

LEONARDI, Lino. 2022. *Filologia romanza*. 1. *Critica del testo*. Firenze: le Monnier Università. Pp. XVI–208. ISBN 9788800748308. €20.00.

A three-volume project specifically aimed at providing basic tools for students of Romance Philology courses in the Italian university system has been recently released by Le Monnier Università. The first volume, written by Lino Leonardi, is dedicated to philology as textual criticism. The second volume, written by Laura Minervini, is intended to provide an introduction to Romance linguistics, in a framework that combines synchronic and diachronic perspectives. The third volume, finally, is entrusted to the care of Eugenio Burgio, and aims to provide an overview of the literary landscape's complexity and diversity, unfolding around the main conceptual cruxes of the Romance Middle Ages. The volumes are conceived as three stand-alone, but organically complementary handbooks; for this very reason the tripartite manual is also alternatively available in a unified format, bringing the three books together in a single volume. In this review we will discuss the first volume, curated by Lino Leonardi and dedicated to textual criticism. The compendium consists of the pedagogical presentation of a vast array of studies carried out by the author on the philological method and the history of ecdotic practice; these studies have culminated, among other things, in the editing and writing of a "Reading Guide" to *Filologia*, an entry compiled for the *Enciclopedia del Novecento*, written by Gianfranco Contini in 1977 and recently republished in an independent volume by il Mulino (CONTINI 2014).

By Leonardi's explicit statement of intent, this textual criticism handbook proceeds along two major lines. The first line coincides with a shared purpose that can be extended to any handbook, introduction, or *accessus* to textual criticism: to convey the understanding that every text is part of a history, of a process that ideally extends from its genesis to its reception, and to convey the need to also treat such history and such textual reality with a critical perspective and a scientific approach. These general premises are consistent with an essential principle for Leonardi: the one that — using a famous formula coined by Contini himself¹ — considers the text as a hypothesis and the edition as a "scientific act" that can never disregard the diachronic aspect, which constitutes "the life of

1. "The critical edition is, like any scientific act, a mere working hypothesis, the most satisfactory (i.e., economical) connecting data into a system" (CONTINI 1974, 369). See LEONARDI 2011, 5–6.

the medieval text”² (FERRARIS, LEONARDI 2019, 92) as well as the only approach capable of revealing “the mobile and re-elaborative nature” (LEONARDI 2016, 987) of medieval textuality. The second, more focused line, consists in the compilation of a vademecum in which the examination of the problems concerning textual editing is specifically applied and exemplified in the context of the Romance Middle Ages. This second aim gives rise to the peculiar character of Leonardi’s handbook: the nature and practice of ecdotics are analyzed taking into account the specific issues of Romance philology, a discipline that has always been compelled to deal with a textual reality far more mobile and dynamic than that of classical philology (VARVARO 1970).

The first chapter of the handbook (“Philology and Truth: The Text as a Problem”) is perhaps — along with the sixth and final chapter — the most epistemologically loaded and the one with the greatest theoretical investment: here Leonardi illustrates the methodological foundations on which the articulation of the subsequent chapters is based, while at the same time discussing the issues at the heart of textual criticism. Philology is the discipline that “studies texts in their deepest nature” (7), the “tool that provides reliable access to the textual heritage of the past” (7), through a twofold movement: on the one hand the historical understanding of the tradition of texts; and on the other hand the operation of making these texts readable by the public through their editions. The “reliability” of the discipline is guaranteed by its “distinctive feature”: the critical attitude, hence the definition of philology as “textual criticism” (*Textkritik*). Three fundamental coordinates of textual criticism are thus assumed from the very first paragraphs: “scientificity, diachrony, readability” (6). To the first two requirements — already established by Contini — Leonardi thus adds a third: “the responsibility of providing a text that [. . .] is not only accessible to specialists but also returns access to the works of the past to a contemporary audience” (6). The concept of the text as a “problem, to which philology is called to provide a solution based on a method” (8), derives from these premises.

The main purpose of the handbook is to address the ways in which the problem emerges and the methods for its solution, from a perspective that overcomes the ancient opposition between the idea of philology as

2. On the risk of losing sight of the diachronic and comparative dimension in the context of early Italian lyric *canzonieri*, and the importance of combining synchronic vision and historical perspective, see CARRAI, LEONARDI, DE ROBERTIS 2004, 184–85.

“art” and the idea of philology as “science”,³ since the method always reacts in the specific textual context. The strength of the handbook lies in a clarity that does not renounce complexity, constantly alternating the theoretical with the empirical: to this end, following a dialectical movement dear to Leonardi, a whole constellation of case histories related to textual practice are activated from time to time, derived both from a deep familiarity with the history of the discipline and from Leonardi’s personal research or teamwork experience. Such case studies are inferred from a corpus of medieval texts that spans the entire Romance area, ranging from the Italian to the Ibero-Romance sphere, from Old French to troubadour literature, and thus reflecting the comparative vocation of Romance philology, a vocation that is “at the heart of Romanistics’ identity” (LEONARDI 2016, 989). The first section of the handbook focuses on the problematic nature of three crucial issues for textual criticism: the concept of author, meant both in terms of attribution and in terms of “stylistic and cultural identity” (27); the concept of text, addressed in its variability; and finally, the concept of tradition, inseparable from the other two, from a perspective that always takes into account the interaction between synchrony and diachrony. Placing “text as a problem” at the center of philological research is not anodyne, for at every stage, from the reading of a manuscript to the edition, “philology is charged with interpreting the textual reality offered by the manuscript tradition” (28), pursuing in every way adherence to the text and methodological rigor. Therefore, philology conceives its work not as an assertion of truth, “but rather as an approximation to the truth of the text” (29).⁴

After outlining the conceptual issues and the main goal of philological practice, the next four chapters illustrate the process that ideally leads from the codex to the end-goal of the critical edition. The second and third chapters are devoted to manuscripts, which are analyzed respectively in their material aspects (“The manuscript as a book”) and in their testimonial value (“The manuscript as a witness”), two closely interrelated features. In order to correctly place a “witness” in the tradition of a text, in fact, the philologist must possess the necessary

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3. Against the axiom “being handed down from Lachmann to Bédier” that wants philology to be a discipline where art prevails over science (LEONARDI 2011, 5).
 4. See FERRARIS, LEONARDI 2019. To the Bédierian skepticism towards the reconstructive method, which has a theoretical foundation in the unpredictability of error, Contini reacts by postulating a predictability of error that is not absolute, but approximate, and conceiving “philology as a hypothesis of ‘rationalization’ of textual reality” (FERRARIS, LEONARDI 2019, 92).

competence to correctly interpret the physical (codicological), textual (paleographical), and paratextual (as well as decorative, etc.) data of a manuscript; namely, the philologist must be able to operate a “combined reading of the external and internal typology of the medieval book”, in order to “grasp its cultural significance, to consider it as the bearer of a literary offer that is also significant for the interpretation of the texts” (50). Such premises are indispensable both for understanding the relationships between witnesses within the textual tradition and for the purpose of transcribing the text contained in an individual witness, be it a diplomatic or interpretive transcription.

After examining the manuscript, in the next two chapters Leonardi moves on to the examination of the tradition, analyzed respectively according to text-internal criteria (“Tradition as process: theory of innovation”) and from the perspective of genealogical relationships among witnesses (“Tradition as process: genealogy of witnesses”). A common problem for the linguist and philologist, the identification of innovations is not a mechanism aimed only at an “upward” reconstruction, but also useful “downward, to scan the stages of the history of the tradition from the linguistic point of view as well” (LEONARDI 2020, 17), a necessary step as much to define “the changes established in the course of the tradition as to eliminate them in the constitution of the critical text” (LEONARDI 2020, 17). The two movements are always interconnected, for where the variants are *adiaphora* — that is, all potentially original — it is the position of the witnesses in the history of the text that is decisive. The fifth chapter is focused on the stemmatic method — improperly referred to as “Lachmann’s method” — based on the identification of common errors between witnesses. The author presents stemmatics in its limits and its advantages: often prejudicially conceived as an automatism exclusively aimed at the reconstruction of an alleged original, that of common errors is rather “a complex and imperfect model”, “a set of procedures aimed at probabilistically distinguishing innovation, unintentional or conscious, from the preservation of the text in the course of its transmission. A problematic attitude, rather than a definitive answer” (LEONARDI 2014, 10–11).

From the text as a problem, the focus shifts to “The Text as Hypothesis” with the sixth and final chapter: devoted to the critical edition, the last part closes the textbook in a circular way, returning to the conceptual issues and goals set out in the first chapter. Like every stage of philological work, the edition involves an “interpretive commitment” (175); it must ensure “the highest possible degree of interpretation of the published

text” (174). According to Leonardi, this obligation not only “is the highest value of philology” (175), but also represents a requirement that virtuously conditions any procedure on the basis of methodological rigor and transparency. Above all, however, it “demands a critical insight into textual reality” (175), based on the sheer authority of competence and scientific fidelity to the text: all of which make the practice of philology “a laborious experience of freedom” (175).

Before this handbook, the student of Romance philology could rely — in addition to the textbooks focused on other specific areas (Italian philology, classical philology) — on three very valid but different tools. Alberto Varvaro’s introduction (*Prima lezione di filologia* — “First Lecture in Philology”) and Pietro Beltrami’s *accessus* (*A che serve un’edizione critica? Leggere i testi della letteratura romanza medievale* — “What is the use of a critical edition? Reading the Texts of Medieval Romance Literature”), both recently translated into French (VARVARO 2017; BELTRAMI 2021). These essays are strongly innervated by critical tension and are indispensable for the neophyte who wants to approach the fundamental problems of the discipline. Moreover, the English-speaking public benefits from Paolo Trovato’s precious “non-standard handbook” (*Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lachmann’s Method*), which, in the words of Lino Leonardi, holds the merit of “attempting to renew reflection on philological method in such a way as to translate it into a language that can be understood even in a broader context, by those who may not have shared its formative assumptions” (2016, 986–87), such as the English-speaking public, which is hardly accustomed to the stemmatic method. This new handbook will stand out in the syllabi of university courses and on scholars’ shelves because of its focused target, completeness, and exhaustiveness; its compositional balance between theory and illustrative insights; its clarity of exposition that does not sacrifice complexity and commitment to an interpretive paradigm but manages to include and critically account for the most distant methodological principles. A perspective that could be called, echoing Leonardi, *Old Philology* (LEONARDI 2011, 34): an ‘ancient’ philology, indeed, but not meant in a sense of antiquatedness, but rather in the noble sense of “textual Philology without other adjectives, which intends to recover its credible role in the humanities of the twenty-first century” (LEONARDI 2011, 34).

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