

An incunable edition of Mantuan's poetry.

Baptista Mantuanus. *In Robertum Seuerinatem panaegyricum carmen*. Venice: Iacobum de Leucho, 1499. 7 1/2 inches (190 mm), [100] pp.

Virgil is the greatest poet of Mantua. The couplet that he dictated on his deathbed for his tomb began: "*Mantua me genuit ...*" and passed into legend. It was thus with a sense of renaissance, of a second strike of poetical lightning, that the Neo-Latin poet Battista Spagnoli (1447–1516) or Baptistus Mantuanus, became known by a single name, like Liberace or Cher. Throughout continental Europe, he was simply Mantovano, or in Britain, Mantuan. Although he did not disdain secular subjects, the poet was a Carmelite, becoming Vicar-General of his order and eventually Prior in 1513. He was even beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1885, but has not yet become a saint.

In 1504 the Florentine printer Filippo de Giunta published the eclogues of the two great poets of Mantua together in a single volume, giving physical expression to Erasmus' judgment that Mantuan was a Christian Virgil. His fame, however, declined rapidly after his death. Mantuan's late works were not among his best, and with the rise of attractive vernacular alternatives, the perfection of his Latin appealed to a dwindling audience. Julius Caesar Scaliger then annihilated his pretensions in his *Poetice*.

In Robertum Seuerinatum panaegyricum carmen was first published in Bologna in 1489. The edition reproduced here is a page-for-page reprint. Mantuan's poem *Somnium romanum* begins on **Spread 20 (left)** with *Ad D. Falconem protonotarium ... carmen* (with a number of other shorter poems) on **Spread 34**. Throughout there are blank spaces left for the addition of colored or ornamental majuscule initials, the correct letter being indicated by a small minuscule letter that could be painted over, such as the "f" on **Spread 3**. Like another of Mantuan's works available on this site, the *Parthenice prima sive Mariana* (Venice, 1499), this volume has been bound (relatively recently) in an early printed leaf of German text, with rubrication. There are annotations by a contemporary reader on **Spreads 20 and 21**. The publisher's name, and date of printing (6th August, 1499), are indicated on the last printed page of the book, with instructions to the binder in the *Registrum* as to just how the pages of text were to be assembled into a completed book; such

guidelines are often found in early books.

This edition is now in the Cecil H. Green Library, which comprises roughly a third of the Stanford University Libraries' 8.5 million volumes, and it houses special collections amounting to a quarter million rare volumes. Among the rarities in the Green Library are an extensive collection of Aldine editions and numerous incunables.