

of Boccaccio. Offering a detailed outline of previous bibliography in each of the topics, all essays add up to represent an extremely useful snapshot of current Boccaccio studies, making this volume an essential source for an up-to-date appreciation of Boccaccio's work, life, and influence.

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Works Cited

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- POZZI, Giovanni, CIAPPONI, Lucia A, eds. 1980. *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Padova: Antenore.

CARUSO, Carlo, ed. 2018. *The Life of Texts. Evidence in Textual Production, Transmission and Reception*. London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic. ISBN HB: 978-1-3500-3905-6. ISBN ePDF: 978-1-3500-3906-3. ISBN eBook: 978-1-3500-3907-0. Pp. xii + 253. HARDBACK \$ 76.50.

This book derives from a series of public lectures sponsored by the Institute of Advanced Study at the University of Durham on a challenging topic: *The Life of Texts. Evidence in Textual Production, Transmission and Reception*. On that occasion, speakers reflected on a number of compelling theoretical and methodological issues centered around scholarly editing and textual criticism as well as on several editorial case studies, from ancient texts to modern times.

Recently edited by Carlo Caruso, *The Life of Texts* works from the premise that each text is inextricably linked to the historical circumstances in which it was produced and that its resultant variability is often an ontological principle at the core of the text itself. Therefore, the various authors of these essays challenge their readers to consider the history of texts as a dynamic and vital sign of their own life. Unsurprisingly, several chapters of the collection are focused on traditions of texts considered *in fieri*: from Leonardo da Vinci's private writings and their variety and mobility as 'open works', to the different editions of the unfinished *Essays* by Montaigne. Texts are often the result not just of an author-inspired activity, but also of the lack of this authorship, the evolving techniques of book production, the historic vicissitudes and the act of interpretation which lies behind each

translation or re-reading. Indeed, as Richard Gameson said in his general introduction to this book (significantly titled: *Conceiving the Life of Texts*), authors have always been aware of how a work may escape their control because of the various processes of revision, rewriting and cuts, mistakes in transcription, censorship and other printing house errors. For this reason, a text could be simultaneously available through its tradition in various forms, fundamentally betraying the traditional and cultural demand for a stable and canonical work.

The audience generally experiences this intrinsic variability of texts through different forms of ‘mediation’. Throughout the book, the identity and consistency of these intermediators between texts and general public are carefully taken into account. For example, several types of mediation could be related to the material aspects of transmission (such as the Christian Bible which switches from the plurality of the *Holy Scriptures* to the singularity of the book known as *The Bible*), to the effects of the historical and social circumstances (for which a ‘text in exile’ as the *Divine Comedy* provides the right example) or to the personal commitment by specific mediators and their willingness, usually involved in text’s constitution and transmission (such as the alterations implemented by Shakespeare’s company on the plays with or without the author’s agreement or the role of Valerie Eliot and Ezra Pound in the revision of *The Waste Land*’s draft materials which inaugurate a new understanding of Eliot’s poem).

Among the various case studies presented in this volume, a fascinating point emerges: the limit between authorial revision and textual corruption is often — from the earliest evidence of literature to the latest novel published — blurred and contradictory. Despite that (or probably due to that), this relation demands to be recognized, respected and interrogated, because it affects the nature of texts themselves and influences the reading practice. The above problem becomes relevant in cases, such as Shakespeare’s and Dante’s ‘phantom’ autographs, in which the lack of authoritative textual witnesses has deeply contributed to shape and direct the textual tradition of the oeuvre. In such cases, as argued by Annalisa Cipollone, evidence shows that stemmatic procedures cannot lead to any reliable conclusion. Hence, the textual critic must work through the text comparatively considering the system of variants, adjusting his understanding of ‘authorship’ on the basis of the variable circumstances of text’s tradition.

Even though this book consists of nine independent chapters, each one dedicated to a specific topic from *Arabian Nights* to the First Movement of Beethoven’s *Tempest* Sonata, we could say that every essay offers a typical example of the general need, in textual criticism, for both critical judgment

and bibliographical knowledge. Thus, the content is designed in order to stimulate discussion and to encourage comparison between as many areas of study and application as possible. This point, which constitutes the ultimate richness of the volume, raises many textual problems in both print and digital scholarly editing, such as uncertainties regarding authorship, the complex stratification of readings, translations and interpretations through different times and all the matters an editor needs to face in order to guarantee a high quality standard for the texts he produces for his audience.

Ultimately, *The Life of Texts* is based on this assumption: the form by which a text is perceived and received by its audience is affected by the form in which it is published and presented. Critical reflections on the textual lives of the works taken into account shed a fascinating light on their history of composition: for this very reason a textual critic who fails to engage with the dynamics of production, transmission and reception misses the evidence of the deep meaning of texts. Therefore, it is not by chance that the book ends with a quotation from MCKENZIE 1999, where this kind of *sociology* is defined as the set of “human motives and interactions which texts involve at every stage of their production, transmission and consumption” (15). These processes, in which composers, printers, editors, publishers and even readers join the author in the constitution of the work, characterize the always-in-motion *life of texts*. The belief that printed and digital copies of texts remain, after all, no less than ancient manuscripts, living organisms, is demonstrated by this ambiguous, conceptual and even tense relationships that determine the very conditions under which textual meanings are created.

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MCKENZIE, Donald F. 1999. *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.