

Book Reviews

Anita Fiderer Moskowitz. *Italian Gothic Sculpture, c.1250–c.1400*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. 432.

With a richness on par with John Pope-Hennessy's classic treatment of the same subject, Anita Moskowitz' *Italian Gothic Sculpture* provides a long needed contextualized synthesis of some of the most sublimely beautiful and radically innovative objects in western art. If this volume immediately begs comparison to Pope-Hennessy's work on the same subject, and also to John White's *Art and Architecture in Italy 1250-1400*, then it is a case of apples and oranges, or rather, pulpits and sarcophagi. Moskowitz lays out the material without requiring the fair level of expertise that encumbers a straight read of Pope-Hennessy's text. At the same time, she consistently provides the rationale, argument and details that are ordinarily absent from surveys, depriving that format of critical texture. This is a work that is both fulfilling to the specialist and comfortable for the student.

The material is organized primarily by region, creating a structure that is especially meaningful for the study of sculpture of the period. Because of the logistics of transporting stone, most often large commissions were site specific, that is, the master and the workshop were in close proximity to the place of final installation. Thus to focus on a center and take into account the local tradition, the local craftsmen, and those who migrated from elsewhere provides a solid framework against which to truly measure innovation and to qualify otherwise nebulous stylistic currents. With the same level of ease, Moskowitz urges us forward in time, assembling the criteria necessary for a distinct picture of the development of an individual style for each of the leading sculptors. In many cases, the results are fresh and perhaps unexpected, as in the observation that Giovanni di Balduccio's idiosyncratic interpretation of the work of Giovanni Pisano seeps, eventually and perceptively, far into the Lombard idiom.

Not to be underestimated is the value of this work in the English language, since in order to be deftly conversant with the published research on Italian Trecento sculpture, one must be fluent in German as well as Italian. This is one reason why valuable studies on many of the major sculptors of the period have had isolated resonance in the more wide-ranging discourse of recent scholarship. The result has been a confluence of generalizations, rather than specifics, allowing even the most

rigorous of scholars, including Pope-Hennessy, to regard the period mainly as a prelude to the Quattrocento. By her multifaceted approach to the material, and her inclusion of foreign language research, Moskowitz has not only brought us to a better understanding of Trecento sculpture, but also that much closer to an understanding of the crucial transition to the Early Renaissance. A sharper definition of this transition can only benefit both Trecento and Quattrocento studies.

From the outset, Moskowitz identifies the impact and elucidates the significance of both Northern European style and the models from the classical past on the development of an Italian Gothic style. Within a framework of workshop practice and tradition, Trecento sculptors such as Nicola Pisano and Arnolfo di Cambio can properly be regarded as the vanguards of certain refinements that are usually identified as defining the early Renaissance. For example, Moskowitz calls attention to the recent discovery that, for the figure of the seated Virgin in the *Monument of Guillaume de Bray*, (d. 1282) Arnolfo recycled a Roman antiquity, to which he added a freshly wrought Christ Child. Here is yet another piece of evidence that the Trecento privileged the classical past, for it is most unlikely that an object not otherwise appreciated would have been reused for one as important as the Virgin, and as central to the composition. It is this type of artistic activity, passed down through generations, that, in certain respects, makes Trecento sculpture not merely a presage to the Renaissance, but its tangible heritage. To wit, it would seem that a serious reevaluation is in order of sculptors who are both witnesses to the Trecento and prophets of the Quattrocento, such as Brunelleschi, Donatello and Ghiberti, since it is more than likely that many of the stylistic choices they made were born out of a far better understanding of their predecessors than is generally acknowledged.

Moskowitz concludes the volume with several case studies, bringing to each thoughtful observation, analysis and new ideas. The fact that two of the examples are major monuments of the period—Arnolfo's ciborium in San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome, and the Arca di San Domenico, Bologna, with its thirteenth century components by Nicola Pisano—point to the overwhelming need for more work of this kind. It is a methodology that requires careful attention to the actual objects themselves, and the need to reassess them amidst stronger visual and documentary evidence, as Moskowitz has done.

LYNN CATTERSON

Columbia University

Letizia Panizza, ed. *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*. Oxford: Legenda, 2000. Pp. 523.

This volume, originated in an international conference organized by Letizia Panizza at Royal Holloway College of the University of London in April 1994, offers a vast and well-organized view of the position that early modern women occupied in Italy from 1400 to 1650 and shows to what extent they fell short of, or surpassed, the role model that contemporary society had prescribed for them. Here we have twenty-nine papers, or chapters, of comparable high quality, organized in six sections of varying length and dealing with the comportment and function of women in the courts, the life and ideology of nuns, the legal constraints and the prevailing precepts and models of behavior imposed on all women, with women on the stage and those engaged in literature. The essays are of comparable high quality, but, being so many, cannot regrettably receive here the individual attention they deserve. I shall therefore offer only an overview of what readers will be gratified to find in this extensive collection.

The first section takes the reader from an assessment of the standards of behavior for women and men in the merchant class and in the courts, (Dilwyn Knox) from an analysis of power courtly women were able to exercise within the range of family influence or thanks to personal prestige, (Evelyn S. Welch) to the motivations behind the texts that male writers dedicated to women of reigning families, (Diego Zancani) to the consideration that Isabella Sforza, presumed author of *Della vera tranquillità dell'animo*, might have been turned into a rhetorical model for religious evangelization (Francine Daemens). The section dedicated to women and the church appraises us about the disciplining effect of religious practices and ethics on the female population, (Gabriella Zarri) the varying prestige that convents enjoyed within the church and in the social life of the city, (Victoria Primhak) the position of religious authorities in relation to the family custom of forcing daughters into convents, (Francesca Medioli) the spiritual and emotional worth to be attributed to the cult of Mary, (Ruth Chavasse) and the value of historical research done by women in conventual seclusion (Kate Lowe). In the third part of the collection, Marina Graziosi shows how important Farinaccio's *Praxis and theorica criminalis* was in determining women's position in modern times; Christine Meek analyzes the real power and limitations assigned to them by property rights; Brian Richardson studies the changing attitudes to marital love in the Cinquecento; Daniela De Bellis deals with Tarabotti's attack on sumptuary laws, while Jane Bridgeman points out the unspoken financial aim of those laws. In the section dedicated to models of comportment, Marta Ajmar assesses the exemplary use made of female figures of the past for the behavior of Renaissance girls; Paola Tinagli infers the economic and

political character of the symbolic *istorie* painted on Florentine marriage furnishings; and Sara F. Matthews Grieco reconstructs the pedagogical function of mass-produced prints in the formation of women's social identity. In part five Richard Andrews illustrates the social and cultural innovation brought about by the *commedia dell'arte* and its most famous interpreter, Isabella Andreini; Maggie Günsberg considers the psychosexual dynamics of cross-dressing in the comedy; and Rosemary E. Bancroft-Marcus studies the Cretan adaptation of Italian plays in relation to the lives of Veneto-Cretan women during the last century of Venetian rule on the island. And finally, in the closing section dedicated to literature, Diana Robin reminds us of Laura Cereta's calls for change in the legal, social and economic status of women; Virginia Cox analyzes the rule of verisimilitude and the system of restraints that reduced women to a limited roles as interlocutors in Renaissance dialogues; Pamela J. Benson uncovers the Florentine political subtext in the story of Guardrada in Boccaccio and Vasari; Judy Rawson offers some plausible interpretations of a Quattrocento love story; Conor Fahy documents the scarcity of women in Cinquecento academies; Giovanni Aquilecchia traces the literary models and the social motivations in the transgressive behavior of Aretino's women in *Sei giornate*; Adriana Chemello comments on the rhetorical organization and devices used by Lucrezia Marinella in *La nobiltà et eccellenza della donne*; Giovanna Rabitti draws attention to the role model played by Vittoria Colonna on sixteenth-century women poets and to the manner of her literary influence on them, and, at the end of the volume, Nadia Cannata Salamone highlights the influence of women in the courtly literary circles of late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento.

A considerable span of time has elapsed since these essays were first presented in London, in which time a great deal has been written about the position and the achievements of Italian women throughout the centuries. As a result, Panizza's collection leaves the reader with the impression of being already acquainted with a considerable part of it, especially in the case when the authors of the essays have in the intervening years used their findings or developed their investigation elsewhere. Even so, the volume retains a great value for the young and not so young scholar, for it offers a basic and well-structured orientation on the results obtained by their predecessors in a variety of disciplines and subjects. I therefore highly recommend the collection.

RINALDINA RUSSELL

CUNY, Queens College

Giordano Bruno. *Candlebearer*. Translated with introduction and notes by Gino Moliterno. Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation, No. 31. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 2000. Pp. 204.

Il Candelaio, or *Candlebearer*, as it is now called in Gino Moliterno's vibrant new English translation, is a comic play of daunting complexity. As Moliterno remarks, the play exhibits "what one might call an ordered excess"; it is really "three plays in one." (15) It is Giordano Bruno's only play; this eccentric and volatile sixteenth-century figure seems to have wanted, with this work, to absorb and perhaps to outdo everything that Renaissance comedy had thus far achieved. What is more, along with its elaborate prefatory material, *Candlebearer* can be seen as a dramatic illustration of Bruno's art of memory. This, says Moliterno, "may be the most remarkable feature of this most remarkable play." (13)

It was in France, in 1582, that *Candlebearer* made its first appearance in print. However, as Moliterno says, Bruno may have begun writing it in Naples before 1576, when accusations of heresy forced him, at the age of 28, to leave his city and eventually the whole Italian peninsula. If this could be proved with certainty, it would come as no surprise, for the play's artistic and intellectual richness is immense. The play may well be a summation of the author's years of reading and reflection, and of life as an exile.

But *Candlebearer* is, first of all, a feast of comic situations. The main plot involves Bonifacio, a greedy and foolish man who, now in his middle years, has fallen for the allure of a courtesan named Vittoria. He wants to have his pleasure with her, but without having to pay, and of course he wants his wife, Carubina, to remain ignorant of the whole matter. He enlists the services, therefore, of Scaramurè, a charlatan magician who, for a small fee, promises to seduce Vittoria for Bonifacio by means of a waxen voodoo doll. In the end, as one might expect, Bonifacio is cuckolded and loses everything: Vittoria, his wife's trust, his dignity, and a great deal of money. The second plot involves Bartolomeo, an alchemist whose great love is silver and gold. "Everything else bores him," says Marta, his neglected and frustrated wife; "his only paradise is his furnace." (90) Like Bonifacio, Bartolomeo is taken in by a con-man, Cencio, who claims to be an alchemist too and to be able to make gold with an ingredient called *pulvis Christi*. At the center of the third plot is Manfurio, a pedant who insists on speaking Latin for most of the play, even when dealing with semi-literate rogues.

These three plots, which are intricately intertwined, would make unreasonable demands on one's memory if the play were not at once hilarious, grotesque and obscene. Bonifacio, for example, while wearing a long false beard, is made to think he is in the throes of passion with Vittoria, but the woman is really his own wife in

disguise. And Bartolomeo cannot be confused with anyone else in the play. "No fish is more at home in water," says Marta, "than he is in getting thoroughly smoked next to those burning coals of his and then [...] he comes to me with those burning, red eyes looking like Lucifer himself." (89-90) Nor can Marta be confused with any other woman in the play; if her husband is filthy on the exterior, she is equally filthy within. With charming shamelessness, she tells the audience that she misses the time when she and Bartolomeo "used to play at straddling the neck, hugging the bear, spearing the bearded clam, parting the fig, putting mousey in hole, doing the three-legged hop, pulling the leg, riding the hump," and so on. (135) The play culminates with the relentless punishment of Manfurio. In order to avoid jail and losing all of his money, he must make a choice: either ten strokes on his hand with a leather strap or fifty lashes on the posterior with his breeches down. (188) He tries the first option, but when he cannot endure the pain, his assailants—who are only posing as authorities—give him a long and spectacular thrashing which occupies the whole of the penultimate scene.

Such moments help to illustrate why Moliterno believes that this play exemplifies Bruno's art of memory. This art, which was originally intended as a tool for the orator, required "the construction of ordered imaginary spaces or *loci*," says Moliterno, "and the creation of striking images that would remain in the mind." The striking images, which served as mnemonic devices, would be associated with the rooms of an "imaginary building," and thus the orator's mental space would acquire a definite and familiar shape. The orator could then recall anything stored in these imaginary rooms by recalling the images associated with them. Moreover, because each room would be in a certain spatial relationship to every other room, the orator could take "a mental walk" through the whole structure and proceed in any number of directions. (22) In theory at least, such a method could allow one to perform dazzling feats of memory. As Moliterno points out, however, what is most interesting is that the mental structure "quite often recommended" by handbooks on mnemonic systems was the amphitheater. (23) *Candlebearer* begins to look, then, like a rather literal manifestation of a memory theater.

Bonifacio's humiliation, Bartolomeo's blackened face and bloodshot eyes, the spectacle of Manfurio's pathetic end: these are among the many striking images that form the memory theater called *Candlebearer*. And its structure is created, or at least impressed on one's mind, through the play's elaborate prefatory material, which consists of seven different documents. The first four of these—a motto, a sonnet, a letter of dedication, and a long *argumento et ordine*—map out the play in an increasingly detailed way. (55-67) Then an antiprologue appears and says the play is too complicated. "I've sweated over it, day and night," he says, "but not all the combined trumpets and drums of those whorish Muses of Helicon have been able to make the least scrap of it stick in my memory." (67) "In a negative light," as

Moliterno says, the antiprologue also helps to establish the shape of this play in one's mind. (28) Following this is the prologue, whose function is very suggestive indeed of a memory system. Pointing to the various spaces on the stage, he firmly associates them with their respective characters. "This is the way," he says, "to the candlebearer's house, I mean Bonifacio and Carubina, and to the house of Bartolomeo; this other way leads to the houses of Vittoria, Gianbernardo, the painter, and Scaramur , the necromancer. Around these parts, although I've no idea why, quite often there wanders a most solemn pedant called Manfurio." (68) The final prefatory document consists of a few hostile remarks by a *bidello*, or janitor, who calls Bonifacio several vividly obscene names, including of course a candlebearer, or cuckold, and then warns the audience that he is about to arrive. "Give way! Make room!" he cries, "or be gored by his horns." (72) What the janitor is doing here, says Moliterno, is "imagistically inscribing" Bonifacio. (28)

Another metaphor for human memory, as Moliterno points out, was the writing tablet. (23) In *Candlebearer*, however, this metaphor seems to be an object of Bruno's mockery. A conspicuous feature of this play is its profusion of lists. Marta's long list of euphemisms for sexual acts and the janitor's list of epithets for Bonifacio are only two; there are many others, both in the prefatory material and in the play proper. And because they are always thunderous and overwhelming, they are always comical. This feature seems particularly to implicate Manfurio, whose mind, with its endless supply of Latinisms, resembles indeed a rigid verbal tablet. Manfurio, as Moliterno says, represents "all the worst and most bombastic pretenses of that decayed humanistic learning which Bruno hated with a fiery passion." (18)

There is no doubt, in any case, that Bruno had his theories of memory in mind when he wrote this play. In his dedicatory letter to a certain Lady Morgana B., whom scholars have yet to identify, Bruno says, "so here then is the candle which is proffered to you by this *Candlebearer* which I send to you from this foreign land in which I find myself and where it may serve to throw light on certain *Shadows of Ideas* which in truth seem to frighten the beasts and, like Dantean devils, leave the asses gasping far behind." (59) The reference here is to *De umbris idearum*, "Bruno's first work on his art of memory," Moliterno notes, "published in Paris in the same year." (193, n.3) And how vividly this letter brings Bruno himself to life: "Where you are, in your homeland," he says to his lady, the play "may serve to bring me into the minds of many and to show them that it's all far from over." (59-60) His exile would come to an end, finally, when he was burned at the stake in Rome in 1600. The letter also suggests a love triangle, involving Bruno, Lady Morgana, and a certain "other candlebearer of flesh and blood." (60)

In this way, Bruno aligns himself with his own character, Gianbernardo the painter, who cuckolds Bonifacio. When Gianbernardo holds forth on honor, the voice we hear is surely Bruno's own: "Honour is the good opinion that others have

of us. Whilst it lasts, honour lasts. And it's not what we are and what we do that makes us honourable or dishonourable but rather the opinions and the esteem of others." (159) Here, one cannot help but think of Falstaff in *Henry IV Part One*: "What is honor? A word. What is in that word honor? What is that honor? Air. A trim reckoning!" (V.i.133-135) Perhaps this is coincidental. In England, however, Bruno had befriended Sidney and perhaps even influenced, as Moliterno points out, Jonson's *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. (15) Indeed, Bruno's influence extends all the way to James Joyce. (32)

Now here is Bruno's play again, in an elegant, authoritative, and economical paperback edition, complete with a fine critical introduction, helpful annotations, and seven photographs of scenes from a modern production. And one can expect that Moliterno's translation, which is highly animated and always idiomatic, will be the best for many years to come.

CARMINE G. DI BIASE

Jacksonville State University

Giambattista Della Porta. *The Sister*. Translated by Donald Beecher and Bruno Ferraro with Introduction and Notes. Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation, No. 35. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 2000. Pp. 162.

It is difficult to know when Della Porta wrote *La sorella*. Although it was first published in 1604, it might have been written as early as about 1588, as a remark made by one of its ridiculous characters suggests. "Queen Elizabeth of England," says a captain named Trasimaco, "wanted me for her husband as protection against Philip II." (122) It is quite possible that Della Porta was thinking of the Armada. What is certain, however, is that this play is a superb example of the *commedia erudita* and has been admired for centuries by other playwrights, Italian and otherwise. Now it is available as *The Sister*, complete with a critical introduction and annotations, in this fine English translation by Donald Beecher and Bruno Ferraro.

In this learned comedy, one sees, as the editors say, "a respect for formal balance and unity of design," (17) for Della Porta believed that what Aristotle had said about tragedy in the *Poetics* had serious implications for comedy as well. Hence Della Porta's adherence in *The Sister* to the unities of time and place, and the supreme care he took with the plot. For Della Porta, plot was the soul of comedy, as for Aristotle it was the soul of tragedy. Another force that shaped Della Porta's art

was Roman comedy; indeed, he had translated Plautus, whose influence can clearly be seen in *The Sister*. Trasimaco, for example, is a preposterous braggart, a character inspired no doubt by Plautus's Miles. The braggart soldier was a familiar type on European stages during the Renaissance. One recognizes him in Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*, and of course in Shakespeare's Falstaff. In *The Sister*, however, Trasimaco is more than a learned allusion, more, too, than a source of comedy. Along with other comic characters, such as a happy glutton named Gulone, Trasimaco is there to help thwart the rather serious tragic potential of this thematically complex play.

This tragic potential is not merely built into the plot; some of the characters, Attilio in particular, are given to fits of despair so dark that, seen out of context, they would never be associated with comedy at all. Before the time of the play, Attilio had set out for Turkey, where, on his father's orders, he was to find and ransom his mother, Constanza, and his sister, Cleria, who had been kidnapped years before. He stopped in Venice, however, where he met a servant girl named Sophia, fell in love with her, ransomed her with the money that was intended for his mother and sister, and brought her home to Nola, claiming that his mother was dead and that Sophia was Cleria. At the opening of the play, the young couple are living as brother and sister in the house of Pardo, Attilio's father. Pardo, who has noticed some unnatural flirtation between the two, is trying to marry Cleria off to Trasimaco and Attilio to a young woman named Sulpizia. Orgio, Sulpizia's uncle, is also eager to see the marriage happen. Meanwhile, Erotico, a good friend of Attilio, actually does love Sulpizia. Attilio and Erotico, therefore, with the help of Trinca, the clever trickster of this play, try to carry out a plan that will allow the two couples to live and love in peace. They will stage a double marriage with a bogus priest. Erotico will marry Cleria, (disposing of Trasimaco forms a hilarious subplot) Attilio will marry Sulpizia, and the four of them will live together in the same house. Erotico and Cleria will live as husband and wife only by day, as will Attilio and Sulpizia; and at night, behind closed doors, they will all recombine.

The plan, however, is never realized, because Constanza reappears unexpectedly and makes the shocking revelation that Cleria really *is* Cleria. And suddenly, incest becomes something more serious than a mildly prurient motif; it becomes the play's main theme. The depth of Attilio's despair threatens to destroy the essentially comic nature of this play. It would be wrong, here, for the actor playing Attilio to elicit laughs intentionally from the audience during his character's long lament in IV.v.: "Death," he says, "is a sweet harbor for those who suffer; accessible to all, it welcomes everyone." Having violated the most basic of all taboos, he must exile himself. "Mother," he says, "may you cherish this newly won daughter, and may you allow your son to wander the earth"; he wants to be "as far from this sister as possible." (137) Here, surely, Della Porta had *Oedipus the King* in mind. It is a

seemingly impossible situation; Della Porta, obviously, was not a slavish classicist. All is set aright, however, with a final revelation by Sulpizia's nurse, Balia: Sulpizia and Cleria, who are the same age, had been exchanged at birth. Nor is this revelation utterly contrived, for it explains a great number of particulars which until this point seem arbitrary: why Sulpizia's parents are absent from the play, for example, and why her uncle is so eager to marry her off to Attilio. Thus, Balia's revelation has a marvelous tightening effect on the whole work. And *The Sister* turns out, in the end, to be a lesson in how comic plotting can be taken to its outermost limits.

One leaves the play feeling slightly unsettled by the deliberately ambiguous, almost obsessive manner in which Della Porta develops this theme of incest. Attilio, for example, believing that he is guilty of incest, thinks that he is having a horrifying revelation: "It was not the sight of her beauty that made the blood course through my veins when I first saw her, but that she was my sister, borne by the same mother." (136) And here is Pardo, as it dawns on him that the real Cleria, his real daughter, is in fact Sulpizia: "I felt some powerful attraction to her, a kind of magnetic pull, and I could never understand why," and for this reason, he says, he "kept after Orgio to give her in marriage to Attilio, even without a dowry." (151) It is likely, however, that Della Porta was responding to a social concern that was quite alive during his day. Incest, as the editors say, "was a topic of current debate among theologians and reformers, philosophers and jurists during the period." (34)

With regard to this matter, the introduction and the accompanying bibliography are lucid, balanced and highly informative. And other matters—such as the life and career of Della Porta, the genre of academic tragicomedy, and the influence of *The Sister* on other playwrights in and beyond Italy—are treated equally well. This last matter deserves some attention here. Della Porta himself called his plays "scherzi della giovinezza," (9) but of course they were much more than that. As the editors note, *The Sister* led to several adaptations, among them Middleton's *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's*, which in turn influenced Aphra Behn's *The Counterfeit Bridegroom; or the Defeated Widow*. Back on the Continent, *The Sister* became *La soeur* in Jean Rotrou's French translation, which then might have served as a source for a play by Goldoni. (56-61) The whole story of this influence is a great deal more complicated; its main lines have been sorted out by the editors for anyone who wants to pursue them. Even a basic understanding of it, however, makes it clear that *The Sister*, in addition to being an enormously enjoyable play, was of considerable importance to the European drama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Sister is also an engaging expression sixteenth-century Italian attitudes to Islam, and to Turkey in particular. Della Porta seems to have been wary of stereotypes. When Trasimaco brags—"go to Persia and ask of me there, for I fought with them against the Turks" (122)—the joke is on him; as a suitor he is an absurd and laughable failure. Indeed, throughout the play, whenever the world beyond Chris-

tendom is mentioned, the laughter is at the expense of the Italians. Most interesting in this regard is the return from Turkey of Pedolitto and his son, Turco, who was brought up there and cannot speak Italian. Pedolitto has met Constanza in Turkey and is therefore a threat to the plans of the young lovers. Trinca, however, in order to save their plans, pretends to know Turkish and speaks some gibberish to young Turco, who of course cannot defend himself when his responses are deliberately misrepresented. Pardo, who does not understand Turkish, is easily deceived. Turco's real responses, however, which the editors have translated and placed within brackets, are dignified and poignant: "I don't know you," he says to Trinca, and "leave me alone," (118) and later, "let's go, father." (120) Long before this scene, when Trinca tries a similar deception, Pardo grows suspicious and loses his patience: "Turkey, Turkey, damn your Turkey. With this word you justify every manner of wickedness." (92) One wonders here if Pardo is speaking for Della Porta as well.

This translation of *La sorella*, the first to appear in modern English, will be welcomed by students and scholars of comparative drama who do not read Italian. Of broader interest will be the critical apparatus. The introduction, at sixty-six pages, is not only thorough but well written. The bibliography, substantial but astutely selective, is a fine guide to the further study of Della Porta, the *commedia erudita*, the *commedia dell'arte*, or theories of comedy in general. One also appreciates the forty-two annotations to the text, which explain literary and historical allusions or clarify passages that have suffered some inevitable loss in the translation.

These features, together with the inexpensive paperback format, make this edition an attractive choice for classroom use. Beecher and Ferraro, one should add, have produced a translation that is more than reliable. It is swift and sparkling, and quite idiomatic: well suited, in short, for practical use as a stage script.

CARMINE G. DI BIASE

Jacksonville State University

Emilio Hidalgo-Serna, Massimo Marassi, José M. Sevilla, José Villalobos, a cura di. *Pensar para el nuevo siglo. Giambattista Vico y la cultura europea*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale [Siviglia, 4-9 ottobre 1999]. Vol. I-III. Napoli: La Città del Sole, 2001. Pp. 1259.

L'Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici e la Stiftung Studia Humanitatis, due tra i numerosi Enti che, nell'ottobre del 1999, hanno collaborato con il Dipartimento

di *Metafisica y Corrientes Actuales de la Filosofía* e il Centro de Investigación sobre Vico nell'organizzazione del Convegno omonimo, ne hanno ora promosso la pubblicazione degli *Atti*, raccolti dai curatori in tre volumi, per i tipi de La Città del Sole di Napoli.

L'elevato numero dei contributi, la ricchezza dei temi trattati e la molteplicità delle aree linguistiche e culturali che hanno concorso alla comune riflessione sul pensiero del napoletano, trovano negli *Atti* una compiuta espressione del carattere ecumenico dell'iniziativa che conclude degnamente un secolo per molti versi 'vichiano.'

Motivi editoriali ci impediscono di riferire su ciascuno di essi: ci scusiamo pertanto fin d'ora con gli studiosi non menzionati.

I contributi raccolti nel primo volume, *Lenguaje, retórica y poética filosófica*, (pp. 3-345) sono preceduti da una breve presentazione dei curatori e dai saluti di Cesare Vasoli e di Mario Agrimi; tra essi ricordiamo quelli di: Eugenio Coseriu ("El lugar de los universales fantásticos en la filosofía de Vico," pp. 3-36); Manuel Barrios Casares ("Hölderlin [tras Vico]: la lógica poética de la revolución," pp. 37-55); Andrea Battistini ("Il granito e l'arcobaleno. La biografia vichiana di Antonio Carafa tra verità storica e ragione epidittiche," pp. 57-86); Gianfranco Cantelli ("Ancora qualche considerazioni sul 'parlare scrivendo' di Vico: una premessa a la sua 'sematologia'," pp. 87-110); Marcel Danesi ("L'interconnessione dei sistemi della rappresentazione umana: verso una visione vichiana della semiotica," pp. 111-36); Humberto Aparecido De Oliveira Guido ("Vico e la emancipazione delle belle arti: l'arte come creazione ed espressione della mente umana," pp. 175-88); Jürgen Trabant ("La lingua di questa Scienza': lingua antica/scienza nuova," pp. 189-218); Rita Verdirame ("Vico, Pirandello e il mito dei Giganti [con sparse osservazioni sul 'vichismo' di alcuni scrittori del Novecento]," pp. 235-51); Gustavo Costa ("Vico e la Sacra Scrittura alla luce di un fascicolo dell'Inquisizione," pp. 252-73); Francesco Botturi ("Ermeneutica del mito ed esperienza etica in Giambattista Vico," pp. 275-93); conclude questa prima silloge il contributo di Mario Papini ("L'etimologico universale vichiano: una linea interpretativa," pp. 321-45).

Il secondo volume, con il sottotitolo 'Vico y la cultura europea,' (pp. 347-913) raccoglie, tra i tanti, i contributi di Mario Agrimi ("Nazioni unite insieme, come in una gran Città del Mondo, *Scienza nuova prima*, 56," pp. 347-61); Eduardo Bello ("Dos concepcionex de la filosofía de la historia: Vico y Voltaire," pp. 363-87); Giuseppe Cacciatore ("Il concetto di 'cittadinanza' in Giambattista Vico," pp. 389-407); Massimo Marassi ("Natura e storia in Vico e Kant," pp. 443-69); Enrico Nuzzo ("I luoghi dell'umanità in Vico," pp. 471-95); Sthephan Otto ("Vico versus Spinoza. Zwei Typen von Metaphisik vor dem Problem 'zeitlicher Kontingenz'," pp. 497-511); Leon Pompa ("Necessity and Contingency in Vico's and Philosophy and History of Humanity," pp. 513-35). Sempre sui rapporti tra Vico e l'Europa si

soffermano anche: Fulvio Tessitore (“Senso comune, teologia della storia e storicismo in Giambattista Vico,” pp. 537-570); Maurizio Torrini (“Vico nella scienza del suo tempo,” pp. 571-87); Maurizio Martirano (“La presenza di Vico nell’attività giornalistica milanese di Vincenzo Cuoco [1804-1806],” pp. 589-613); Franco Ratto (“Il ‘Sessantotto’ di Giambattista Vico,” pp. 643-71); Sanja Roic (“Vico e i Morlacchi. Il passato e il presente delle idee vichiane sulla costa orientale dell’Adriatico,” pp. 673-693); Manuela Sanna (“Qualche nota su un brano soppresso della Scienza nuova e sui rapporti tra filosofia e metafisica,” II, 695-713); Pierre Girard (“Comunidad y política: Vico crítico de Aristóteles,” pp. 797-811); Bruce Haddock (“Vico’s Critique of the Theory of Social Contract,” pp. 813-23); Miguel A. Pastor Pérez (“La antropología política de Vico desde la perspectiva de la dialéctica emocional,” pp. 851-71); María José Rebollo Espinosa (“Vico-Delors-Vico: ‘La educación encierra un tesoro’,” pp. 873-897); Olivier Remaud (“Infanzia e storia,” pp. 899-915).

Tra i saggi raccolti nel terzo volume, “El pensamiento Hispanico y propuestas viquianas para el nuevo siglo,” (pp. 915-1259) segnaliamo quelli di: José Faur (“Retórica y Ermenéutica: Vico y la tradición rabinica,” pp. 917-37); Emilio Hidalgo-Serna (“Actualidad y función filosófica del humanismo español anterior a Vico,” pp. 939-60); Antonio Scocozza (“De la historia civil a la teología de la historia: Vico y Donoso Cortés,” pp. 961-83); Jose M. Sevilla (“Vico y Ortega: razón narrativa y razón histórica,” pp. 985-1017); Moisés González García (“De la racionalidad a la ‘barbarie de la reflexión’ en Giambattista Vico,” pp. 1041-60); José Luis López López (“‘El sueño de la razón...’ El sentido de la música, experimentum crucis del viquianismo de hoy frente a la Neoilustración imposible,” 1061-75); Alain Pons (“Vico e il destino dell’Europa,” 1137-47); Amadeu Viana (“‘Ahora empieza la historia’: interdependencia y géneros difusos en G.B. Vico,” pp. 1149-66); José Villalobos Domínguez (“La mirada y la creación,” pp. 1167-77); Vincenzo Vitiello (“Vico e la topologia,” pp. 1179-1202); Amparo Zacarés (“Humanismo versus Positivismo. La inevitabilidad de un itinerario de vuelta: del Cours de philosophie positive a la Scienza nuova,”; III, 1203-1224) ed altri.

I contributi raccolti nei tre volumi costituiranno certamente un patrimonio di rilevante valore culturale fatto di riflessioni ma, soprattutto, di proposte di lavoro per gli anni futuri, un'eredità di cui trarranno certamente profitto non solo gli studiosi del napoletano. Non a caso, nel presentare il Convegno, i curatori avevano sottolineato come il tema scelto, "G. Vico y la cultura europea," si presentasse "como el medio a partir del cual sea posible realizar una reflexión crítica acerca de la propia razón con la que culmina el siglo." In altre parole, "Pensar para el nuevo siglo" vuol dire necessariamente "pensar los motivos por los que, desde el pasado, se ha gestado esta necesidad. Y para enfrentarse a esta lid, nada más elegante que elegir a Vico como el filósofo que, a pesar de los siglos, puede acompañarnos en nuestra tarea. El vértice temporal e histórico—finales de un siglo y de un milenio y comienzos de otros dos nuevos—propicia una ocasión única e irrepitible para ubicar el estudio y discusión del pensamiento y la historia (del pasado) articulada con una proyección hacia delante, (de futuro) máxime en un momento tan importante de crisis para las humanidades."

FRANCO RATTO

Università La Sapienza, Roma

La Veniexiana (1535). Translation by Carolyn Feleppa Balducci. Introduction and notes by Martin W. Walsh. Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation, No. 34. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 2000. Pp. 83.

In *Cymbeline*, Imogen fears that her husband has been seduced by "some jay of Italy." (III.iv.49) And in *Othello*, Iago deliberately maligns Desdemona by calling her a "supersubtle Venetian." (I.iii.353) The flashy and treacherous Italian seductress: it was a stereotype, and Shakespeare, who was nothing if not resourceful, used it often to play with the assumptions of his audience, most of whom had never been to Italy. But stereotypes, however distorted they may be, are sometimes rooted in fact; and *La Veniexiana*, which was written about thirty years before Shakespeare was born, is a bracing reminder of this reality. The characters and their salacious escapades may very well be accurate reflections of the anonymous author's Venice.

La Veniexiana is also a highly unusual, surprisingly modern play. It probably did not enjoy "a full-scale public production in its own time," as Martin Walsh says in his introduction, but since the manuscript was discovered in 1928, the play has been performed regularly in Italy, and in the 1980s it was even adapted for the

screen. (22-23) For these reasons, this new English translation, which is clear and animated and perfectly suited for use as a script, should be received with open arms.

The plot is essentially this: Iulius, a young scoundrel from Milan not yet twenty years old, has come to Venice in search of a wealthy bride. His eye is on Valiera, who is about the same age. She is already married but quite eager for an erotic tryst with Iulius. After all, she says, he is “a stranger, who’ll take his pleasure and then go away.” (49) Her servant, Oria, arranges a meeting. In the meantime, however, Iulius has caught the attention of Anzola, a wealthy, aggressive widow about ten years his senior. And Bernardo, her delightfully obscene valet, sees to it that Iulius meets with Anzola instead. What follows is one of the most explicit love-making scenes one is likely to find in all of Renaissance drama. Bernardo waits upstairs with Nena, Anzola’s servant, and comments on what is happening below, which should not be recounted here. “They have been going at it like goats in a stable,” (54) says Bernardo at two in the morning. At four he has had enough of it: “That’s it! No time to loll about. Those two will never stop stirring the polenta. I’d better call them.” (55) Anzola, who never reveals her name to Iulius, nevertheless makes him swear that he will love her always, and gives him a parting gift, “a gold chain with an emerald pendant.” (56) Iulius leaves, hoping to spend the following evening with Valiera. When they meet, Valiera recognizes the pendant and is enraged. She immediately sends Iulius away, but soon afterwards she regrets her outburst and, with the help of Oria, arranges yet another meeting with Iulius. At the same time, Anzola has sent Bernardo to fetch Iulius for her again, but Iulius now wants to try a different pleasure and, to buy time, makes a rather insincere request: he must know Anzola’s name before he agrees to meet with her again. And so, while Bernardo is busy delivering this request, Iulius finally gets his chance to meet with Valiera.

The play ends thus, happily unresolved. And one can only assume that Valiera, like Anzola, will have her way with Iulius. “Oria, child,” says Valiera, “lock the room and go up to the Master, so he won’t call me.” (71) As Walsh says, “the symmetry of the two equally illicit consummations, for a widow and a bride—and the lack of real consequence therefrom—suggests an infinite replication of the pattern established in the play.” (21) The plot of *La Veniexiana*, then, is simple but evocative. It bears none of the conventional complications of the time: no elaborate intrigues or cases of impersonation, only some withholding of information and a bit of lying. Anzola, in addition to keeping her name from Iulius, hides her face from him behind a black mourning veil, (50) but even after he has had his pleasure with her, he does not really care who she is. His philosophy is as simple as the plot: “I shall go wherever there is pleasure.” (61) The comedy of this play arises thus, as each attempt to complicate the plot is thwarted by some new revelation of moral degeneracy. Even the lies are comically ineffectual. When Valiera asks Iulius why

he missed his first appointment with her, he says, "I didn't feel quite well, so I didn't want to go out." (62) The pendant gives him away, but Valiera must eventually forgive him because, like him, she is driven by mere pleasure. At the end of the play, when her turn with Iulius finally arrives, she instructs Oria to lie for her in the very same way: "say I'm sick and tonight I don't want anyone to bother me." (71)

It is an urbane play, and its spoiled, aristocratic characters are hilariously incapable of patience or restraint. "Grab me, like so, in your arms," says a frustrated Anzola to Nena, "and I'll shut my eyes and pretend you are that boy," and "talk dirty, so I'll be convinced you are a man." (39-40) Homosexuality, a minor theme in this play, is made to seem comical as well, but in the case of Bernardo it is also something more serious. He is quite resigned when he says to Iulius, "I bet you'd rather be with the one who knows how to embrace you better than ol' Bernardo." (66) The valet is a rather pitiful, impotent voyeur, the end result, it seems, of a worn-out society. There is an amusing moment when Anzola, who has just been told that Iulius is on his way, hastens to ready the *palazzo* for his arrival. "Don't just stand there!" she tells Nena. "Set up the mezzanine with tapestries; put the canopy over the bed; find the incense burners, got that?" (44) Here one senses Anzola's weariness with the routine of seduction. And the décor, as Walsh notes, reflects a larger Venetian reality: the city's long history of trade with the East. (76) All of this makes *La Venexiana* one of the most realistic plays of its time.

At the end of the play, a startling claim is made: that the work is "neither tale nor comedy but a true story"; it is "a love story about those I could name," so "read," says the author, "mull it over, keep it to yourself." (71) As Walsh says, a good deal of evidence has been unearthed to suggest that this claim is true. In Venice, at the time the play was written, a wealthy widow named Anzola actually existed, as did a young bride, about twenty years old, named Valiera Valier. Both were members of powerful families. Moreover, Valiera Valier had a sister named Laurina (14); in *La Venexiana* Valiera makes reference to "Laurina, my sister." (70) It is even possible to speculate intelligently about the identity of the author. The most likely candidate is Giovan Francesco Valier, who was also "a member of the patrician Valier family," says Walsh, "but of illegitimate birth." (15) This Venetian man of letters was executed for treason in 1542; "his writings," says Walsh, "would likely have been confiscated and destroyed," (16) but he was not obscure. He was known to Ariosto, who mentions him several times in *Orlando Furioso*: "Un gentilomo di Vinegia," he calls him, "Gian Francesco Valerio era nomato; / che'l nome suo non mi s'è mai scordato." (XXVII.138) One wonders, however, why Valier should have said "those I could name," for most of them seem to have been named already. Is it possible that Valier had intended to change the names in his manuscript later on but simply never had the chance to do so? The story behind the manuscript is as engaging as the play itself.

That the author was quite literate is clear. The action of the play is punctuated with seven songs, or *intermezzi cantati*, taken from the works of Andrea Navagero, Jacopo Sannazaro, Girolamo Verita, and others, perhaps even Pietro Aretino. These songs are not integral to the plot, but they do comment ironically upon it. After Valiera determines to be disloyal to her husband, who never makes an appearance in this play, the scene ends with a song, probably by Pietro Barignano, which speaks for the poor man: “*Com'avrò dunque il frutto / del seme sparso, Amor, se gelosia / disperde il fior de la speranza mia?*” (38) The rather simple diction of these songs makes them accessible to anyone who has a basic understanding of Italian. Carolyn Feleppa Balducci has placed her translations of them in the annotations, while the originals remain in the text of the play: an astute decision. A performance of this play in English, but with the songs sung in Italian, would be greatly enriched.

Balducci's translation was made with the stage in mind, and the idiom in which her “supersubtle Venetians” speak is thoroughly believable. She has also been attentive to a matter that complicates the translator's job: the language of the play alternates between the Venetian dialect and, when formality is called for, standard Italian. Bernardo, therefore, is made to speak in a brand of English that one might hear in an American street. Here he is, talking with Nena about how to bring Iulius to Anzola: “we could smuggle him in, same as we do with stuff we don't want to pay duty on.” (42) Here, however, is Iulius, more formal because he is a foreigner and is addressing Anzola for the first time: “Great thanks to your Ladyship for accepting me into her service; all the greater since I don't deserve such kindness.” (51) One appreciates such sensitivity in a translator.

La Venexiana, which has been ranked with Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*, has been highly esteemed. Benedetto Croce liked it immensely. “It is hoped,” says Walsh, “that the present translation will make the work more familiar to scholars as well as more accessible to English speaking performers and audiences.” (12) Given the aesthetic and historical merits of this play, the quality of this new translation, and the inexpensive but elegant paperback format, Walsh's hope, surely, is a well-grounded one.

CARMINE G. DI BIASE

Jacksonville State University

Umberto Mariani. *La creazione del vero. Il maggior teatro di Pirandello*.
Fiesole: Cadmo Edizioni, 2001. Pp. 192.

Frutto di parecchi anni di studio e d'insegnamento, questo saggio, scritto in un linguaggio sempre scorrevole e chiaro, incomincia con un capitolo sulla natura del personaggio pirandelliano vista come chiave per la comprensione della maggiore

opera drammatica di Pirandello. Il personaggio pirandelliano si oppone all'ipocrisia e all'oppressione rappresentate dai principi e dai comportamenti del mondo borghese. Avendo ormai perso le certezze e i valori che avevano sostenuto la moralità ottocentesca, egli è vittima sia della disintegrazione dei principi su cui si sostiene l'ordinamento sociale che di quella della propria identità individuale. Una perdita che egli lamenta e non accetta, non potendosi rassegnare al caos dell'informe e dell'insignificanza: un rifiuto che lo contraddistingue dai personaggi di drammaturchi posteriori e che ne garantisce la maggior vitalità e permanenza. Egli lotta contro una società che pretende il possesso di verità assolute e si ostina a non accettare la creazione di una verità individuale, soggettiva, mutevole.

Il capitolo su *Liola* dimostra come, lungi dal presentare un protagonista e un dramma di derivazione verghiana, quest'opera sia già completamente immersa nel vivo dell'ispirazione umoristica e della problematica relativistica tipicamente pirandelliane. Il dramma presenta una struttura nuova e del tutto originale rispetto a quello della commedia tradizionale. Il personaggio Liola, propugnatore di una morale relativistica, smaschera l'ipocrisia e il dissesto morale di una società che "predica valori e principi assoluti," ma di fatto pratica la morale relativistica liolaiana.

Così è, se vi pare ripropone il problema dell'opposizione della verità assoluta cercata dal gruppo degli inquisitori borghesi e di quella soggettiva e individuale creata e difesa dai "personaggi pirandelliani," cioè dai tre inquisiti che cercano invano, nonostante la persistente mediazione del personaggio-coro Laudisi, di comunicare agli altri la propria verità.

Il capitolo su *Sei personaggi* è ovviamente il più ricco del gruppo, dato che tratta l'opera più complessa sia per tematica propriamente pirandelliana che per le innovazioni drammatiche e teatrali che il dramma propone, e per le strategie stilistiche impiegate dall'autore per assegnare ai vari personaggi il diverso linguaggio che loro compete nelle diverse fasi del loro sforzo comunicativo. Nello sforzo di comunicare il loro dramma di famiglia, al quale il loro autore non ha voluto dare una forma artistica definitiva perché troppo affine alla materia tipica del dramma borghese contro cui si è posta l'intera sua opera drammatica, essi vivono il vero dramma assegnato loro da Pirandello di personaggi rifiutati che, privi del mezzo più efficace di comunicazione, la forma artistica definitiva, non riusciranno mai a comunicare se stessi agli altri, vivendo appassionatamente il dramma perenne, ma soprattutto centrale a tutta la letteratura e all'arte novecentesca, della necessità e della difficoltà dell'umana comunicazione.

Il capitolo sull'*Enrico IV* polemizza con i non pochi critici che non hanno capito la rigorosa logica dello sviluppo, né la ricchezza tematica, né l'alta qualità di questo capolavoro pirandelliano, che appunto, come Mariani dimostra, in ricchezza tematica, nell'architettura drammatica, nell'originalità espressiva, oltre che nella

creazione di un modernissimo personaggio tragico, è degno rivale del precedente capolavoro dei *Sei personaggi*.

Il capitolo che segue vuol dimostrare invece come *Ciascuno a suo modo* riprenda, approfondisca e sviluppi ulteriormente i temi e le situazioni di *Sei personaggi*, e faccia un uso ancor più audace e originale delle strategie sceniche e drammatiche. Qui si approfondisce il rapporto persona-personaggio, e si drammatizza soprattutto il rapporto tra la realtà della vita e dell'arte; si sviluppa il dramma dell'insicurezza, dell'inconsistenza, del dubbio su di sé e sugli altri, del continuo mutare d'opinioni, del credersi uno ed essere invece tanti, diverso agli occhi degli altri e diverso anche ai propri.

Segue un capitolo in cui si discute quello che è il vero tema di *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*, il terzo dramma della trilogia sul teatro, cioè il problema dell'autorità della creazione artistica e della inviolabilità del testo. Poi si passa alla trilogia dei miti, in cui Pirandello cerca una soluzione utopica ai problemi fondamentali inerenti all'esistenza stessa. Nella *Nuova colonia* Mariani esamina il vero tentativo dell'autore di cercare una soluzione socio-politica "in direzione democratica" ai vecchi mali della società, e trova che l'unica possibile salvezza è quella suggerita dal comportamento altruistico della Spera, onde nel mito successivo, *Lazzaro*, Pirandello esplora come possibilità di salvezza un'esperienza religiosa fondata esclusivamente sull'idea di Dio come amore e quindi della carità universale. Infine nei *Giganti della montagna* Pirandello esplora la natura dell'arte come ultima ancora di salvezza, come la più alta attività dell'uomo, la più divina, e le sue apparentemente contraddittorie finalità: la sua esigenza comunicativa da una parte, e la sua tendenza lucida e solipsistica dall'altra; e ancora una volta l'esito sembra piuttosto pessimistico, come se nella futura società consumistica e di massa solo la seconda possa sopravvivere nel mondo chiuso dell'artista solitario e autosufficiente.

Un lungo capitolo finale esplora la posizione di Pirandello nella cultura del Novecento; esamina i motivi della sua permanenza e della sua attualità; la sua totale indipendenza dal futurismo, il suo rapporto con l'attualismo gentiliano, il suo pervadente influsso sia di carattere tematico che tecnico su tutto il teatro contemporaneo e successivo nel mondo occidentale; sul teatro esistenzialista, su quello surrealista e su quello di Brecht, sul teatro dell'assurdo, sul *living theater*, e sulle nuove generazioni di scrittori sia europei che americani.

Ogni argomentazione, ogni polemica, ogni correzione di rotte interpretative è perseguita con rigore di logica e sempre documentata sui testi. Questo libro può servire da guida introduttiva a chi si sta avvicinando per la prima volta al maggior teatro di Pirandello, data la chiarezza dell'esposizione; a chi vuole approfondire la propria conoscenza di questi capolavori; e agli studiosi di Pirandello per approfondimenti e correzioni interpretative.

FRANCO ZANGRILLI

CUNY, Baruch College

Antonio Catalfamo. *Diario pavesiano*. Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon, 2001. Pp. 111.

Quest'ultima collezione poetica di Catalfamo suggella quel dialogo che lo scrittore aveva intrapreso dieci anni fa con un autore non solo studiato e amato ("dolci letture della prima giovinezza"), ma ancor di più, infinitamente "vissuto": Cesare Pavese. E "vivere" Pavese per l'autore non significa semplicemente conoscerne l'opera a fondo, "vivere" Pavese per Catalfamo è raccogliere il retaggio dell'autore piemontese e calarlo nel proprio reale fino a farlo diventare uno "stato in luogo," una specie di "luogo dell'anima" dove affondare per recuperare e recuperarsi a proprio piacimento. Questo recupero della propria essenza/grumo di vita attraverso i moduli pavesiani è la costante che segna tutta la poetica di Catalfamo, e non a caso la prima poesia della sua prima collezione *Il solco della vita* (1989) si intitola appunto "Il vizio assurdo" con dedica all'autore torinese.

Il rapporto che Catalfamo stabilisce con Pavese si delinea in quei primi versi de "Il vizio assurdo" dove ciò che colpisce non è tanto il contenuto nostalgico di tornare con Pavese ai tempi dell'adolescenza sulle rive del Belbo, quanto la ricorrenza costante nel tracciato dell'imperfetto della prima persona plurale ("Masticavamo," "ci abbandonavamo," "picchiavamo," "e Nuto suonava per noi"), nella necessità di omologare la propria esperienza di vita a quella di Pavese creando un "accanto" che lo vede protagonista insieme al protagonista per eccellenza che è l'autore tanto amato.

Nelle successive collezioni torna Pavese ritmato nei suoi luoghi letterari e nelle sue abitudini. In *Origini* (1991) c'è il Pavese de *Il carcere* dove le viti e gli ulivi diventano lo sfondo entro cui si muovono dolci Elena "bianca come la spuma del latte" e Concia "capra selvatica dalle natiche crostose." In *Passato e presente* (1993) nel gruppo di poesie "Espresso Palermo-Torino," Catalfamo "alla ricerca di radici tra le ciminiere" racconta il proprio percorso nei luoghi pavesiani. ("In Piazza Carlo Felice / l'albergo di Pavese, / così com'era"). Ma è ne *L'eterno cammino* (1995) che si dispiega in definitiva il suo rapporto con lo scrittore piemontese nelle poesie raggruppate sotto il titolo "Nord-Sud." E in particolare la prima, "Coordinate," è una specie di manifesto poetico/confessione dove l'autore racconta se stesso e la sua scrittura.

Fui lirico,
grecamente forte e dolce
mi disse la Muse Verte,
compagna di Rembaud.
Andai a Borgo San Paolo

e divenni poeta selvaggio.
 Una fanciulla dalmata
 mi scopri prosastico
 orizzontale, come Pavese.
 Ora scrivo versi insanguinati
 nella lingua verticale
 dei miei avi

Catalfamo parte così dal lirismo greco, come lo dimostrano le poesie di *Origini*, per approdare a “una lingua verticale” dopo l’esperienza “orizzontale” di tipo pavesiano.

L’esperienza orizzontale di cui parla l’autore coincide col tempo anabatico. Il viaggio a Torino (Borgo San Paolo) lo avvicina a Pavese nella modulazione della poesia-racconto (in particolare le poesie di *Passato e presente*). Catalfamo racconta Torino con voce riecheggiante Pavese in una scrittura che si scioglie leggera nel ritmo di personaggi-immagini e di luoghi-immagini che scivolano via nel momento in cui vengono nominati. Ma è il momento dell’ “ora scrivo” che interessa a Catalfamo, quello dei versi “insanguinati nella lingua verticale” dei suoi avi.

La lingua verticale è la lingua dell’approdo, la lingua del *Diario pavesiano*. Non mancano certo cadenze pavesiane in quest’ultima collezione dello scrittore. Si va dal ritmo anapestico che riecheggia *Lavorare stanca* (come traspare nella versificazione della poesia “Lillu” (“Non ha letto Pavese / il cugino di Nuto. / Ma è stato alla Mora / e sa che i padroni/picchiavano duro. / Aiutava a fare bigonze, / ascoltava Pavese / parlare di donne / e la luna e i falò / gli sembravano balle ...”), alla dinamica del deittico pronominale “tu” che lega il tessuto paratattico scarno de *La terra e la morte* di Pavese e che l’autore riprende in “Moncucco” (“Tu sei la vita... Sei la terra dal ventre caldo..., Sei la speranza che non muore...”).

Eppure, nonostante il titolo della collezione *Diario pavesiano*, il sodalizio con Pavese non si dà come destinazione, piuttosto come partenza. Nel viaggio intrapreso da Catalfamo verso i propri lidi poetici, Pavese è il compagno della memoria, di quella memoria corale dove le colline, i personaggi pavesiani e i contadini piemontesi sono un tutt’uno con la terra, la tradizione orale e i coloni siciliani di cui il Catalfamo si sente di far parte, e nulla è cambiato nel tempo e il mondo continua a proporsi come sempre nella plenitudine del suo dolore.

A questo linguaggio verticale approda l’autore, a questa lingua del ritorno. E il ritorno è alle cose dure della terra e alle cose leggere dello spirito.

Tu sei la terra
 che si fa vita
 nello scorrere segreto

delle linfe
 fumanti di passioni a lungo taciute
 E io ti abbraccio con la disperazione del contadino povero
 che strappa il frutto
 dalle viscere tremanti
 contro il tempo
 che nulla ha dato

E mentre le cose della terra hanno il colore dei cedri e del sangue, quelle dello spirito rifrangono l'urto delle emozioni che hanno un nome: popolo.

Ti amavo perché tu eri popolo
 nel nome bisillabico,
 nella furia dei capelli
 tesi all'indietro
 ad asciugarsi al sole,
 nei seni carnosì come cedri
 Avrei voluto soffiarti dentro
 come otre, sgranarti come melograno,
 per conservare l'amaro in bocca
 e godere l'amore doloroso della vita

La lingua verticale di Catalfamo racconta il popolo risalendo all'antico ("vecchiu pi diri anticu....com'e versi chi ti scrivu / di sta terra luntana/sula mmenzu o mari / cu palori cchiu vecchi di tia," ("Anticu e vecchìu") e recupera attraverso la scelta di cadenze e voci dialettali quei movimenti dell'animo e della carne che da sempre combattono le ingiustizie sociali e il rancore ("Di sempri travagghiu / sta terra /...Ora haiu a lassari / a terra: cosi dici / aliggi chi ficiru a Roma / pi patrùni. Forsi c'è na liggi / puru pi mia, ma io na sacciu, / e nuddu ma dici." (Tistimunianza d'un colonu"). Questo è ancora più evidente nella scelta della prima poesia della collezione intitolata *Santo Stefano Belbo* che è grido straziato e riprende i temi de *La luna e i falò* per raccontare la lotta partigiana (suprema costante di Catalfamo che torna in numerose poesie), insieme alla morte e al dolore. ("Arato urla Pavese / e le gialle colline / si popolano di morti [...] Cadaveri sfossati / di fascisti traditori / e Nuto li a spiegare il filorosso della Storia/ che stronca la vita ai prepotenti [...] Cinto, unico superstite, / avanza a fatica / lungo lo stradale / e il dolore è tonfo / di rospi nel pantano").

E ancora, i personaggi-popolo, in particolare quelli del secondo gruppo di questa raccolta dal titolo "Scillecariddi" sono quelli che non legati alla letterarietà pavesiana, Catalfamo rivive nei loro particolari, costruendoli di carne e di respiro nel luogo della memoria, per affidarli al mito che li sottrae alla precarietà del tempo.

C'è Peppi Triliri con "a sigaretta Alfa e a birrita cinnirusa," c'è Peppa "un ramo di castagno invece del bastone" che gli "parla di malanni e fatture," e ancora "La donna di Ragusa (Maria Occhipinti)" che "col ventre profanato / agita uno straccio per bandiera," e poi "il poeta errante," "solo come sempre in una città di fascisti," e infine, "la cinesina" che "vende camicie fiorate" e "la giornalista" "con le dita leggermente inchiostrate / e un sorriso stagiato / sul viso selvaggio di donna normanna."

Nell'ultima parte del *Diario pavesiano*, sotto il nome di "Strofette irriverenti," Catalfamo polemizza contro i simboli del potere: la grossa industria, ("La FIAT spia") la sanità ("Ticket"), e in modo particolare i politici ("Barone nero," "Democristiani alla riscossa," "Centro-comunisti," "Dinosauri"). L'intenzione è di fare dell'ironia giocosa, eppure dietro tanto ludico avanza un senso impalpabile d'amarezza e di perdita. I miti sociali hanno dimenticato l'uomo e non reggono al confronto coi miti contadini che invece lo ricordano nel suo estremo coraggio e nel suo costante dolore.

In conclusione, per rimanere pavesiani, questa collezione di Catalfamo si profila come un appello e ancor di più come un urgente bisogno di ritornare alle cose dell'uomo.

ANNALISA SACCA

St. John's University

Patrizia Fanelli. *Compresa la distanza*. Introduzione di Achille Serrao. Roma: Edizione Cofine, 2000. Pp. 48.

A tarde, cun can e un libro
 entreaberto
 sento-me nun banco do xardin
 e deteño-me a contemplar o trascorrer de vida.

Certe volte una chiave di lettura riverbera nel titolo. Nel caso della Fanelli (*Il tempo dell'assenza*, 1997 e *Compresa la distanza*, 2001) ciò sembra particolarmente vero: "assenza" e "distanza" diventano due punti ideocentrici intorno ai quali la poetica fanelliana sembra roteare e informarsi. Mentre nel diapason dell'assenza si svela "una appartenenza ad una realtà vissuta come perdita," nel cerchio della distanza si "appalesa [...] il bisogno di una diversa articolazione complessiva." (Serrao) I quattro "capitoli" di questo viaggio poetico—"Recinto d'ombre", "Compresa la distanza", "In nome del padre", e "Extravagantia"—sono pilastri metanar-

rativi che reggono un romanzo, più che un canzoniere lirico, poiché la trama testuale /esistenziale si svela in un movimento apparentemente diastolico, ma in verità parabolico. Incomincia: “Nasce il silenzio dal vuoto dell'anima” (9) e arriva ad una conclusione provvisoria, “tutto continua a scorrere nella sorpresa.” (47) È un'opera aperta, come dichiara Umberto Eco, dove principio e fine s'intrecciano, si rispecchiano e di continuo capovolgono il paradigma tessuto dal poeta.

La tela lirica creata dalla Fanelli è indimenticabilmente raffinata e vivida. Coi fili di Arianna tesse dei paesaggi scintillanti: “Mi sfidano le rondini, sfrecciano / davanti non riesco / a decifrare,” (10) oppure “Un oceano di sabbia, / il cielo a conchiglia lo ammanta / copre l'assenza [...] l'aria trema, / io sorveglio la luna,” (11) “il cielo inghiotte / il limite di questo andare verd'azzurro,” (12) “un silenzio mobile di fiamma / di una chiesa di periferia.” (13) Figure simili fanno da cornice completa a questo delizioso quadro, intitolato *Compresa la distanza*.

Il secondo capitolo, la parte più “corposa” di questo romanzo lirico, crea un ponte fra le “assenze” individuate nel primo libro della Fanelli (presenti anche nel primo capitolo del secondo libro, che è veramente un “Recinto d'ombre”) e le “presenze” che si incarnano nel terzo e quarto capitolo. Qui, nel silenzio pullulante della natura, una “essenza” rimane:

sei goccia di luce
 sospesa
 sei solo ombra
 ora
 indossi vestiti d'argento
 come la sera il mare. (p. 22)

È una presenza minima (una lacrima di luce) che invoca l'*altro*: “Ti prego, gioca / con me”, “scivola sul mio corpo e tra carezze”, “per un attimo / annega la notte.” Un altro, questo, che può anche implicare l'*Altro* “nell'illusione che ci stiamo amando.” (23) Poesia come allusione /illusione, ecco il paradosso mimetico, l'anello che vuole legare ma forse non lega la “cosa” alla “parola.” L'oltranza si svela attraverso il gesto poetico che forse rimane illusione. Il poeta invita l'*altro* a giocare, scivolare e annegare, insieme, nel vuoto (la notte), nella *naderia assoluta*. È un “annegare” che forse implica anche una negazione del *Nada* in conquistabile. L'oltranza (“gli angeli”) pare ignorare questa lotta umana fra essere e divenire, fra “sapere” e “avere” la “nostra follia” che unisce e separa ciò che “sa di celeste e tenero” da ciò che soffre “palpiti d'amore”:

[...] non si sono
 accorti della nostra follia

presenza ed assenza, fra l'io e il non-io (*l'Altro*), riassunto nella ultima poesia di questo capitolo:

Come vuoi che la notte sussurri
 le vele del tuo tempo o tra le mura
 di questa casa che ancora non vivi,
 come vuoi che caparbiamente
 due occhi di donna ti siano
 compagni, quando vivono
 nella distanza; sarebbero comunque
 lontani quegli occhi cintati
 nella convivenza;
 come vuoi che il giorno riposi
 sul tuo corpo e assapori un cammino
 trascorso, se fuggi da un letto di latta
 ma vero. (32)

La forza sconcertante di questi versi ci conduce al terzo capitolo, "In nome del padre." L'identità femminile appena conquistata è messa in bilico dalla presenza atavica patrilineare. Quegli occhi di donna "cintati / nella convivenza" diventano ottenebrati dal paterno "vincolo si forte / [che] tiene e nel pericolo è una morsa..." Ci riporta al padre/padrone, nell'abisso dove, "[p]resso quel letto nuda [è] l'appartenenza." (34) La risposta tradizionale della donna per fuggire da questa illustre prigione è l'appello o al silenzio oppure al divino: "—fa che veda, mio Dio, fa che veda / cancella questo mio essere / che si ferisce l'anima per amori / irrisolti..." Ma Lui rimane il *Deus incognito* e muto. Il femminismo moderno ha cercato una risposta alternativa invocando la Dea, ma con risultati altro che conclusivi. Forse la risposta che meglio tiene è di imparare a prendere il volo come un nuovo Icaro che crea le sue ali ma impara a non avvicinarsi troppo al fuoco che distrugge. La poesia potrebbe fungere così da ali, potrebbe essere lo strumento che ci avvicina all'*Altro* senza inesorabilmente consumare l'umano. Forse. Non una Divinità terribile ma la *pòiesis* per un istante riuscirà a portare il "chiaro / sul monte" dove "s'apre come ferita nella notte / quella luce, preludio alla speranza." (36) Saprà fare da ponte fra l'umano e il divino? Simultaneamente l'uomo continuerà "ad onorare la Tua regalità / d'amore e spine. / Dietro quegli altri vetri / sarà di nuovo mattino." (36) Il *Pater noster* sia biologico sia ontologico domina ancora.

Si arriva così al capitolo finale, "Extravagantia" dove l'apertura intravista nella parte antecedente si spande, si arricchisce di significati tanto chiari come pregni di polivalenze. Il titolo ricorda la ricchezza semantica del petrarchesco "errare/errore": "extra"+"vagare" può significare un passeggiare inter/extra testuale, un vagabondare

fra l'*id*, l'*ego*, il super-*ego* come pure un excursus fra poeta e i vari personaggi, la natura, l'oltranza. Da notare la più fitta presenza di immagini e persone concrete; vedi per esempio "Inforcare la bicicletta", "le concimaie di giorni", "Sogni di carta", "Prende forma di barca", "E tu, Edith," "C'è un parco intorno," "è necessario muovere tra il limo / fluviale ora secco e i resti mummificati / del cocodrillo / casupole a fango, casupole e verde di palma il tetto, / bambini al telaio per ore." (pp. 38-47) La poesia che conclude questo romanzo finisce con versi indimenticabili:

Il giorno chiude
 il profilo di un cammello sulla riva alta
 nel tramonto, un uomo si bagna
 viaggia la grande ninfea
 tutto continua a scorrere nella sorpresa. (47)

Con la mia abituale dislessia, al posto di "si bagna" ho letto "si lagna"; e "nella sorpresa" è diventato, tramite un lapsus, "nella sospesa." Se la poesia è ciò che rimane *dopo* la traduzione da *Res a Verbum*, chissà allora che frammento /filamento scatta dal tipo di scarti sopra indicati. Dopo tutto è stato detto e fatto, penso che per il poeta la cosa che più conta rimanga quel sapere che "tutto continua a scorrere"—realtà o finzione che sia. Auguro alla Fanelli un continuo, inesauribile tuffarsi in quel tutto/nulla che dà moto e significato, anche se instabile, a ogni viaggio. E concludo con le parole di Paulo Coelho: "Che cosa è l'amore?" domandò il deserto. 'Amore è il volo del falco sopra le tue sabbie.' [...] 'Allora questo è l'amore?' 'Sì, questo è l'amore. È ciò che cambia la preda in un falco, il falco in un uomo e l'uomo, al suo tempo, in un deserto. È ciò che muta il piombo in oro e fa ritornare l'oro nella terra.'" In questo flusso amoroso la poesia si nutre e si rinnova.

ADEODATO PIAZZA NICOLAI

Niccolò Ammaniti. *Io non ho paura*. Torino: Einaudi, 2001. Pp. 219.

Se lo spirito del tempo concorre a dilatare il significato di un'opera, il romanzo *Io non ho paura* di Niccolò Ammaniti travalica il dettato della scrittura per accogliere le paure di questo nostro minaccioso presente.

Il vaso di Pandora, che pensavamo sigillasse definitivamente le forze più oscure e terrifiche, è stato scoperchiato, essendo venute meno le fiduciose difese della razionalità e del dialogo e l'orgogliosa superiorità di scienza e tecnologia. È in questo contesto che il messaggio si rivolge non solo a lettori adolescenti che,

identificandosi con il protagonista, combattono contro i mostri proiettati dal loro immaginario fantastico e leggendario quanto anche, e soprattutto, agli adulti artefici di demoni che prendono corpo nella storia e nella società.

Nella torrida estate del 1978, in località Acqua Traverse, minuscola frazione di un Sud marginale, Michele Amitrano di nove anni, in compagnia di coetanei, si avventura in impervie scorribande approfittando del vuoto di presenza dei grandi. Dovendo scontare la punizione per una gara perduta, Michele s'imbatte in una scoperta sconvolgente che, per la sua stessa enormità, lo costringe a mantenere per sé solo il segreto, e da questa situazione scaturisce un crescendo di stati emotivi, eventi e colpi di scena sul filo sempre teso della *suspense* narrativa.

Il protagonista conosce la sadica ferocia del branco, quando è sottoposto alla volontà dispotica di un capo come il Teschio, il tradimento del giuda Salvatore Scardaccione, la inquietante pazzia del di lui fratello, Nunzio lo strappacapelli, il bullismo di Felice Natale, ma anche la dedizione profonda, superata l'iniziale ripugnanza, verso la piccola vittima Filippo Carducci, figlio di un ricco industriale del Nord, sequestrato e tenuto prigioniero in un recesso della desolata campagna circostante. Sfidando i divieti degli adulti e la sua paura di piccolo eroe, Michele torna più volte nel buco della montagna per incontrare Filippo cui lo legano un impegno e una promessa di amicizia che si fa intensa fino al sacrificio di sé. Nei pericolosi andirivieni, pedalando sulla sua vecchia Scassona, trova la forza di combattere i fantasmi dell'immaginazione, indossando a sua volta i panni di mitici personaggi come Tiger Jack, "l'amico indiano di Tex Willer," quello che sulla collina del diavolo sarebbe comunque salito "pure se c'era il convegno internazionale di tutte le streghe, i banditi e gli orchi del pianeta perché era un indiano navajo, ed era intrepido e invisibile e silenzioso come un puma."

A seguito di strane coincidenze, tra cui il ritrovamento di una pentola di casa sua nella prigione del bambino sequestrato, Michele inizia un corpo a corpo con spettri e demoni dai contorni sempre più domestici e familiari, insinuatisi irragionevolmente nel suo borgo, fra la cerchia dei suoi conoscenti e persino fra le pareti di casa. Di sospetto in sospetto, di paura in paura egli giunge all'inconfessabile certezza: "Papà era l'uomo nero. Di giorno era buono, ma di notte era cattivo. Tutti gli altri erano zingari [...] mi immaginavo che gli zingari erano una specie di nanetti velocissimi, con le orecchie di volpe e le zampe di gallina. E invece erano persone normali."

Della domesticità del male, della sua mimetica ordinarietà il protagonista del romanzo diviene man mano consapevole e questa progressiva coscienza determina in lui l'uscita definitiva dal mondo dell'infanzia. Con un'assunzione di coraggio e responsabilità decide di compiere l'estrema trasgressione, lo strappo decisivo dalla comunità e dai suoi, mettendo in gioco ogni cosa, compresa la sua e altrui vita. Sa che i mostri che lo inseguono e gli impediscono di liberare Filippo questa volta

sono reali e dura è la lotta contro di loro, “i signori delle colline, i giganti di terra e spighe” che “facevano lo stesso suono del vento e del grano.”

In un libro che mette sapientemente in scena la paura e la racconta in variazione di toni e maniere, che riecheggiano il romanzo di avventura, la fiaba, il thriller, il genere poliziesco, il culmine della tensione non può non coincidere con lo scioglimento finale dell'intera vicenda: agli uomini in divisa, da tempo all'inseguimento dei malfattori, il padre di Michele Amitrano confessa di aver involontariamente ferito il figlio da lui scambiato per Filippo.

In ogni romanzo di formazione, questo compreso, ogni punto di arrivo dell'esperienza e della conoscenza è fatto di acquisizione e insieme di perdita.

L'acquisizione è nella propria crescita a fronte della quale gli altri appaiono fortemente ridimensionati e i giganti non sono più tanto grandi: “Loro hanno paura [...] Perché urlano.” La perdita è invece nel venir meno di consolidate sicurezze e nella consapevolezza che contro i propri fantasmi si lotta da soli. Ma a questo punto non si è più tanto certi di vincerli o intrappolarli come accadeva magicamente nelle farneticazioni e nei sogni infantili, e varrà per noi tutti l'amara e nostalgica considerazione cui si lascia andare il protagonista del racconto una volta diventato adulto: “Da piccolo sognavo sempre i mostri. E anche ora, da adulto, ogni tanto, mi capita, ma non riesco più a fregarli.”

La chiusa di forte lirismo sintetizza l'avvenuta formazione del protagonista all'insegna di una più complessa concezione del mondo in cui il buio e la luce si fronteggiano, come pure l'inquietudine e la sicurezza, il vuoto e la presenza: “Ora è di nuovo buio. E c'era papà. E c'ero io.”

Se c'è un dato che riflette più di ogni altro la condizione odierna è la spietata radiografia del male perpetrato dagli adulti nei confronti di piccole vittime innocenti. Un peso insostenibile d'iniquità, violenza, corruzione o, nel migliore dei casi, d'indifferenza grava sui piccoli figli di una società allo sbando come emerge dal delirio di morte di Filippo, emblema dell'infanzia violata: “Liliana. È morta anche lei. Anche Peppino è morto. E papà è morto. E nonna Arianna è morta. E mio fratello è morto. Sono tutti morti. Sono tutti morti e vivono in buchi come questo. E in uno ci sono io. Tutti quanti. Il mondo è un posto pieno di buchi dove dentro ci sono i morti. E anche la luna è una palla tutta piena di buchi e dentro ci sono altri morti.”

Sarebbe tempo che la società dei potenti, e tutti noi, ci interrogassimo attraverso gli occhi dei bambini; forse sceglieremmo con Michele Amitrano le ragioni della vita contro i calcoli dell'intelligenza, perché “da qualche tempo, questa *intelligenza* non è più legata alle ragioni della vita, direi che è indipendente da essa e indifferente del tutto alla vita e alla sua conservazione.”(Anna Maria Ortese) Con il dinamismo e la prensilità della sua giovane narrativa Ammaniti, alla sua quarta esperienza di scrittore, ci può anche raccontare quest'insanabile divario fra vita e intelligenza

che tanto tormentò la vecchia scrittrice eretica che non rinunziò alla visionarietà nemmeno nella sua riflessione filosofica.

CATERINA FALOTICO VITELLI

Università di Bari

Ginevra Bompiani. *The Great Bear*. New York: Italica, 2000. Pp. 88.

It is no coincidence that in her epigraph to *The Great Bear*, Ginevra Bompiani dedicates her novel to her mother and to her childhood. Both are intimately related to loss, and, like the “great bear” of her title, they remain both inscrutable and the locus of Bompiani’s memory. *The Great Bear* is Bompiani’s commemoration of abandonment: of her two-year stay at a boarding school, of her separation from her parents and sister, of her estrangement from her lover, and of her eventual loss of both parents within six months of each other. For all its known deceptiveness, memory continues to challenge Bompiani in this narrative. Despite her lover’s belief that “we are not the future of our childhoods,” the narrator remembers childhood passions like the bogey man of her boardinghouse memories: the great bear in an abandoned house, its menace proved to be an illusion when the children see its eyes of glass and stuffed flesh.

In an effort to simulate the ubiquity of memory, Bompiani organizes her book in four parts, but without a traditional narrative structure. This non-linear approach allows the author to focus on a borderland world of dream and reality, in which the narrator occupies the liminal space between memory and imagination. In the first part of the novel, aptly titled "The Great Bear," the narrator's memory is triggered during a casual stroll on a street with a similar name as Les Marmousets, the boarding school of her childhood. A painted garage door on the same street initiates a memory of a mountain landscape where the narrator's boarding school was located. What Bompiani recalls thereafter is the oppressive atmosphere of those childhood years in the boarding school where the persecuted become the oppressors and childhood itself feels endless: "spiteful, cruel, and enchanted, all of us, without any other dimension than that of eternal childhood, absolute and ruthless." (4) Two basic features of boarding-school life are tears and shame. Children learn that tears give "rhythm and ritual" to their lives, as they beat each other into crying and thereby free themselves from the injustice of their deprived lives. Like tears, shame is a sign of conscious vulnerability; the narrator fears the immense exposure of insanity because it signals "exposure without shame, while shame is the price one pays for not going crazy." (7, 12) Within the boarding-school setting, childhood rituals are fierce and competitive. To survive, the narrator learns to persecute others and to love discipline. Bompiani appropriately ends the first part of her novel with "The Pillory" section, bringing together the secret rituals of the narrator's tormented childhood in which shame is described as "a kind of lava or filthy drool" and memory similarly is "this vomiting of poorly digested mouthfuls." Having been pilloried by her own lust for power, the narrator must resort to shame in order to survive the horrors of childhood. Uninterested in sentimentalizing or ennobling the uses of memory, Bompiani links childhood shame to memory, recognizing its ceaseless presence: "in this place, everything that happens, happens forever." (36)

As if to reinforce this major thematic point, Bompiani shifts the narrating voice to third-person in the remaining three parts of her novel, but she fluidly slips back into the first-person voice of the narrator who is visited by childhood memories. In the second part, "Anteros," Lisa takes a pilgrimage to an abandoned garden; like the childhood boardinghouse of part one, the garden is a site of estrangement and betrayal. Menstrual blood flowing down her legs, the protagonist's ongoing request for maternity is rejected. Juxtaposed to Lisa's experience of this loss is part three, "The Inscrutable," in which the narrator loses both parents within six months of each other. On her deathbed, Lisa's mother remains an impenetrable mystery. During this time, Lisa nonetheless attempts to achieve "a moment of exquisite maturity" between the two primary shadows of life: the shadow of birth and death. (65) At the end of her life, the mother answers Lisa's persistent question: if you were a little bird, which little bird would you be? That she unhesitatingly answers "a night-

ingale” suggests a hidden artistic passion. The melodious song of the male occurs at night during the breeding season and allows the author to embrace the consanguinity between biological and literary birth giving.

Not surprisingly, Bompiani ends her novel with a fourth part devoted to writing, “The Dream of the Earth.” Aware of the deceits of childhood and betrayals of adulthood, the narrator reiterates the overarching concern of her novel, the persistence of memory. Like narrative itself, memory is not linear and does not come out whole; like writing, memory is regurgitative—“like a mouthful that has remained in the throat too long”—ungratified by digestion. Anorexic of her memories, the writer nonetheless coughs up mouthfuls “like a bitter pill,” and must find some way to understand the neglect of her painful childhood. (77) In order to do this, Ginevra Bompiani abolishes traditional narrative, compelling readers to think differently about childhood and the strategies contrived to shelter oneself from being unloved. *The Great Bear* is a haunting and beautiful mediation on memory, which is often inscrutable, but as necessary as breathing.

MARY JO BONA

SUNY, Stony Brook

Howard Curle and Stephen Snyder, eds. *Vittorio De Sica: Contemporary Perspectives*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. 285.

Vittorio De Sica is a director/actor whose reputation has been a victim of misunderstanding and stereotyping over the years. As an actor he has largely been associated with the kind of lightweight roles that in Italy, especially in the 1950's and 1960's, provided the public with a few hours of entertainment and no serious after-effect. As a director, he has been almost exclusively associated with neo-realism, and not always in a flattering manner. As a director, at least in English language film criticism, De Sica has been seriously overshadowed by Rossellini, Fellini, Antonioni and Visconti. As Curle and Snyder point out in the “Introduction” to *Contemporary Perspectives*, at the time of the present book's publication only one full length study of this director's work existed in English. De Sica's directorial work, once considered to be cutting-edge, has “receded [...] year by year, to near invisibility.” (3)

One of the aims of Snyder and Curle's book is to understand why this has occurred. The editors suggest that the near oblivion into which De Sica has fallen may in part be due to the distrust that both the public and the film critics today harbor towards sentiment of any kind in film; and many consider his work to be

sentimental. They remind us that Mary Ann Doane, influential film critic and author of *The Desire to Desire*, for example, “virtually assumes without question that all spectator emotion generated by a film is to be distrusted.” (3) Yet the editors’ thesis is that De Sica’s tendency to produce emotional reactions has to be understood “as part of the postwar world, especially as De Sica saw it.” (4) Furthermore, they contend that as a director he saw himself, “not as a purveyor of sentimentality but as a physician supplying a stringent antidote to a prevailing sentimentality, a champion challenging an idealized vision of the people...” (4)

Vittorio De Sica: Contemporary Perspectives consists of a number of essays, some new, some reproduced from previous sources, some by relative unknowns, and others by the most respected names in film criticism. Among the latter we find Gilles Deleuze, Andre Bazin, Cesare Zavattini, Millicent Marcus and Peter Bondanella. In some cases the essay may be quite old. Andre Bazin’s “De Sica: Metteur en Scene,” dates from 1952, at the time of the release of *Bicycle Thieves*. Zavattini’s “Some Ideas on the Cinema,” occupies a central role in the history of neorealism, as it is considered the “manifesto” of this film style. It is reproduced here from the 1953 written version. Bondanella’s “Neorealist Aesthetics and the Fantastic” is from 1979. I believe that the inclusion of such material, though it may be viewed by some with a jaundiced eye, was actually a wise decision on the part of the editors. In order to understand De Sica he must be fully contextualized, and in order for this to occur, we need to know something about the philosophy of the school, its history, and the reception that De Sica’s work received at the time of its release. Most of the essays are quite short. Some (Pauline Kael’s thoughts on *Shoeshine*, for example) are only one or two pages long. The variety of the material included may be one of the attractions of this book. Nor does it hurt its readability that many of the essays are not “scholarly” in a negative sense. They are lively, interesting and aimed at any reader, even just the average movie buff.

Various articles are noteworthy for different reasons. Among them we find Bazin’s “De Sica: *Metteur en Scene*” which bravely (although unwittingly) contradicts the many critics who criticize De Sica’s sentimentality. Bazin not only does not disapprove of it, he celebrates it, seeing tenderness and love as “the source of his art.” (70)

Cardullo’s essay on “The Art of *Shoeshine*” claims that the “real tragic conflict” in this movie is not between the two young protagonists, Pasquale and Giuseppe, but between the two boys and their society, post World War II Italy; what Cardullo sees as “a society divided against itself...” (131) He then goes on to investigate the tragic role that society itself plays in *Shoeshine*, thus in effect arguing that society is the true protagonist of the film; an approach that he diligently tells us has not been taken by any other critic. However, while the discussion may be interesting at times, Cardullo engages in hairsplitting and grasping at picayune

details in an attempt to discredit other critics' discussions of the film. He is particularly keen to destroy Roy Armes' contention, in *Patterns of Realism*, that the police in *Shoeshine* use underhand methods to elicit a confession from the boys, and Fong's claim that the prison in which Pasquale and Giuseppe are held is cruel and dirty. Cardullo's strident tone strongly suggests an intense emotional investment that detracts from what ought to be a cool and reasoned argument.

Bondanella's "Neorealist Aesthetics and the Fantastic: *The Machine to Kill Bad People* and *Miracle in Milan*" (originally written in 1971) explores the allegorical dimension of De Sica's *Miracle in Milan* and Rossellini's *The Machine to Kill Bad People*, arguing that "realism and allegory are not necessarily at odds." (172) For those interested in a discussion on metacinema and specifically, the "metacinematic nature of the relationship between fantasy and reality," in these two films, this essay is probably the most relevant. Bondanella's conclusion is that De Sica's entire film is "an extended metaphor...a hymn to the role of illusion and fantasy in art, as well as in life." (177) Furthermore, that both films "clearly mark the outer boundaries of the Italian neorealist movement." (178)

However, the most enjoyable inclusion in the book is "De Sica on De Sica," a collection of various snippets which describe personal and professional aspects of his life, sometimes in his own words and sometimes in those of others. The major part of this chapter, in addition to the fragments mentioned, is Charles Thomas Samuels' 1972 interview of De Sica, reproduced in its entirety. Here De Sica describes his philosophy of movie making, his ideas on neorealism, the problems he has encountered in creating his films, his relationship to Hollywood, and the success and failures of his fellow artists. It can fairly be said that Samuels does not let De Sica off easily. At times his tone is almost inquisitorial. And De Sica frequently bristles at what he interprets as a need to justify his decisions and choices. It is very revealing of the man and the artist.

All in all, despite the unusual, though not necessarily unwise, decision to include new and old essays, Curle and Snyder's book should please anyone wishing to learn more about De Sica and/or neorealism.

GRACE RUSSO BULLARO

CUNY, Lehman College

Carlo Celli. *The Divine Comic, the Cinema of Roberto Benigni*. Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow Press, 2001. Pp. 174.

In Italy Roberto Benigni has been a fixture on television and film since the early 1970's. But in the United States he remained virtually unknown until the release of *Life is Beautiful*, a film that brought him critical acclaim as director and actor, popularity, and two Oscars. Nevertheless, while there has been much written about him in his native Italy, this is not the case in the United States. Celli's book is therefore both useful and welcome to those members of the American public who are interested in Benigni the director, the actor, and "typical Italian" in the eyes of the American viewing public who witnessed his antics at the Oscar presentation program.

This is a very small book, eleven short chapters in addition to ancillary material such as an Afterword, Appendix, Filmography and Bibliography. The author traces Benigni's career in roughly chronological order, starting with a biographical summary in Chapter 1 and then going on to treat various aspects of Benigni's career in greater detail. For example, Chapter 2 deals with the evolution of the "Cioni persona," a character born of a combination of literary influence (Rabelais, Dostoevsky and others) and Benigni's native Tuscan peasant culture, its customs and lore. The Cioni character, which later became Benigni's trademark, started as a stage monologue and later evolved into a film character. Celli tells us that the main themes of the "Cioni" humor are "lower body humor" (i.e. "Rabelaisian"), religion, and left-wing ideology. As the author states, the importance of the Cioni material "cannot be understated." (20) It formed the basis of his first appearance on television and his first film, *Berlinguer, I Love You*.

In the Cioni monologue we already detect the Benigni "style": a style whose roots are "more in the theatrical and narrative forms than in the use of photographic effects." (20) Having brought Cioni to television in *Onda Libera*, Benigni took on some serious themes that at the time, in the early 1970's, were just then becoming a preoccupation among certain intellectuals such as Umberto Eco. Benigni's ongoing protest was directed against intellectual hegemonies. And his warnings about the disappearance of indigenous culture resulting from economic changes and mass culture, were a harbinger of his later tendency to tackle the weightiest issues in comic form, a style which resulted in controversy even in *Life is Beautiful*.

In Chapter 5, "Film Apprenticeships and Cameos, 1979-1989," Celli discusses Benigni's collaboration with Renzo Arbore, Marco Ferreri, Jim Jarmusch and Cesare Zavattini in order to determine the ways in which these established directors influenced Benigni's later filmic style. Thus we learn that through Arbore he was able to transition his "Rabelaisian" material from stage to television. Through Ferreri he connected to a filmic style that was heavily influenced by the French New Wave. (45) From a year-long close collaboration with Zavattini he learned how to write a treatment and a screenplay. Finally, Benigni was also influenced by

Zavattini's "fabulist" approach (i.e. treating a potentially tragic subject in the format of a fable), something he did in *Life is Beautiful*.

In Chapter 6, "Benigni's Religious Parody on Stage," Celli explores another aspect of his monologues, drawing parallels between Benigni's religious irreverence and Schopenhauer's philosophical treatise, *On Christianity*, concluding that his comedy is more sophisticated than one would think. "Benigni has managed to follow specific currents in lay tradition, including the carnival physicality of Rabelais, the skepticism of Schopenhauer, and the cynicism of Pascal," Celli states. (59-60)

The aim of *The Divine Comic* is to understand the evolution of this artist's distinctive style and the various factors that shaped it. Celli determines that these factors include: a regional heritage of oral poetry which helped him to develop a linguistic facility; Benigni's intellectual curiosity, which despite a poor education, led him to acquire an interest for "serious literature" and film; and the influence of outstanding directors.

Celli's analysis of *Life is Beautiful* demonstrates how the various formative elements that he has examined have come together to shape this film. The fabulist, the Rabelaisian, the traces of "commedia dell'arte" tradition, the Cioni persona, all play a part in the finished product that we have come to know.

Finally, in the "Appendix" we find Celli's extensive interview of Roberto Benigni. This is the most revealing and enjoyable part of the book, and comes at just the right point. After we have learned *about* Benigni, through Celli, it is all the more meaningful to "hear" Benigni talk about himself: his points of departure, his inspiration, his goals, his artistic decisions and the debts he gladly acknowledges to other figures such as Chaplin, Zavattini, Fellini and Pasolini. In short, the interview is fascinating, not least because we discover a Benigni who is not only as passionate as we already suspected, but also well read and wise about literature, philosophy and culture in general. As Celli has already told us, Benigni is that rare artist who combines a "high level of cultural sophistication while maintaining popular appeal." (Celli quoting Brunetta, 123) And as we probably all know, that is one of the most difficult cultural feats to accomplish. *The Divine Comic* reveals Benigni in all his complexity.

GRACE RUSSO BULLARO

CUNY, Lehman College