extol the virtues of a great literary text, a fact Weinberg and Matter easily acknowledge and are justified in labelling the “author’s intention to emulate Plato [...] an obvious failure” (42). However, for those of us who study dialogue, even a “bad” one is irresistible, as it often reveals much about how the genre was used and perceived during its most prolific time period. The praise of its writing is correctly deferred to those instances where Alfieri recounts conditions and historical events to which he bore witness either as a participant or an observer. They cite his “best and most credible pages” as those that outline “Milan after the death of Gian Galeazzo, Genoa at the time of Gabriele’s execution, and Caffa at the beginning of its political and economic decline” (43).

The *Ogdoas*’ contribution to political history is undoubtedly its greatest strength according to our editors who cite Alfieri’s list of consuls in the city of Caffa between 1409 and 1421 as “important details that fill a gap in the history of the colony” (43). In bringing Alfieri’s work to light, Weinberg and Matter have provided a valuable text of the Renaissance, which further reveals the thoughts and conditions of a people and a time whose fascination, continues unabated.

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Giovanni Botero. *On the Causes of the Greatness and Magnificence of Cities*. Translation and Introduction by Geoffrey Symcox. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2012. Pp. xxxix, 95. ISBN 978-1-4426-4507-3. \$ 45.

The series “The Lorenzo da Ponte Italian library” welcomes Geoffrey Symcox’s new English translation of Giovanni Botero’s *On the Causes of the Greatness and Magnificence of Cities* (1588). The work, originally published alongside Botero’s more famous *On the Reason of State*, is divided into three books with a dedication to Duchess Cornelia Orsini Altemps (†1643). This new translation is fitting with the book’s history; it was in fact translated into various languages, including French, German, English, and even Latin, relatively soon after its original publication in Italian. Symcox reminds us that *On the Causes* was translated into English at least twice—“by Robert Peterson in 1606, and by Sir Thomas Hawkins in 1635” (xiii)—and summarized by Sir Walter Raleigh in his *Observations Concerning the Causes of the Magnificency and Opulence of Cities*.

In the Introduction, the editor stresses the basic points of the work, and contextualizes it in Botero’s life and political career using as a guide the essays by the Italian historian Luigi Firpo. The latter wrote the biographical profile of Botero in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Vol. 13. Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1971. 352-62), and published the first modern edition of *On the Causes* (Turin: UTET, 1948). Symcox based his own translation on Firpo’s edition with a single variation: chapter 2.7 (*On Industry*), which Firpo published in the *Reason of State*, was restored to its original place. Short but pithy footnotes accompany Botero’s text and help to clarify some of the more difficult passages. For example, Symcox points out the idea that Botero confuses Babylon with Baghdad when he

states that a Bugiafar rebuilt it (2.12).

Symcox's translation is very accurate and faithful to the original text in terms of syntax, while the proper nouns have mostly been normalized and modernized. He also paid particular attention to the titles of the single chapters, often citing Peterson's and Hawkin's versions. It is evident that Symcox put significant effort into his translation: in many passages the treatise consists of a collage of various sources which Botero enriches with references to his contemporary context. For example, the synecism of Attica carried out by Theseus has its modern parallel in Brazilian towns founded by the Jesuits (Botero's own order) (1.2); the need for the natural resources found in the territories trumps the identity of the conquerors (Tartars, Alexander the Great, Attila, Tamerlane, or the French kings: 1.7); the analysis of the rivers has a very wide horizon which spans the Seine to the Tiber, the Senegal to the Gambia, the Mekong to the Ob, and the Amazon to the St Lawrence ("River Canada": 1.10). The book often recalls places dear to Botero or episodes he personally took part in, such as 'his' Piedmont (1.9); the waterway linking Lake Maggiore and the Ticino river to Milan; the re-erection of the obelisk in St Peter's Square (1.10); the vibrant homage to Carlo Borromeo, for whom Botero worked as a secretary; the mention of the sanctuary of Loreto (2.4); the sporting events of University of Paris students (2.5); the harbour of Palermo (2.12). Moreover, Botero mentions many foreign locations; his description of China, whose economical potentialities he underlines, occupies a wide section of the longest chapter (2.12).

Botero supports his arguments with both ancient (classical and biblical), and contemporary examples, in the style of Machiavelli (an author generally despised by Botero). Regarding extra-European geography, it is well-known how much the Jesuit order contributed to contemporary knowledge about the new worlds through the reports of its missionaries. Symcox posits that Botero must have read these reports, correlating one in particular to a puzzling ethnographic detail (27*n*), while in other cases Botero seems not to be equally 'up to date' (56*n*–59*n*). Botero often seizes the opportunity to confirm what he asserted in the *Reason of State*, especially emphasizing the fundamental role of religion in the growth of a city, in direct opposition to those who state "that human reason serves better than divine reason" (2.4).

In this edition, Symcox has also included Botero's discourse *How many people Rome might have contained at the height of its greatness*, published in the same year (1588) as *On the causes* but in a separate miscellany (Firpo, Luigi. *Gli scritti giovanili di Giovanni Botero: Bibliografia ragionata*. Florence: Sansoni, 1960. 86–7). In the discourse Botero continues somehow the final chapter of *On the Causes* and reflects on why a population doesn't grow after reaching a certain level. This demographic aspect of Botero's speculation has led some scholars to think that he anticipated Malthus' theories.

In a world where globalization dominates and new regions have become the protagonists of economic expansion, Botero's *On the Causes* appears prescient: his historical analysis, which refuses the idealistic, utopian path, had long before its time accepted the worldwide horizons of geographical discoveries. When we read his sentence—"in truth we Italians are too fond of ourselves and are too much the

uncritical admirers of our own ways, when we prefer Italy and its cities over all the rest of the world” (63)—we should replace “Italian/Italy” with any nationality/country; in this way, we will have understood the true essence of Botero’s thought in the same international and “non-Eurocentric perspective” (xxiv) as Symcox’s new translation.

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Giuseppe Parini. *Prose. Scritti polemici (1756-1760)*. A cura di Silvia Morgana e Paolo Bartesaghi. Edizione nazionale delle opere di Giuseppe Parini. Pisa: Fabrizio Serra, 2012. Pp. 420. ISBN 978-88-6227-423-4. € 84.

The second to come out in the *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Giuseppe Parini*, the volume edited and introduced by Silvia Morgana e Paolo Bartesaghi contains the critical edition of the polemical pieces that Giuseppe Parini (1729-1799) wrote in response to the writings on language and style of Alessandro Bandiera and Onofrio Branda between 1756 and 1760, a crucial period in the writer’s literary and intellectual formation.

The author of the classically-inspired *Odi* (1791) and of a biting moral satire such as *Il giorno* (1763-1801), Parini is probably the writer who most fully embodies the ambiguities of the Italian Settecento, suspended as he was between Arcadic classicism and the moral instances of the Enlightenment. Of a humble origin – “di casa popolare,” to use Carducci’s words – Parini, more than Alfieri and Goldoni, the two other crowns of Italian eighteenth-century literature, was fully engaged in creating and implementing a literary program that was ideologically driven – inspired by the Enlightenment ideals of an ethical and civil function of literature – but also aesthetically aware, aiming at achieving a compromise with a more traditional classicist taste. If, for Parini, taste and ideology were always closely linked, so the *questione della lingua*, as it emerges from his polemical writings, was never only an aesthetic issue but also a moral one.

Recognizing the importance of the two controversies, Francesco De Sanctis wrote that it was in the clash with the Fathers Branda and Bandiera that Parini first revealed his true personality, both as a man and as a writer. As the editors explain in the introduction, the ideas about language and style that Parini presented in the polemical writings would later find fuller and more thoughtful expression in his *Lezioni di Belle Lettere* (1769-1776). The intellectual exchange and confrontation with the two clerical antagonists, however, was a defining moment for the young writer, one that gave him the opportunity to start redefining his literary classicism and reconcile it with the instances of a new rationalistic poetics.

Both polemics had at their heart the choice of a literary language and the aesthetic and ethical implications of such a choice. In his 1755 *I pregiudizi delle umane lettere*, the Servite Father Alessandro Bandiera had defended a rigid linguistic purism that had led him to criticize the sermons of Paolo Segneri’s *Quaresimale*, which were deemed not “Tuscan” enough, and to rewrite parts of