Albert N. Mancini. *I "Capitoli" letterari de Francesco Bolognetti*. Naples: Federico & Ardia, 1989. Pp. 213.

If there were ever a period characterized by the all-pervasive and heated debate about literary criticism so typical of the late twentieth-century, it was precisely the second half of the Cinquecento. Just as the present theoretical battles concern issues such as time, being, language and, generally speaking, the post-structural critique of knowledge, theorists of the latter part of the sixteenth-century were preoccupied with, among other things, the aesthetics of epic poetry. The issues were many; for example: the type of literary model to be employed, the sort of language which best suited epic poetry, and questions dealing with the appropriate depiction of characters. While the discourse of post-structuralism has become, according to Susan A. Handelman, a variety of "substitute theology" which is essentially oblivious to the structure of genres and to the formal constructions that define the art of literature, the problems discussed in the late Cinquecento were related instead to what the term "aesthetics" originally meant; in Peter Demetz's words: "the secular attention to an inalienable element of sensuality and its *jouissance*". In other terms, the critical interests focused on the formal texture and thematic domain of a literary work.

In his book, Mancini, a critically acclaimed scholar of the Seicento novel, aims to offer a fresh perspective on the theoretical debates concerning epic poetry in the Renaissance. In a more specific sense the study centers upon the relatively unknown figure of Francesco Bolognetti, author of, among other works, the epic poem *Costante*. Mancini's study consists of six chapters plus an Appendix. Chapters two to six each contain an introduction to and a commentary on an apologetic verse composition or "capitolo letterario" addressed to a number of literary figures of Renaissance Italy.

In the opening chapter we are offered essential biographical data concerning Bolognetti whom we find to have been very active in the cultural life of Cinquecento Bologna. Mancini provides a succinct critical overview of Bolognetti's poetic works; the *Christiana vittoria marittima*, *La vita di san Tommaso d'Aquino*, the *Antenore* and *Il piacere*. But the writing which is of particular interest to the understanding of Bolognetti's poetics are the "capitoli" which deal with the *Costante* and with the nature of epic poetry in general. Chapter two contains a "capitolo" addressed to Annibal Caro where Bolognetti speaks about civil and family obligations that interfere with his own literary career. The third chapter reproduces an edition of a "capitolo" directed to Sperone Speroni who had entertained some reservations about the *Costante* and it deals with Bolognetti's answers to the criticism. In chapter four we find a version of a "capitolo" addressed to Alberico Longo, while in chapters five and six we are provided with "capitolo" respectively concerning Giraldo Cinzio and Giovanni Battista Pigna. In the Appendix Mancini includes versions of epistles by Bolognetti, Girolamo Muzio along with pages of

criticism by Speroni, M. Antonio Tritonio, and Giraldi Cinzio's answer to Bolognetti's "capitolo".

These texts are hardly marginal, however, as they are essential to the articulation of the complex debates that involved Bolognetti and the art of epic poetry.

I capitoli letterari is of interest and importance for at least two reasons: firstly, we are offered the relatively inaccessible texts of a figure who was involved in debates with major critics such as Speroni and Giraldi Cinzio; secondly, Mancini's detailed critical exposition to each "capitolo" offers some first-rate critical formulations. The author manoeuvres through primary and secondary sources with ease and confidence. In essence, the reader is given the fullest spectrum of the theoretical and historical concerns that underpin each "capitolo". At the same time Mancini heeds much attention to the aesthetic sensibility of Bolognetti and his contemporaries.

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