Paradiso. The *Paradiso*, to some degree, embodies the critical concerns he gives voice to, for it represents a critical act within the poem itself, standing to the *Inferno* as criticism to poetry. It is, after all, with its reductive clarity – and transparency – the realm of transcendent peace, absolute certitude, perfect love and moral severity, this latter as exemplified in the behavior of Beatrice toward Virgil (*Inf.* 2, 91- 93). Call it the anti-existential. How then can one reconcile the language of the *Paradiso* with an “infinitely open language of ambiguities”? I look forward to the reading of the *Paradiso* that will provide his response. On the evidence of this and the other writings of these admirable young *dantisti*, I would conclude that Dante studies is an exciting, diverse and thriving place to be.

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Valerio Vianello. *Il “giardino” delle parole. Itinerari di scrittura e modelli letterari nel dialogo cinquecentesco*. Rome: Jouvence, 1993. Pp. 127.

As indicated by the title, this study intends to trace the development of the dialogue, provocatively referred to as “codice onnivoro e sfuggente” (8), through the intellectually and politically turbulent Italian Sixteenth Century. The dialogue is held up as a mirror to the society which defined and cultivated it as a literary genre. Its evolution from the Quattrocento Humanists’ occasionally servile attitude towards classical *auctores*, to one of experimentation in the ensuing era, leads the author to investigate the dominant historical moments and cultural currents of the period.

His attempt at revealing the cultural importance of the dialogue is done through an analysis of fundamental issues which impacted greatly on Italian Renaissance culture. These are the ideological and physical importance of Rome in relation to the conception of the role of letters, as well as choice of *locus* by the authors studied (Pietro Bembo, Baldassare Castiglione, Pierio Valeriano, Sperone Speroni); the *questione della lingua*; and the evolution of print culture for a transforming society of readers.

After a brief “Introduzione” (7-8), Vianello’s study opens with an examination of the art of the dialogue entitled “Il racconto di parole: l’arte cinquecentesca del dialogo” (9-23). The philosophical and socio-political issues at the basis of the transition between the early and late Renaissance is clearly and convincingly related by the author who proceeds from the various manifestations of the hegemonic grip on the dialogue by Ciceronian models, to the rise of genre theory in light of the translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In relation to this last development, Vianello identifies three cornerstones of contemporary genre theory whose goal it was to lend artistic integrity to a popular, polymorphic genre which seemed to defy categorization: Carlo Sigonio’s *De dialogo liber* (1562), Sperone Speroni’s *Apologia dei dialoghi* (1575), and Torquato Tasso’s *Discorso dell’arte del dialogo* (1585).

After distinguishing the three categories of dialogue which surface in the contemporary theoretical literature as mimetic, diegetic and mixed, Vianello proceeds to provide examples of each (primarily from the repertoire of the aforementioned authors) and shows how, over the course of the Cinquecento, each had particular appeal to a cultured reading public that shifted from the court to the academy.

Fundamental to his observations is the changing emphasis between the literary and ideological importance of *res* and *verba* as a reflection of the historical and cultural reality that influenced the composition of dialogues. To this end, the author puts forth Sperone Speroni as the principal "promotore della metamorfosi" of dialogues since his works "non calcano più un palcoscenico reale, ma un fondale istituzionale immaginario innalzato sulla scomparsa del quadro culturale che aveva reso praticabile la rappresentazione narrativa" (23).

The second chapter, "'Ut pictura poësis': gli 'Asolani' e il giardino della corte" (25-46), while taking into account other works like *De Aetna*, *De corruptis poetarum locis*, and *De Guidobaldo*, concentrates on the *Asolani* in light of Bembo's attempt to "dare alla scrittura volgare esistenza e consistenza di scienza" (25) which dominated his literary career. This is seen as the socialization of Petrarchism which could only be achieved in courtly society.

That the *Asolani* was the text through which Bembo undertook to achieve a kind of social renewal is clear to Vianello on the basis of the numerous revisions of the text which aimed at, and succeeded in, becoming the "testo di base del platonismo amoroso" (37). As Vianello reminds us, until the appearance of the works of Leone Ebreo, the *Asolani* was the means of diffusion of platonic ideas which, due to the courtly society to which they were intended, displayed a profound influence from the verses of Petrarch. While insisting on the structural influence of Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes*, Vianello underlines the debt owed to Petrarch (for both the inclusion of verse, as well as some ideas expressed in the *Secretum*), and also to Boccaccio who was held up as the prose model.

The shift in emphasis from courtly considerations coloured by autobiographical references (Caterina Cornaro and the Venetian social and literary circles) in the first redaction, to the second version which placed more stress on matters of style and composition, is seen by Vianello as Bembo's attempt at distancing himself from the declining court culture in an attempt to more clearly identify the role of the writer in a changing society.

The next section, entitled "Il tempo dei 'soavi ragionamenti'" (47-71), deals with Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano*. The acknowledged consciousness of history and society in this book manifested itself also through the various editions of the manuscripts which circulated throughout Italian courtly society in the sixteenth century. Vianello keenly observes that this practice of correction was the author's continued attempt to bring the book up to date with "una realtà sfuggente, magmatica che rischiava di vanificare o di eludere l'intreccio tra intellettuale e potere" (64-65).

The figure of Guidobaldo di Montefeltro is seen as particularly indicative of Castiglione's effort to reconcile absolute paradigms with a world in flux. The duke is seen as an "ossimoro vivente dell'inoperosa attività per gli impedimenti fisici e l'animo virtuoso" (50). Thus, he becomes emblematic of the ills of this society where nobility of spirit and cultivated talent do not guarantee mastery of this domain.

In an ideological sense, the dedications to both Alfonso Ariosto and don Miguel de Silva in the final version are interpreted as an attempt to reconcile the Empire and the Papacy which, after 1527, threatened to deepen the divide between European allegiances.

Vianello's return to Pietro Bembo in "Il 'focolare' della professionalità" (73-86) is a concentration on the *Prose* as a demonstration of Bembo's preoccupation with the

status of the writer which, he claimed, may only be achieved by complete technical competence over his element: language. Linguistic theory, which was a mere secondary preoccupation in the *Asolani*, here became the primary focus.

The discussions of the *Prose*, which take place at Carlo Bembo's Venetian residence over three days, are guided by three speakers (Carlo Bembo, Federico Fregoso, and Giuliano de' Medici) who discuss the birth of vernacular Italian, its poetry, and its most correct form. They then move on to the operative criteria for aesthetic judgment of these works, and the corresponding grammatical rules. Vianello asserts that the choice of speakers is particularly significant since they are men of letters, not politicians, whose common interests are purely literary "perché ci si accosta a forme estrapolate dal contesto storico di pertinenza e congelate per sempre in una sezione aurea extra-temporale" (80). The nostalgic look backwards to a lost golden age apparent in the *Cortegiano* is also present in this work by Pietro Bembo which Vianello identifies as an attempt to go beyond time to carve out a purely literary or scholarly space where men of letters – no longer dilettante courtiers – may practice their art and hone their skills.

Nevertheless, as Vianello states, the use of a Venetian *locus* and the denial of any kind of supremacy on the part of Venetian or Venetian writers is intended to portray "una partecipazione allargata a tutta la società letteraria, senza filtri di sbarramento e senza confini ideologici" (81-82). The *Prose* therefore presuppose an idea of writing as a form of contact between a spatially and chronologically dislocated sender and the receiver. Whereas Castiglione saw literary and linguistic competence as an accessory, Vianello insists that for Bembo it is a fundamental component of one's being a "celebrazione dell'eterna energia dei verba" (86).

Issues of style and language loom large in the next chapter, "Le 'bellissime questioni e curiose' nel 'Dialogo della volgar lingua' di Pierio Valeriano" (87-109). Vianello looks at the linguistic content of Valeriano's dialogues from a socio-historical point of view, bringing to the fore considerations related to the chronology of its composition as well as the significance of the choice of Rome as the site of the conversations.

Although the dating of the inception of Valeriano's dialogue may be traced to approximately 1540, coinciding with his return to the Accademia degli Infiammati – as proven by Vianello's analysis of the *questione della lingua*, that deals with issues which were elaborations or borrowings from, for example, Claudio Tolomei's *Cesano* – the *Dialogo della volgar lingua* is supposed to take place in Leo X's Rome some time in the early sixteenth century. The significance of the choice of pre-1527 Rome as the site of the conversations is that at one time it was hoped that Rome would become a place of synthesis for Christian and Humanistic learning for a linguistically and culturally united Italy. Vianello's final words on Valeriano's dialogue are that it should be seen to be an expression "di un classicismo moderato, non privo di una vocazione contemporanea, depurata, però, da spinte demoticamente irriflesse" (109).

In the final essay of the collection, "Nella 'camera' dell'accademia: i 'Dialoghi' dello Speroni" (111-26), Vianello attempts to show that Speroni's dialogues reflected the change in society where the academy took over from the court as the primary place for the cultivation of letters. While Rome is certainly an influence on Speroni's work, being, as it were, the place where he had to defend his *Dialoghi* from the threat of hermeneutical violence by the forces of the Counter-Reformation, Vianello insists on

the inherent *patavinitas* of Speroni's *Dialoghi* in which one breathes "un'aria provinciale, facilmente percepibile [...] come indicazione temporale, come presenza di docenti universitari, come sfruttamento dei metodi argomentativi, delle pratiche diatribiche e dialettiche" (112). This is also seen in his aristotelianism and inclusion of the figure of Pietro Pomponazzi (Peretto) as interlocutor.

Summarizing the basic tenets of Speroni's theory of dialogue as expressed in his *Apologia*, Vianello continues to claim that the Paduan writer was not looking for deep philosophical truths but rather a point of convergence between high culture and the needs of "una letteratura ormai merce di consumo" (114). The place of the rhetor is more fundamental than that of the philosopher to the society of the times where truth is relative and the appearance of truth, the *verosimile*, is equally valid. While never neglecting the importance of *elocutio* (Speroni's dialogues on language and rhetoric are frequently referred to by Vianello), the importance of the demonstrative cause is particularly celebrated since it "cammina sul filo del puro artificio" (122), and therefore is the culmination of the rhetor's art. Furthermore, since praise or derision is the highest form and morally ambiguous, it falls to the efficiency of the *mimesis* to "inscenare la comunicazione" (122). Therefore, to Vianello, the ideological dignity of the genre accorded to it by Speroni lies precisely with the importance placed on the conveyance of the message based solely on linguistic exchange. This, in the author's opinion, made Speroni "il paradigma del letterato nuovo" (111).

Vianello has successfully put together a collection of essays on aspects of different Renaissance authors of dialogues who, despite temporal, geographical, and in some cases "ideological" differences, display aspects of the socio-cultural change that was sweeping Italian letters in the Cinquecento. By avoiding any attempt at a broad, encyclopedic study of the genre throughout the century, and favouring more precise, particular studies, Valerio has produced a clear vision of the literary and cultural climate of the times. This slim volume truly ranks as one of the most engaging and instructive studies of the dialogue to emerge in recent years.

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Pierantonio Frare. *L'Ordine e il verso: La forma canzoniere e l'istituzione metrica nei sonetti del Foscolo*. Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1995. Pp. 227.

With *L'Ordine e il verso*, Pierantonio Frare has written a thoroughly researched, detailed, important and original study of Foscolo's poetry. In it, however, he employs a dense, technically difficult exposition to argue – ultimately convincingly – that Foscolo's poetics synthesize into an organic, unified *canzoniere*. Frare's own text is a synthesis as well: of much of his earlier research and writing; of verses by Foscolo and poets from Petrarch to Leopardi; and of poetic treatises from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By weaving together all of these elements, Frare proposes a believable chronology of Foscolo's sonnets demonstrating a progressive refinement of his poetic style from a dependence on traditional models toward a more innovative style imitating the classical poetry of the ancients.