatio in Homerum* Poliziano refers specifically to Pisistratus as the collector of Homer's works. To emphasize this aspect of patronage, however, is to ignore the stress of the presentation in the *Epistola*. Petrarch himself had in fact named Pisistratus as a collector of books (*Epist. fam.* 1601). But the author of the *Epistola* does not praise Pisistratus merely as a defender of letters; the prince is praised because the defense of letters is useful. The final exclamation of the section, which includes in its reference the hero, the poet, and now the ruler, is "Oh veramente divini uomini, e per utilità degli uomini al mondo nati!" (p. 4), and the key word is clearly *utilità*. This emphasis accords too well with Lorenzo's own interests, particularly with his conception of the role of ruler-patron, to be easily dismissed. Recent studies reassessing the development of vernacular humanism have established both its depth and its influence, and there is no doubt that Lorenzo's own thinking was profoundly influenced by central figures in this movement, particularly by Landino and Alberti. In Alberti, as Cardini has recently said, "la scelta del volgare quando si voglia stabilire un organico e diretto rapporto con 'tutti e' cittadini', è così decisa in nome di un'originale e più profonda imitazione-emulazione dei classici fondata sulla analogia di funzione civile dei moderni con gli antichi scrittori." The stress on the civic function of language, an integral part of vernacular humanism, has important implications for the evaluation of Lorenzo's involvement in the literary life of his time.

In fact, the author of the *Epistola* may well have had in mind the specific efforts to connect the *volgare* with civic enlightenment already associated with the Medici name. Among the praiseworthy customs of the past, he notes particularly "il poetico
ed oratorio certame.” (p. 3). Cotton sees in this reference another indication of Poliziano's authorship: “È notevole, dato che nel 1480 il Poliziano iniziò i suoi corsi nello Studio fiorentino discorrendo delle Institutiones oratoriae di Quintiliano e delle Sylvae di Stazio.” But we may also suspect here a reference to another certame coronario, that which Alberti, with the support and financial backing of Piero de' Medici, had attempted to transplant to Florentine soil a few years before Lorenzo's birth. The set theme for the competition was classical, as was the laurel crown forged of silver for the victor. This effort, although abortive, was effective in focusing attention on the volgare and its claims. Alberti obviously hoped to gain for the certame the prestige of the reminiscences of imperial Rome where such contests were a matter of intense public pride, promoting the competition as “istituzione ottima, utile al nome e dignità della patria, atta a esercitare preclarissimi ingegni, accomodata a ogni culto di buoni costumi e di virtù.” Precisely as in the Epistola, the encouragement of poetry is defended within the widest civic context.

Still considering the Epistola within its context, we may suspect in the lament for lost manuscripts an indirect reference to the great efforts made under Cosimo's sponsorship to collect, edit and preserve major classical texts. Although the Medici name is never mentioned at this point in the letter, by the date of the Epistola these efforts were receiving wide acclaim throughout Italy and abroad. The Epistola tells us that men during the post-heroic period allowed “la dolorosa perdita di tanti e si mirabili greci e latini scrittori con nostro grandissimo danno intervenuta” precisely because they were themselves without virtue and merit, and therefore could not appreciate the great writers who celebrated great deeds: “non facendo gli uomini alcuna cosa laudabile, ancora questi sacri laudatori hanno al tutto disprezzi” (p. 5).

The implication, especially as the Epistola is written to accompany and recommend a collection of poetry, is that, with the advent of Medici rule, the period of “naufragio” was drawing to an end. This hint of a new age of both great deeds and great poetry, a new “età di oro,” appears repeatedly in Florentine art and literature of the period of Lorenzo's youth, as does the suggestion that Lorenzo, “Lauro,” in his multiple role of prince-poet-patron, is at its center.

The second section of the Epistola is that which merits Simioni's description of “il primo documento, dopo il De Vulgari Eloquentia, di storia critica della nostra antica poesia.” Although this critical effort applied to the volgare is itself new, it is particularly noteworthy for its appreciation of one aspect of the vernacular poetic tradition, that of the Dolce Stil Nuovo. This emphasis is in proportion to the actual composition of the Raccolta, where stilnovistic poems predominate. Bigi points out that here “l'inizio tuttavia di una precisa valutazione dello stilnovismo come fenomeno letterario dotato di propri caratteri, si coglie soltanto, e non a caso, nell'ambito della cultura dell'ultimo Quattrocento.”

The importance of this emphasis for the attribution of the Epistola depends upon its relation to other evidence of Lorenzo's poetic attitudes and activity of the period, and as the chronology of his own poems is uncertain, that relation is difficult to assess. However, Bigi's probing study of Lorenzo's lyrics led him to distinguish two “maniare principali” in Lorenzo's poetry, and to conclude that “maniare petrarcheggiante e maniera stilnovistica appartengono di massima a due momenti cronologicamente distinti e successivi.” Furthermore, Lorenzo's own stilnovistic poetry
is the more important because he seems to have been the first of his circle to incorporate “evidenti e consapevoli reminiscenze stilnovistiche” into his work. On the evidence of those poems which may be dated with certainty, Bigi posits the period 1476-77 as the chronological distinction between the earlier (Petrarchan) and later (stilnovistic) styles, one affirmation of this being the poems by Lorenzo included in the Raccolta itself: “Se invece Lorenzo già prima del 1476-77 avesse composto rime intonate a quella maniera . . . come mai si sarebbe indotto ad escluderle dalla raccolta, nella quale pure, come vedremo, affiora già assai netta, sul piano critico, la preferenza propria per la poesia stilnovistica?” Even more important is another suggestion by Bigi, of evidence which “potrebbe anzi venirci da Lorenzo stesso, se la sua dichiarazione che solo dopo la morte di Simonetta (avvenuta nel 1476) hanno avuto inizio il suo amore per Lucrezia e la composizione dei suoi versi per lei, è da intendere— come ci sembra— nel senso che solo dopo quella morte e il suo amore e le sue rime abbianno assunto il ‘nuovo’ aspetto, appunto quello stilnovistico-neoplatonico, che li informa.”

This explanation by Lorenzo of his new literary direction is found in his Comento sopra alcuni dei suoi sonetti. This work too is difficult to date with precision, but recent research has suggested that the Comento may have been begun in that same period when the Epistola was composed: “la stesura della prosa del Comento si può fissare con buona approssimazione tra il 1476-77, quando ha inizio la seconda maniera lirica laurenziana, di carattere neoplatonico stilnovistico, e alla quale vanno ricondotti quasi tutti i quarantuno sonetti trascelti e spiegati, e il 15 luglio 1484.” The suggested coincidence in date would lend added significance to any similarities in the ideas and presentation between these two works. In fact, however, whatever the date of either, there are a number of striking similarities which link the Comento and the Epistola. Both contain poems, and commentary about the poems; both concern themselves in part with poetry in general, presenting both social and esthetic considerations; and, especially, both support the claims of poetry in the vernacular. As Lorenzo’s authorship of the Comento is not disputed, and as many of the claims advanced for Poliziano’s authorship of the Epistola are based on similarities to other works by that poet, a comparison of the Comento and the Epistola naturally suggests itself with regard to the attribution of the letter.

The most often noted similarity between the Epistola and the Comento is in their defense of the vernacular. Noting in the Comento that some find the volgare “non capace o degno di alcuna eccellente materia e subietto” (p. 306), Lorenzo sets out criteria by which a language may be evaluated, the principal tests being its ability to convey any range of meaning, and when in it are in fact written “cose sottili e gravi e necessarie alla vita umana” (p. 307). He then calls upon experience as the best measure, asserting that Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio have shown that any meaning can be expressed in the volgare, and with sweetness and harmony. Turning to the Epistola, we find exactly the same defense of the volgare, although in condensed and less systematic form: “Imperocchè sì bene e giustamente le sue ricchezze ed ornamenti saranno estimati, non povera questa lingua, non rozza, ma abundante e pulitissima sarà reputata. Nessuna cosa gentile, florida, leggiadra, ornata; nessuna acuta, distinta, ingegnosa, sottile; nessuna alta, magnifica, sonora; nessuna finalmente ardente, animosa, concitata si puote immaginare, della quale non pure in quelli duo primi, Dante e Petrarca, ma in questi altri ancora . . . infiniti e chiarissimi esempli non risplendino” (pp. 5-6).
Lorenzo’s lead in this defense of the vernacular has been recognized. Maier points out that “en associant étroitement la notion de langue en tant qu’instrument destiné à alimenter par excellence l’esprit, et la notion d’utilité, qui est explicitement formulée dans le Comento sopra alcuni de’suoi sonetti, Laurent transpose dans le domaine de l’humain et de l’universel le débat traditionnellement placé sur un plan compétitif et dogmatique encore limité,” and also notes that in the Comento “le plaidoyer en faveur du volgare reprend les thèmes traités par Landino dans l’Orazione et la plupart des arguments exposés dans la Lettre à Frederic d’Aragon.” In fact, in addition to similarity of argument, there is some correspondence of detail in the defense of the vernacular as found in the two works. In particular, the exclamation of praise for heroes, poets, and princes in the Epistola, “Oh veramente divini uomini, per l’utilità degli uomini al mondo nati!”, finds an echo in the Comento’s criterion for establishing the worthiness of a language, when in it are written things “necessarie alla vita umana, così alla mente nostra come all’utilità degli uomini e salute del corpo.” This argument of utilità, noted as Lorenzo’s contribution to the language question in the Comento, was also, as we have seen, the addition of the Epistola’s author to a largely derivative defense of letters.

Those critics who have compared the two works have generally stressed their differences rather than their similarities. Bigi acknowledges that “questa difesa del volgare ha molte analogie con quella contenuta nell’Epistola attribuita . . . al Poliziano,” but adds in agreement with Santoro that “nell’Epistola manca il confronto a volte polemico con la lingua e la letteratura latina, che è invece caratteristico di queste pagine.” Yet there is little in the Comento which may properly be called polemic; there is rather a difference of emphasis between the Epistola and the Comento in presenting the vernacular as a worthy means of literary expression, a difference which may be attributed to the dissimilar contexts in which the discussion occurs. The author of the Epistola, introducing a wide-ranging anthology of vernacular poetry, attempts to demonstrate by these examples that good poetry could be, and in fact already had been, written in the volgare. He draws upon the customs and achievements of an illustrious former age for his argument to encourage the patronage of poetry in general, then extends this to include vernacular poetry in particular. As the Raccolta is presumably sent in response to Frederic’s request for such a compilation of vernacular poems, no detailed defense need be offered for the vernacular as such. In the Comento, on the other hand, Lorenzo presents his comments on the vernacular as a response to anticipated criticism for having used it for his own poetry; he thus focuses on establishing the worthiness of his chosen literary language, and in doing so must directly counter the main thrust of that criticism, that Latin would have been more suitable on several counts.

While much of the defense of the volgare in the Comento is thus an application of the concept of utilità found also in the Epistola, the defense of love as a topic worthy of the poet’s efforts is based on essentially the same theoretical considerations. Lorenzo attempts to elevate love as a subject by pointing to its ennobling effects: “E, giudicando più tosto secondo la natura comune e consuetudine universale degli uomini . . . pure credo l’amore tra gli uomini non solamente non essere reperibile, ma quasi necessario ed assai vero argomento di gentilezza e grandezza d’animo, e soprattutto cagione d’invitare gli uomini a cose degne ed eccellenti, ed esercitare e riducere in atto
quelle virtù che in potenza sono nell’anima nostra . . .” (p. 300).\(^{44}\) The highest love, as Plato tells us, “è mezzo a tutte le cose a trovare la loro perfezione e riposarsi ultimamente nella suprema Bellezza, cioè Dio” (p. 301), but even limited mortal love is good if well-directed, in keeping the lover from lesser pursuits: “chi ama una cosa sola e sempre, di necessità non pone amore ad altre cose, e però si priva di tutti gli errori e voluttà, nelle quali comunemente incorrono gli uomini; ed, amando persona atta a conoscere e cercando in ogni modo che può di piacerli, bisogna di necessità che in tutte le opere sue cerchi degnificarsi e farsi eccellente tra gli altri, seguitando opere virtuose per farsi più degno che può di quella che lui stima sopra all’altra degnissima” (p. 302). In other words, the justification presented for love is that it promotes excellence in the one who seeks it, just as the Epistola tells us that immortal renown — that conferred by poets — promotes excellence in men.

The passion of love is also justified in the Comento as “naturale,” suggesting another interesting similarity to the Epistola. This presentation is clearly derived, not from the stilnovisti, but from Ficino;\(^{45}\) and as Ficino had taken the lead in the Neoplatonic interpretation of Cavalcanti’s poetry, this explains also the emphasis on Cavalcanti in the Comento.\(^{46}\) In the Epistola too, Cavalcanti receives the most lengthy mention, and in both cases the canzone on the nature of love is singled out for the highest praise. The preference for Cavalcanti in the Epistola has been noted by several scholars, among them Rossi in his volume on the Quattrocento: “Nè tale simpatia per la dotta eletta
del primo amico di Dante fa meraviglia in Lorenzo; perchè se i lirici d’eguaglianza, privi
del libri del divino Platone, non giunsero all’altissima concezione dell’amore celeste,
tutte platoniche . . . sono le loro considerazioni intorno all’amore, e gli effetti morali che gli attribuiscono sull’animo umano sono già tutti accennati dal filosofo attiniese.”

Bigi, persuaded of Poliziano’s authorship of the Epistola, notes here “senza dubbio la
presenza di una poetica, in cui l’eco dell’ammirazione ficoniana per le dottrine specie
del Cavalcanti . . . si mescola a quel gusto della ‘delicatezza,’ della aristocratica e vivace
raffinatezza sentimentale e stilistica, che è proprio del Poliziano e che non è estraneo
da Lorenzo . . .”. Cotton, attempting to link the Epistola with various works by
Poliziano, admits that in the Nutricia “egli accenna appena alla poesia volgare di Dante,
Petrarca, Boccaccio, e Guido Cavalcanti.”\(^{47}\)

In fact, not only is the emphasis the same in the two works; there are also notable
similarities of detail in the references to Cavalcanti, as “sottilissimo dialettico e filosofo
del suo secolo prestantissimo” (Epistola, p. 6), and “quella sottilissima canzone di
Guido Cavalcanti, uomo al tempo suo riputato primo dialettico che fussi al mondo”
(Comento, p. 305). Furthermore, while the Epistola points out that his canzone was
such that “nella sua età di tanto pregio fu giudicata, che da tre suoi contemporanei,
prestantissimi filosofi, fra li quali era il romano Egidio, fu dottissimamente commentata
(pp. 6-7), in the Comento Lorenzo tells us that “io ho letto di Egidio Romano e Dino
del Garbo, eccellentissimi filosofi, sopra quella sottilissima canzone . . .” (p. 305).

It is thus apparent that the Epistola does reflect Lorenzo’s demonstrated attitudes
and interests, and also bears many similarities, both in type of argument and in detail,
to the Comento on his own sonnets. The similarities are particularly important because
the Comento and the Epistola are the two major defenses of the volgare, written
themselves in the vernacular, of the period. Furthermore, as Bigi stresses, “opera
ostentamente erudita, la prosa del Comento presuppone numerose fonti letterarie e
filosofiche-scientifiche;" yet if we accept this conclusion with regard to the Comento, some of the negative arguments which have been advanced against Lorenzo's authorship of the Epistola — the work's erudition, and its familiar yet innovative use of its sources — must be abandoned. On the positive side, we have seen that those attitudes which seem most original in the Epistola, as well as its reflections of cultural context, are particularly meaningful with respect to Lorenzo's unique position as poet-patron-head of state. The glorification in the Epistola of the role of the prince-patron, adduced in support of Poliziano's authorship, and the stress on utilità, on the function of poetry within a wider civic context, are consistent with Lorenzo's own conception of his role. His added dimension of statesman makes the relationship between Tuscan and classical history which the Epistola suggests especially noteworthy, particularly as the major early vernacular poets were widely viewed as proponents of civic ideals.

Before accepting the attribution to Poliziano, Maier noted that in the Epistola "de fait il est difficile de déterminer avec précision la part qui revient à chacun dans ce travail," and the various efforts to establish Poliziano's authorship, which have been widely accepted, have not resolved the difficulty. The attribution to Lorenzo too, as we have seen, is plausible on several counts; and as the letter is written in the first person, in response to a request made by Frederic to Lorenzo, the case for Lorenzo's own authorship is such that the question of the attribution of the Epistola, with all its important implications, should not yet be considered closed.

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Notes

1 The date of 1476, proposed by B.M. Scanferla ("Per la data della Raccolta Aragonese," Rassegna bibliografica della Letteratura Italiana, XXI, 1913, pp. 244-50) is generally accepted; see also L. W. Ferguson, "The Date of the Raccolta Aragonese," Modern Philology, XXIII (1925), 43-45.

2 Three texts are assumed to reproduce the original, but some of the poems are slightly altered, and there has been some disagreement concerning the reconstruction of the text. M. Barbi in Studi sul canzoniere di Dante (Firenze, 1915, repr. 1965) devotes a chapter to the Raccolta, and studies the derivative manuscripts and their relationship.

3 For example, M. Santoro, who asserts Poliziano's authorship of the Epistola, says of it that, being commissioned by Lorenzo, it must "riflettere in genere le idee e il gusto del Magnifico e del cenacolo al quale apparteneva lo stesso Angelo" ("Poliziano o il Magnifico?" Giornale Italiano di Filologia, I, 1948, p. 149).


7 Barbi, Studi, p. 222, note 1.


11 For evidence of Poliziano's service in this capacity, see Maier, pp. 228-29, note 48.


14 Maier, p. 225.

15 Ibid., p. 237.

16 For these influences on Lorenzo during his youth and early manhood, see the thorough study of A. Rochon, La jeunesse de Laurent de Médécis, Paris, 1963.

18 M. Ficino’s commentary on the Symposium of Plato is entitled Sopra lo amore ovvero Convito di Platone.

19 References to the Epistola are to Simioni’s edition of the Opere, Vol. I.

20 Maier, p. 236.

21 Rime LIII, 3, 5.

22 Rime CLXXXVII, 1-4.

23 For the source of this reference, see C. Stange, Lorenzo il Magnifico (Bremen, 1940), p. 201, note 9.

24 Maier, pp. 230-31.


26 Epist. fam. 1601; see Stange, p. 201, note 7.


28 Cotton, p. 283.

29 For the certame, see A. Altamura, Il certame coronario, Naples, 1952; see also V. Rossi, Il Quattrocento (Storia letteraria d’Italia, v. V), Milano, 3rd ed., 1945, p. 115.


31 For the contents of the Raccolta, see Maier, pp. 226-27, note 37.


34 Ibid., p. 25.

35 Bigi, “Genesi,” p. 339. For a general interpretation of Lorenzo’s place within the stil nuovo tradition, see A. Lipari, The Dolce Stil Novo according to Lorenzo de’ Medici (New Haven, 1936).


37 Loc. cit.

38 E. Bigi, ed., Scritti scelti di Lorenzo de’ Medici (Torino, 2nd ed. 1965), p. 295; “sembra invece meno facile accogliere, se si tiene conto delle circostanze sopra ricordate (a parte altre considerazioni), l’ipotesi del Martelli (Studi laurensiani . . .) secondo cui l’opera, come ci è pervenuta, sarebbe il risultato di una raccolta e rielaborazione, effettuata soltanto dopo il 1486, di appunti stesi soprattutto in epoca giovanile (1473-1474)” (loc. cit.).

39 References to the Comento are to Bigi’s edition in the Scritti scelti.

40 Maier, pp. 225-26.

41 Palermo pointed out the similarity of the descriptions of the volgare in the two works, but his observations have been generally discounted (op. cit., pp. 364-65).

42 Bigi, Scritti scelti, p. 306, note 2.

43 “Imperocchè essendo noi nel passato anno nell’antica pisana città venuti in ragionare di quelli che nella toscana lingua poeticamente avessino scritto, non mi tenne punto la tua Signoria il suo laudabile desiderio nascoso: ciò era che per mia opera tutti questi scrittori le fussino insieme in un medesimo volume raccolti. Per la qual cosa . . . tutti in questo presente volume ho raccolti, il quale mando alla Tua Signoria . . .” (Epistola, p. 5).

44 Bigi notes that with this argument Lorenzo “richeggia chiaramente il concetto stil-novistico dell’identità di amore e ’gentilezza’ (nobilità d’animo)” found especially in Guinizelli and utilized by Ficino in the Sopra lo Amore (Scritti scelti, p. 300, note 2).

45 “Questa giustificazione dell’amore terreno come ‘naturale’, e ordinato per la propagazione umana, è estranea allo Stil Nuovo, e invece è da riportare al Ficino, Sopra lo Amore . . .” (Bigi, Scritti scelti, p. 303, note 6).


48 Bigi, Scritti scelti, p. 296.

49 For example, Bigi points to the cult of Dante “fiorito a Firenze nella prima metà del Quattrocento, un culto diretto non tanto all’artista sognante e astratto della Vita Nuova, quanto al poeta della Commendia, al letterato fortemente impegnato nella vita civile” (“Lorenzo lirico,” p. 32).

50 Maier, p. 226.