

THE VERNACULAR ARISTOTLE

This book explores the ways in which Aristotle's legacy was appropriated and reshaped by vernacular readers in Medieval and Renaissance Italy. It considers translation in a broad sense, looking at commentaries, compendia, rewritings and abridgments alongside vernacular versions of Aristotle's works. Translation is thus taken as quintessential to the very notion of reception, with a focus on the dynamics – cultural, social, material – that informed the appropriation and reshaping of the 'master of those who know' on the part of vernacular readers between 1250 and 1500. By looking at the proactive and transformative nature of reception, this book challenges traditional narratives about the period and identifies the theory and practice of translation as a liminal space that facilitated the interaction between lay readers and the academic context while fostering the legitimation of the vernacular as a language suitable for philosophical discourse.

EUGENIO REFINI is Assistant Professor of Italian Studies at New York University. His interests include Renaissance poetics, rhetoric and drama; reception of antiquity and translation studies; and the intersections of music and literature. His publications include a monograph on Alessandro Piccolomini (*Per via d'annotationi: le glosse inedite di Alessandro Piccolomini all'Ars Poetica di Orazio*, 2009) and several articles and book chapters on Ludovico Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, Latin Humanism and the musical culture of early modern Italy.

CLASSICS AFTER ANTIQUITY

Editors

Alastair Blanshard
University of Queensland
 Shane Butler
Johns Hopkins University
 Emily Greenwood
Yale University

Classics after Antiquity presents innovative contributions in the field of Classical Reception Studies. Each volume explores the methods and motives of those who, coming after and going after antiquity, have entered into a contest with and for the legacies of the ancient world. The series aims to unsettle, to provoke debate, and to stimulate a re-evaluation of assumptions about the relationship between Greek and Roman classical pasts and modern histories.

Other titles in the series

Afterlives of the Roman Poets: Biofiction and the Reception of Latin Poetry

Nora Goldschmidt

ISBN: 978-1-107-18025-3

The Perpetual Immigrant and the Limits of Athenian Democracy

Demetra Kasimis

ISBN: 978-1-107-05243-7

Borges' Classics: Global Encounters with the Graeco-Roman Past

Laura Jensen

ISBN: 978-1-108-41840-9

Classical Victorians: Scholars, Scoundrels and Generals in Pursuit of Antiquity

Edmund Richardson

ISBN: 978-1-107-02677-3

Modernism and Homer: The Odysseys of H. D., James Joyce, Osip Mandelstam, and Ezra Pound

Leah Culligan Flack

ISBN: 978-1-107-10803-5

THE VERNACULAR
ARISTOTLE

*Translation as Reception in Medieval and
Renaissance Italy*

EUGENIO REFINI

New York University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48181-6 — The Vernacular Aristotle
Eugenio Refini
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108481816
DOI: 10.1017/9781108693684

© Eugenio Refini 2020

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2020

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-48181-6 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48181-6 — The Vernacular Aristotle
Eugenio Refini
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

*To my parents,
Miranda and Marcello*

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48181-6 — The Vernacular Aristotle
Eugenio Refini
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Series Editors' Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<i>Notes on the Text</i>	xix
Introduction: Translation as Reception	
1 Taming the Philosopher	17
Triumphs of Love	17
The Song of Nature	21
Vulgarising Grammar	25
The Moral of the Story	33
The Vernacular Ethics of Storytelling	38
‘I, Aristotle, who arranged all moral virtues’	42
2 The Master of Those Who Know (and Those Who Don't)	51
Aristotle in Limbo	51
Assessing the Vernacular	57
‘All men by nature desire to know’	62
Disfiguring the Philosopher	67
An Aristotelian Bestseller and its Readers	70
Beyond the Bestseller	80
3 Family Business: Readyng the Ethics for the Layman	86
Overlooking the Piazza	86
Conversation Piece	95
Accessing the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> in the Vernacular	99
One Generation Later	III
Ethics for Beginners	II4
Perfecting the Merchant	I2I

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
4	The Philosopher, the Humanist, the Translator and the Reader	128
	The Philosopher on the Campanile	128
	Fighting the Ancients	133
	The Humanist in the Middle	140
	The Vernacular Reading List	145
	Proactive Readership	151
	Owning the <i>Ethics</i>	165
5	Abriding the Philosopher(s)	180
	Not Only Aristotle	180
	One Step Backward	182
	Two Steps Forward	187
	Ask the Theologian	194
	Pressing the Master	197
	Transformative Reception	206
	Conclusion: The Spirit in the Crystal Bottle	224
	<i>Bibliography</i>	233
	<i>Index</i>	265

Figures

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------|
| 1.1 | Apollonio di Giovanni, <i>Trionfo d'Amore</i> , c. 1442 Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Strozzi 174, fol. 19r
Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali | page 19 |
| 1.2 | Aristotle and Phyllis, from Brunetto Latini, <i>Tresor</i> , Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine, MS 269, fol. 108r.
©Universal Images Group / Art Resource, NY | 20 |
| 1.3 | Diagram of the Liberal Arts, from Bartolomeo de' Bartoli, <i>Canzone delle virtù e delle scienze</i> , Chantilly, Bibliothèque du Château, MS 599 (c. 1355). ©RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY | 28 |
| 1.4 | Grammar, from Bartolomeo de' Bartoli, <i>Canzone delle virtù e delle scienze</i> , Chantilly, Bibliothèque du Château, MS 599 (c. 1355). ©RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY | 29 |
| 1.5 | Memmo di Filippuccio, Aristotle and Phyllis (c. 1300), San Gimignano, Palazzo Pubblico, Camera del Podestà. ©De Agostini Picture Library / G. Nimatallah / Bridgeman Images | 34 |
| 1.6 | Taddeo di Bartolo, Aristotle, Cycle of Illustrious Men (1408–14), Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, Anticappella.
©Mondadori Portfolio / Archivio Lensini / Fabio e Andrea Lensini / Bridgeman Images | 45 |
| 1.7 | Anonymous, Aristotle and the cardinal virtues (c. 1375–1400), Asciano, Casa Corboli. Reproduced with permission of the Museo Civico Archeologico e d'Arte Sacra Palazzo Corboli, Asciano | 47 |
| 2.1 | Dante, <i>Commedia</i> , the Holy Spirits in Limbo. Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms. Holkham misc. 48, p. 7. Reproduced with permission of The Bodleian Libraries, The University of Oxford | 53 |

x	<i>List of Figures</i>	
3.1	'Aristoteles Dialecticus', sculpted capital, Venice, Palazzo Ducale, c. 1340–55. Photograph by Giovanni Dall'Orto. Reproduced with permission of the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia	87
3.2	'Aristotele che diè lege', sculpted capital, Venice, Palazzo Ducale, c. 1450. Photograph by Giovanni Dall'Orto. Reproduced with permission of the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia	88
3.3	Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, MS Ital. 279 [alpha.P.5.6], fol. 1r. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali	96
3.4	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Ital. 907, fol. 1r. Reproduced with permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France	115
4.1	Luca Della Robbia, Philosophy, decorative tile, Florence, Campanile of Santa Maria del Fiore, c. 1437. Photograph by Francesco Bini	129
4.2	Andrea di Bonaiuto, Dialectic and Aristotle, detail from Triumph of Saint Thomas, Florence, Cappellone degli Spagnoli, Santa Maria Novella, 1365–7. ©Scala / Art Resource, NY	131
4.3	New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, MS 151, fol. 1r. Reproduced with permission of the Beinecke Library	168
5.1	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Latin 6467, fol. 1r. Reproduced with permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France	183
5.2	London, The British Library, MS Additional 22325, fol. 1v. From the photographic collection of The Warburg Institute, London. Reproduced with permission of The Warburg Institute, London	213
5.3	Jacopo Campora, <i>Loica vulgare composta e traduta da duo valentissimi loici e grandissimi filosofi in dialogo</i> . Milan, Ulrich Scinzenzeler, 1497, title page (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Guicciardini 20.2.70). Reproduced with permission of Fondazione BEIC (Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License: cf. www.beic.it/it/articoli/copyright)	220

List of Figures

xi

- 5.4 Jacopo Campora, *Tractato de l'origine et immortalità de l'anima in theologia et philosophia morale utilissimo, composto per valentissimi homini in dialogo e vulgare*. Brescia, Battista Farfengo, 1498, title page (Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Inc. 477). Reproduced with permission of the Biblioteca Angelica, Rome

222

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48181-6 — The Vernacular Aristotle
Eugenio Refini
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Series Editors' Preface

The Latin roots of *tradition* and *translation* (respectively, *trado* and *transfero*) share not only a prefix (*trans-*) but also the same basic spatiotemporal metaphors. Both, in other words, ask us to imagine a process by which something is moved from point A to point B. That the thing being moved has (or is) 'value' is further suggested by other English words derived from both ('trade', 'transfer', etc.), to say nothing of the deeper root of *trado*: *do*, 'I give'. This last verb lurks at the very heart of older notions of 'the classical tradition' as not just a 'gift' of those clever and talented Greeks and Romans, but a hulking inheritance to which subsequent ages supposedly owed both care and respect. Such notions now seem quaint (or even morally or politically suspect), supplanted by more supple accounts of 'classical reception' that emphasise the agency of person or age 'receiving' this supposed gift – a gift that, on close inspection, is revealed to be as much a product of said person or age as it is an intact legacy from the past. But what of 'translation', especially when the movement in question is from Greek or Latin? Can and should we similarly upend the hypothesis of ancient value 'transferred' to the present, in order to recover the creative work of translators and their readers in creating that very value?

This question animates Eugenio Refini's *The Vernacular Aristotle: Translation as Reception in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*. As his title makes clear, 'point A' in this study is Aristotle, who by the later Middle Ages was such an authority that he could be cited, simpliciter, as 'the Philosopher'. But if Aristotle is in some ways an exemplary figure from (and for) the classical canon, in others he is problematic. His oeuvre is vast and varied and covers an astonishing range of subjects, albeit with conclusions that are not always consistent between this or that work. This is partly the result of the origins of his texts, with most of the surviving *Corpus Aristotelicum* seemingly comprising lecture notes rather than finished treatises. The analysis is dense and minute, often mired in technical vocabulary, some of it given specialised meanings by Aristotle himself. And then, of course, there is the

fact that he wrote in Greek. That was not in itself a problem for his contemporaries, but it was already a significant mediating factor for medieval readers who knew him only in Latin translation. Later, as Latin too began to yield to the vernacular, the Philosopher slipped, for many, even further out of reach.

One might suppose, therefore, that the proliferating translations of Aristotle into the vernacular in the late medieval and early modern period represent nothing more than an effort to rescue his works from a linguistic dead end, preserving their value as an ongoing gift to posterity. This, indeed, was part of the stated intent of his translators. But as Refini's probing portrait reveals, the story is far more complex. On one hand, as translators grappled with the text and their task, their work inevitably became one of interpretation as much as one of translation. (Here too, as Refini points out, there lurks a pun, in that *interpretes* is the Latin word for 'translator'.) On the other, far from being destined only for a 'lower', Latinless audience of non-specialists, their translations circled back to inform 'higher' work of Aristotelian exegesis and new philosophy still conducted in Latin. Vernacular translation, in other words, was an integral part of Aristotelian reception throughout the period in question.

This fact is interesting in its own right, revising a crucial chapter in the reception of a major classical author and shedding new light on late medieval and early modern philosophical thought more generally – and not just in 'academic' philosophical circles. But Refini's book offers even more: namely, a model for the study of what his introduction labels 'translation as reception'. His case studies, organised around specific projects of translation, provide close analysis not just of the resulting texts but of the physical books in which they circulated and the readers through whose hands (and sometimes, under whose annotating pens) they passed. The dynamism of Aristotle's late medieval and early modern life, in Refini's colourful reconstruction, embraces not just abstract concepts and rebarbative terminology, but a messy world of books, printers, merchants, patrons and a remarkably varied cast of readers. Reception in such scenarios is often double or triple, while seemingly linear movements like tradition, translation and transmission are shown to trace geometries of extraordinary complexity.

Acknowledgements

The idea to write this book came to my mind towards the end of my time as a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Warwick within the AHRC-funded project ‘Vernacular Aristotelianism in Renaissance Italy’ (2010–13). Having had the wonderful opportunity to do extensive research in libraries and archives in Europe and North America, the materials accumulated proved too many to be analysed and discussed as part of the project’s immediate outcomes. Thanks to another productive period of research as Ahmanson Fellow at Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (2013–14), the project of a monograph on the vernacular reception of Aristotle in late medieval and Renaissance Italy developed further and – as is typical of research projects conducted on the hills of Vincigliata – changed significantly. Increasingly concerned with the interaction of reception and translation, the project’s rationale benefited enormously from the following leg of my academic journey, Johns Hopkins University, where the productive dialogue with colleagues across the humanities led to the final shape of the book.

My colleagues directly involved in the AHRC project have been crucial to this book and I cannot thank them enough for their intellectual generosity and continuous support: David A. Lines, Simon Gilson, Jill Kraye, Luca Bianchi and Grace Allen. It has been a privilege to have them as interlocutors – a privilege only matched by our ongoing conversations. Other people at Warwick have contributed in many ways to my research during three unforgettable years in the UK. I think, in particular, of my colleagues in Italian Studies and in the Centre for the Study of the Renaissance: Serena Bassi, Paul Botley, Emma Campbell, Giacomo Comiati, Alessio Cotugno, Ingrid De Smet, Rocco Di Dio, Peter Mack, Loredana Polezzi, Alexander Russell, Sara Trevisan, Christiania Whitehead. Much gratitude I owe to Jayne Brown, whose heartwarming and helpful presence made my everyday routine on the Warwick campus particularly enjoyable and productive.

I wish to thank the entire community at Villa I Tatti as well as the Ahmanson Foundation, which, during my year in Florence, generously supported my research. In particular, I am grateful to Lino Pertile and Anna Bensted for making me cope with my nostalgia for the Midlands since the very beginning of my stay at the Villa; Jonathan Nelson, Michael Rocke, Allen Grieco and Margaret Haines for the many enlightening conversations over coffee, lunch and tea; my co-fellows and the visiting professors, without whom this book would hardly be what it is: Rossend Arqués, Nicholas Baker, Davide Baldi, Karen-edis Barzman, Katherine Bentz, Robert Black, Francesca Borgo, Elena Calvillo, Angela Capodivacca, Angelo Cattaneo, Roger Crum, Vanessa De Cruz Medina, Maria Deprano, Guy Geltner, Raúl González Arévalo, Gerard González Germain, John Henderson, Tamar Herzig, Árni Ingólfsson, Elizabeth Kassler-Taub, Noriko Kotani, Elizabeth Lagresa, Marika Leino, Giordano Mastrocola, Emily Michelson, Morgan Ng, Stephen Orgel, Neslihan Şenocak, Daniel Stein Kokin, Miriam Szocs, Miguel Taín Guzmán, Koichi Toyama, Carl Villis, Gur Zak. I am sure they will not mind if I give one of them – Cecilia Muratori – special credit, not only for her invaluable help as a scholar, but also for her precious friendship, certainly one of the two most significant relationships built during my year in Florence.

Since my arrival at Johns Hopkins in 2014, I have been constantly exposed to a variety of stimuli that, coming from different disciplines, have been affecting significantly my work well beyond this specific project. I wish to thank Christopher S. Celenza for his generosity and for reminding me that ‘humanism’ is not a historical category to be taken for granted; and I wish to thank Walter Stephens for his generosity and for reminding me that all historical categories are potentially fake. Much of my gratitude goes to Shane Butler for his continuous support and for making me feel (somewhat too generously) a half-classicist. I also thank Laura Di Bianco, whose outside view has helped me look at my own work from a refreshing distance; Stephen Campbell, who showed me that ‘vernacularisation’ applies to art history too; Sara Miglietti, whose insightful reading of an early draft of my introduction is but the peak of a much deeper (and deeply appreciated) commitment to our friendship and scholarly collaboration; Gabrielle Spiegel and all the participants of the Andrew W. Mellon Seminar for their challenging comments on the first chapter of this book; Sharon Achinstein for her insightful reading of the same chapter and for her continuous advice. An important contribution – both intellectual and material – to this work came from the Special Collections in the Sheridan Libraries and from the Charles Singleton Center for the Study

Acknowledgements

xvii

of Pre-Modern Europe. By thanking Earle Havens and Lawrence Principe, I extend my gratitude to all the colleagues and members of staff that have facilitated my work. I also wish to thank all the members of the Cenacolo Italiano di Baltimora, who gave me invaluable feedback on early drafts of my chapters, as well as the graduate students in the Italian PhD program at JHU who have been a constant source of inspiration during the final stages of my research.

Many other friends and colleagues have been, consciously or unconsciously, of great importance to the development of this project: Annalisa Andreoni, Albert R. Ascoli, Bryan Brazeau, William Caferro, Maurizio Campanelli, Alberto Casadei, Claudio Ciociola, Rita Copeland, Alison Cornish, Virginia Cox, Eva Del Soldato, Luca D'Onghia, Consuelo Dutschke, William Egginton, Nicola Gardini, Paul Gehl, Sonia Gentili, Jessica Goethals, Marco Guardo, Amey Hutchins, Victoria Kirkham, Valentina Lepri, John McClucas, Martin McLaughlin, Maria Luisa Meneghetti, Silvia Montiglio, Paola Nasti, April Oettinger, Katrin Pahl, Fiammetta Papi, Stephen Parkin, Anna Pegoretti, Lorenzo Pericolo, John Pollack, Leonardo Proietti, Anna Laura Puliafito, Matteo Residori, Brian Richardson, Roberta Ricci, Jessica Richardson, Andrea Rizzi, Claudia Rossignoli, Marco Sgarbi, Harry Sieber, Eleonora Stoppino, Claudia Tardelli, Franco Tomasi, Troy Tower, Jane Tylus, Juan Miguel Valero Moreno, David Wallace, Bernadette Wegenstein, Neil Weijer, Susan Forscher Weiss, Michael Wyatt, Massimo Zaggia.

Along with the anonymous readers, whose remarks have been of great help while revising my manuscript, I wish to acknowledge the continuous support of the series editors and of all those at Cambridge University Press who have assisted me during the production of the book.

These acknowledgements would not be complete without mentioning a few very special individuals: my parents, Miranda and Marcello, and my brother, Tommaso, who, in the distance, are always there; Lina Bolzoni, who encourages me every step of the way; Maude Vanhaelen, whose generosity as both friend and scholar goes far beyond her thorough feedback on my work; Laura Maria Castelli, whose Aristotelian expertise is not the only reason for my gratitude; and Davide Daolmi, *you know, darling, why*.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48181-6 — The Vernacular Aristotle
Eugenio Refini
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Notes on the Text

Sections of Chapters 2, 3 and 5 re-elaborate and expand three previous publications: 'Aristotile in parlare materno: Vernacular Readings of the *Ethics* in the Quattrocento', *I Tatti Studies* Vol. 16 (2013): 311–41; 'Shifting Identities: Jacopo Campora's *De immortalitate anime* from Manuscript to Print', in *Remembering the Middle Ages in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Lorenzo Pericolo and Jessica Richardson. Turnhout, Brepols, 2015: 67–80; 'By imitating our nurses: Latin and Vernacular in the Renaissance', in *The Routledge History of the Renaissance*, ed. William Caferro. London, Routledge, 2017: 46–61.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48181-6 — The Vernacular Aristotle
Eugenio Refini
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)
