
Alberto Cavaglion’s monograph, a revised doctoral dissertation, surveys the critical reception of Otto Weininger (1880–1903) in Italy, giving the reader an overview of the antisexual fanatic philosopher’s two books, *Geschlecht und Character: Eine prinzipielle-Untersuchung* (Vienna, 1903), an expanded version of a dissertation entitled *Eros und Psyche*, which he wrote for Friedrich Jodl, and *Über die letzten Dinge* (Vienna, 1904), a collection of aphorisms that appeared posthumously and that he penned while travelling through Germany and Norway in 1902 and during his tour of Italy in 1903.

The publication of Mr. Cavaglion’s book is a welcome event; it is the first study in Italian letters that presents a straightforward, sympathetic but balanced account of the intellectual and literary impact in Italy of the theories of a thinker who more poignantly than perhaps any other individual embodied the promise and the peril of European intellectuality at the turn of the nineteenth century. Weininger, using mathematical formulas, believed he could demonstrate how varying proportions of male and female protoplasm could explain prostitution, anti-semitism, racial superiority and even genius.

No doubt, Cavaglion’s ambitious study—accurately characterized in the *Introduzione*—is a significant addition to Italian critical literature and deserves wide readership for its many strengths. A noteworthy feature of this monograph is its arrangement into eight short sections. The first four, “La Voce,” “Sesso e carattere” (1913), “André Spire,” “Intorno alle cose supreme” (1914), are roughly chronological. Each section is a succinct, knowledgeable account of the articles and critical commentaries on Weininger that appeared in the most authoritative Italian literary journals of the *primo novencento*, from *Leonardo* to *Lacerba*, from *La Voce* to *La Ronda*. The remaining four “Individuo assoluto ed estetica metafisica,” “Maschilità del fascismo,” “Le Juif antisemite,” “Trieste,” address interrelated questions of cultural, social, political, historical events: the philosophy (politics, aesthetics, ethics) of Benedetto Croce, the Catholic Church’s opposition to Freud’s pansexualism and the antifeminism of fascism. On reading Cavaglion, one receives the impression, first, that an important aspect of Weininger’s work was totally misunderstood by the Italian intelligentsia and, secondly, that the remainder shifted kaleidoscopically to blend with a certain wishful preconception. No doubt Weininger was welcomed warmly, almost emotionally by his Italian readers. This warmth is reflected in what seems to be a general tendency, on the one hand,

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to impose an Italian spiritual paternity upon his Geschlecht und Char-
acter and, on the other hand, to redeem the young Jewish prodigy by stress-
ing his antisemitism (or is it anti-germanism?) in Über die letzten
Dinge. The outstanding feature of this book is the comprehensive and
cohesive coverage of a somewhat neglected field in Italian thought and
letters. Mr. Cavaglion has demonstrated his scholarly ability, his wide-
ranging familiarity with Italian intellectual life before and after World War
I. In short, Otto Weininger in Italia is an excellent guidebook on a much
debated period in Italian letters. I can recommend it for research libraries
without reservations.

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Paolo Simoncelli. La lingua di Adamo: Guillaume Postel tra acca-

The book focuses on a few passages from Dante (especially Paradiso,
XVI. 124–26 dealing with the language spoken by Adam) and on the
theories that several sixteenth-century Florentines expounded in relation
to Dante’s statements on matters of language. The major figure dealt with
is Guillaume Postel (1510–81), the French humanist, linguist, religious
thinker and prophet, who is much less well known as a critic of Dante.
Not only does Professor Simoncelli’s study provide new information in this
area but it also challenges many of the interpretations offered by historians
of the questione della lingua for this period. The author rejects facile labels
and chooses instead to examine internal and external data thoroughly and
objectively. Through a careful reading of the documents (both manuscript
and printed) and judicious weighing of the impact of political and religious
factors, in a manner which one might term interdisciplinary and which he
used with much profit in a previous work entitled Evangelismo italiano
del Cinquecento, Professor Simoncelli is able to pinpoint convincingly the
subtle differences which characterize the individual theories of the various
protagonists in this episode of the language controversy.

What emerges is a clear and well-documented exposition of the intricate
interplay and evolution of the views each critic advanced and modified in
the light of changing personal historical circumstances. The Florentine
academician Giovambattista Gelli developed his early ideas on the Ara-
maean origin of Florentine probably after reading Postel’s work on the
origin of the Hebrew language (1538), the author argues. This theory, as
advanced by Pierfrancesco Giambullari, was a defence of Tuscan in the
face of bembismo, but it also had political implications, Simoncelli shows.
It indicates the far-reaching geographical boundary of the Medici state and