

Presentation of the 1517 Epic *Baldus* by Aquario Lodola

The Book of Merlin Cocaio, Mantuan Poet: 17 Macaronic books never before published

Venice, Paganini, 1517

{P Title page/ P + i}

From Magister Aquarius, herbalist, expert in the art of enemas, to the illustrious Lord Passarino, Count of Carp, a pamphlet in praise of Merlin Cocaio.

For such a long time now, most serene Count, you have so rattled my brain that I should write something about the discovery of this volume for you, that I almost went mad over the ledgers of my memory, and lest you continue to cause me such craziness: Accept this which I did not hear, but actually touched with these very hands.

You have known for a while how keen I am to go exploring the world and the various customs in the world, and this is suitable for herbalists, teeth-pullers and masters of britches.

It happened that some of us herbalists were navigating toward Armenian in order to find roots, herbs, stones, little worms and things of this sort for concocting treacle.

Among us on that caravel were: Magister Quintinus Scaramella, Magister Salvanelus Bocatorta, Magister Dimeldeus Zucconus, Magister Johannes Baricocola, Magister Buttadeus de Grattarognis, and I, Magister Aquarius Lodola;

{P Aq. Lod. p. 1/ P + i v. }

but contrary Fortune welcomed us hostilely with such a discrepancy of winds on the high seas, that in the end our caravel ran aground on an uninhabited and barren island.

So, half-dead from such a frenzy of waves, we disembarked onto the dry sand of the shore and after resting a little while, we rose up to investigate the island.

The terrain was sandy there, so we entered various pine woods; there Phoebus was spreading intolerable heat, so, constrained by such sweltering heat, we fled down into a cavern of a truly immense mountain.

It was so dark that just looking at it scared us; nonetheless, assuming a brave spirit, we resolved to explore the cavern, after getting food and a torch.

Then, after making the sign of the cross, we went down into it and walking, walking, walking went further and further down.

After a two-day hike, behold! We found ancient legs, heads, and the assorted bones of various animals and a little in front of that we gazed upon a spacious cave with two bronze doors, marvelously wrought; here we stayed for an hour unsure whether we should go inside.

Finally, like sheep, one more presumptuous than the others, we followed.

We went searching here and there through the cave: we saw hammers, pliers, anvils and other such things, all very rusty; we saw human heads, arms and legs. Imagine for yourself how astonished we were.

{P Aq. Lod. p. 2/ P + ii}

Proceeding further along, behold – a wonder to relate! We counted eleven marble sepulchers whose immensity I am unable to describe; above these, there was also a long, wide porphyry tablet hanging down, on which was displayed this epigram in gilt letters composed and sculpted by our Cocaio.

“The right hand of Merlin Cocaio sculpted these tombs in which he concealed magnanimous men. By heavenly grace these men roamed through Phlegethontean shadows, and the things which they reported back to me, I wrote in five books in the heroic mode whatever I experienced of hell from their mouths.”

After mulling over these things a while, we began to read the epigrams on the sepulchers one by one, there were (as I said) eleven tombs and the middle one was more beautiful than the others, all in alabaster, in whose whiteness these verses are inscribed.

“I, Baldus, lie here, who was not afraid to break down the doors of hell; nor did one Stygian [door] frighten me. I saw the raging of Cocytus, the sighing, the wailing, the terrible-sounding voices, and death everlasting. Having fallen into hell, I was content to disdain the world and to ask god for strength in this cavernous mountain.”

On the right side of this same sepulcher, there was another pure white tomb suspended on four stone columns, this couplet hanging down from it.

{P Aq. Lod. p. 3/ P + ii v.}

“Rubinus always lived with Baldus [despite] the contempt of his father, and he could not stand to be far from his tomb.”

On the left moreover, we observe another sepulcher of striped marble, where the following distich was read.

“I Cingar lived as a pervert, but when I slipped into Orcus, I wept and noble piety did not abandon me.”

On Rubinus’s sepulcher there was also this poem written above the snow-white monument:

“Captivated by extraordinary love for Baldus, Philotheus saw hell, now he occupies the stars of the yoke/ constellation Libra.”

After these, near Cingar’s stone, we read these verses left inscribed on another sepulcher, which was in fact taller than it was long:

“If my body appeared to be half dog, this Falchettus could not be displeasing to god.”

So on account of that versifying we understood that this Falchettus had a half-dog shape; near that was another white rock; this we saw written with a poem:

“The noble Hircanus lies here, not known in the world, whose nurse was Cingar’s mother herself.”

Next to this burial of Hircanus there was also the following distich on the white stone:

“As a little one, and as both a youth and an old man I, Moschinus, lived with Baldo, without whom this stone would not have me.”

Not far from this one a sublime monument was found stamped with this distich.

“Here you lie quietly, Virmazzo, although you were a Centaur, still you cannot be devoid of human intelligence.”

{P Aq. Lod. p. 4/ P + iii}

On the other side near Philotheus’s sepulcher the following was written in marble:

“Here I, Lirone, entering Acheron wailing, saw the pirates’ punishment which was to be given to me.”

Then on another stone, actually sculpted like a milepost, we were amazed by this writing:

“Neither mercy in heaven nor punishment in hell, is given to a buffoon, therefore, I, Bocalo, will live here.”

Stupefied by such an epigram, we decided to turn over the stone at the mouth of this tomb; having done this, behold! We saw an emaciated man, a beard down to the top of his feet, and he was toying with gall-nuts, cups and little playthings.

“Why, are you pestering me?” he says.

We to him, “Who are you?”

“I am who I was, but I will be what I was not, if you will grant what you have not granted.”

Amazed at this enigmatic statement, we reply,

“Speak more clearly.”

Sighing, he said, “No mercy is shown in heaven to buffoons, nor any pain in hell; I was a buffoon, indeed heaven and hell disdain to receive me; however, this judgment depends on you. If you will do something good for my soul I will go to heaven, if bad, I will be taken to hell: you decide.”

We answered him, “What do you want, good or bad?” And he, “What a man naturally desires.”

And saying this he became silent to such a degree that we were never able to get another word from his mouth.

Then and there, Father Gelminus who had come with us, began to murmur psalms, with the *Requiem aeternam*, and in a short time, freed from his body, [Boccalus] was taken to heaven by angels, from which we learned no small thing, in realizing that buffoons have no place in either heaven or hell, but it is up to the men left behind to entreat god for them.

{P Aq. Lod. p. 5/ P + iii v.}

While we were considering this further, behold, a sepulcher of surprising magnitude appeared, on whose side was hanging this epitaph:

“I was forty cubits long; I took two horns from Lucifer’s hell back to the world, because I was bringing two thousand souls in them snatched away from punishment; I am driven away from the celestial vault. Before the gates of heaven, I, a suppliant, beseech the Thunderer to grant me pardon for such a crime. But this was the sentence of the righteous judge: Let Fracassus stay [there] as many years as there were souls.”

So after we had observed these things attentively, we sought some trace of this poet and artificer, Merlin Cocaio, who had written (as his verses kept attesting) five books about the country of the devils.

After a long search and investigation, we unearthed a certain large chest, in which, after breaking it open with axes, we found a treasure of this laureate of ours, Cocaio, namely, extremely learned volumes in the Macaronic art: books, little books, small books, big old books and thousands of other scribblings.

We were happier than if we had found the riches of Croesus (since to us philosophers, wisdom is more pleasing than money);

{P Aq. Lod. p. 6/ P + iiiii }

we began to rifle through them this way and that with a certain greediness.

Among the other volumes there was one larger than all the rest dealing with natural things and those beyond the skies; there was a book dealing with all the battles conducted by King Charles, king of the French.

There was a book about warlocks and witches, and this attacked the Dominican brothers well enough.

There was a book entitled Barrichut, and another Transbaruch, another Robaiott, another Sgnirifot, another Scharcacol, another Cracricron, another Stritricetz, another Argnafel and many others which I don’t have in my memory, which deal with things so subtle that it is not fitting for men to utter them.

Among the other books mentioned above we took the five books of hell and arranged them in a small chest, and this [present] book on the deeds of the magnanimous Baldo,

leaving however the other books in the chest, we decided to carry that to the ship; but either God or Beelzebub did not take this along; for, right when we were all making an effort to carry it, with our shoulders beneath it, suddenly such an earthquake and a wind and a hammering of rocks started up that we immediately began to flee, fearing that the mountain would crash down on us; and thus, having abandoned the chest, we emerged at last outside the cavern. But when the earthquake would not stop, we boarded the ship and scarcely had we distanced ourselves from the shore, when right away we saw the island swimming miraculously and at a distance of 200 miles from our eyes; and it was not possible to draw near to it ever again, since if sailors even so much as threaten to disembark there, a similar earthquake is roused, with thunder and a commotion of storm clouds.

{P Aq. Lod. p. 7/ P + iii v.}

Therefore, as soon as I reached my own homeland, full of dread, I did not dare to open that particular little chest in which I had placed this work of Baldus and also the books of hell; nevertheless, having revived, I did open it and found only this book of Baldo's deeds, not even well-polished, since as could be believed, this was Merlin's first draft.

The books of hell, however, I did not find – either they vanished miraculously or, as I strongly suspect, someone stole them and perhaps they will be brought to light in due time.

Here, therefore, O most serene Prince, I have told you the manner of the discovery of this volume, and do not think I was dreaming, because I can lead forth many witnesses, especially the aforementioned herbalists; I have made a real effort to sift through the non-fantastical meaning of our poet in this book for nearly seven months now, to such an extent that my mind has nearly toppled (as one says) like a bowling pin.

Nevertheless, I enthusiastically seized upon each book, from the first to the last, admiring such great disdain for philosophy, astronomy and cosmography, that I came to consider Pythagoras, Plato and many other philosophers as nothing.

Furthermore, chewing over the grandiloquence and the richness of the discussions, I presume to not give a shit about Cicero and Vergil.

Doesn't his poetry glow with a certain loftiness or rather greatness of speech? "The pawing horses cannot stand still in their restraints" and in other passages. [cf. V 1.239]

"... and they turn the windlasses, cocking the curved crossbows" [V 16.41]

"They light the fuses on their rifles, bullets are discharged with a toof taff." [cf. V 4.485]

Why is Lucan praised for comparisons?

{P Aq. Lod. p. 8/ P + v}

Here is what our Merlin Cocaius writes about Baldo:

“With what fury a bull in love with a young heifer, when it is assaulted in a field by a thousand dogs, first wounds with its hooves, then gores with its horns; and spreading sand, launches big kicks into the air and fills the skies with howls from its frothy mouth.” [cf. V 11.265-69]

Such was Baldus etc., and in other passages:

“As a wild boar with its mouth open, which a hunter has wounded with a sharp spear, goes through the countryside and woods, goes through the tops of fields, breaking branches and bushes, spewing bloody foam from its curved tusks.” [cf. V 4.368-71]

If you want a description of a tempest at sea why do bash your brains saying: “Una Eurusque Notusque ruunt creberque procellis/ Africus et vastos volvunt ad litora fluctus” (Eastwind and Southwind rush together—and Southwest wind, thick with squalls, and they roll huge breakers toward the beaches) [*Aeneid*, 1.85-6]

Look at how well our Merlin sings:

“... when suddenly the army of winds arrives. First Boreas, and blowing against him, Sirocco. Behold! Garbino is here, against whom Greco lets loose big farts, which resound in the highest skies. Olympus flashes, teeming with flame-throwing lightning and lets stormy rains shoot out.” [cf. V 12.460-70]

If you want morality, why do you need to rifle through Horace, Juvenal, Terence? Behold again – our Cocaius:

“They are all doctors, but they spurn their medicine; they are all friends, but won’t share a friendly pint. I am rich, everyone is willing to die for me; I am poor, no one wants to spend a penny on me.” [cf. V 4.227-30]

{P Aq. Lod. p. 9/ P + v v.}

If you wish to discuss the enjoyable curiosity of astronomy, why so many spheres of the universe?

Why do you try to understand Euclid?

Therefore, read everything in Book 10 since it is all about astrology; you will see how clearly everything is explained by orbits, not copying other astrologers, and this is shown by Cingar’s character; specifically in that extremely profound subject matter of the moon, and how well he defines its waning and waxing and its qualities, indeed he says:

“I was watching the white Moon with her spotty face dispel shadows from the shoals of the sea and the lands of the earth. Doctors observe her: she knows when medicine is to be given to the patient and when this would make him shit out his intestines.” [cf. V 14.434-55]

O most skillful, O most excellent poet! Look at the opening he chooses and if it is comparable to the Virgilian opening, for Vergil said:

“Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris/
Italiam fato profugus laviniaque venit/
Littora multum ille et terris iactatus et alto” (I sing of arms and the man who first came to Italy and the Lavinian shore from the coast of Troy – a fugitive of fate, he was greatly tossed about on land and sea.) [*Aeneid*, 1.1-3]

Look what magnificence Merlin displays in his opening.

“A certain fantastic fantasy has come to me, to sing the story of Baldo with the fat muses, whose high flying fame and noble name make the earth tremble and the abyss beshit itself in fear.” [cf. V 1.1-4] But wishing to proclaim all the beautiful parts, it would be necessary to read the whole book immediately; you, clever Prince, know quite well what I wish to explain.

{P Aq. Lod. p. 10/ P + vi}

I am sickened that this noble volume was not both revised and copied by him; oh, how much better it would have been, since where land is better plowed, it is more fertile, as Columella attests.

However, worthless pedagogue idiots emerged who stirred up debate: that this Cocaio was not Mantuan; oh, what a great torment to learn this, since the poet himself attests in the 16th macaronic [book], saying thus:

“I am called by the name Cocaius of Manto’s blood,” wherefore it is understood not so much that he was Mantuan, rather that his female lineage was from Manto, a mage, it is said, who built the city called by her name, Mantua.

But a greater proof can be discerned in the various passages: how well he depicts the habits and customs of these same citizens and principally in the first seven books.

Find these verses then, noted in the front of this book, which we decided should be written, where talking about himself, he says:

“If you inquire who I am, Mantuan in country, and the years under whose rule I lived, under King Gaioffo, in whose jurisdiction the Macaronic kingdom stands. [Cf. Dante, *Inferno* 1. 66-76.]

If [you ask] my name, I am called Merlin Cocaio. Cocaio is my name, Merlin is my title; while by chance my pregnant mother had been looking for a bottle-stopper lost in a field, she gave birth to me, and I was given this name [Cocaio means cork, bottlestopper]; and so that you may learn the meaning of Merlin: every day a merle had carried a beakful to my crib for me, since my mother drowned in wine when I was an infant. Here, I am called Cocaio; there I am named Merlin.

{P Aq. Lod. p. 11/ P + vi v.}

“We sang of the noble arms of the magnanimous Baldo. The heroic style was not pleasing to me; brilliant Macaronic poetry shows me to the world as a bard.

The long and short syllables maintain their proper length everywhere; I rarely corrupt them with my [poetic] liberty.

I wrote very many vocabulary words of my invention; which anyone will be able to understand without explanations. [cf. V 22.1-132]

See with what smoothness he establishes his homeland and tells about his studies, therefore let there be no disagreement among these ignoramuses; and as to what age it was, or under whose rule he lived – he himself attests and says under the reign of Gaiolfo; who this king Gaiolfo was, Johannes

Scannagatus in his histories and Petrus Bricola in his supplements described.

In what location the Macaronic reign is, many writers have spoken, especially Tibertus Pizzaferrus and Guglielmo Mangiafico.

It is noted moreover that our poet was of peasant parents, therefore, because his mother, impregnated with him, gave birth to him while she was looking for a bottle stopper, and thus chance created his name.

The reason he is called Merlin means therefore that the merle brought edibles to his crib everyday, since his mother was drowned/ drowned herself in a vat of wine while he was an infant – O such a great and unprecedented calamity!

He recited the deeds of Baldo so that they would be clearly available in a book; the Mantuan poet himself saw Baldo and spoke to him when Baldo himself lived near Mantua.

And our poet observes the standard length of syllables, even though some worthless people say that in this Macaronic art, it is not necessary to maintain the long and short qualities of vowels,

{P Aq. Lod. p. 12/ P + vii}

O rude and uncouth people, who are gripped by such madness: scan Merlin's poems and then you will see if he maintains the norm.

Although, infrequently, he corrupts the syllables on his [poetic] authority; however, not everyone possesses this power.

Lastly, O most splendid Prince, lest I drag on too long, I announce to you that what I have said is utterly true, and I swear to this before my co-herbalists mentioned above.

Farewell, remember me in the city of Alchedamach, Magister Aquarius.

[P.S.] I found this following eclogue in the same chest, which I didn't decline to send to you as well. Again, farewell.