

is deeply *ingrained* in the dynamics of a desire that is now emptied of any passion,” (438) the nightmare sensed by Deleuze and Guattari.

Given the wide range of its analytical perspectives, *Tot-Art* is certainly recommended as an essential tool for the study of old and new totalitarianism, not only in the form of “classical” dictatorships but also in more recent and insidious resurgences through the Web.

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**Roberta Ricci, and Simona Wright, editors. *NeMLA Italian Studies. The Renaissance Dialogue*. Vol. 38, 2016, pp. 245.**

This monographic issue of *NeMLA Italian Studies* celebrates the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first publication of *Orlando Furioso* (1516) by drawing attention to Ariosto’s modernity. The title of the collection reflects the philosophical and organizational principle the two editors brilliantly derive from fragmentation and digression as narrative techniques in *Orlando Furioso*. Such practices, and the instability they promote, testify to an essential Renaissance feature—the dialogue among the various artistic expressions and the fields of knowledge. In the essays of this volume literature, language, philosophy, medicine, and the arts engage in a conversation that offers a more comprehensive understanding of Renaissance culture and might drive, Ricci and Wright anticipate, additional investigation into disciplinary cross-pollination.

The essays are organized in three sections. In the opening one, Ricci, “Umanesimo letterario, riforma grafica: Poggio Bracciolini editore, filologo e copista,” and Lorenzo Sacchini, “Tra latino e volgare nei *Dialoghi piacevoli* di Stefano Guazzo,” examine Poggio Bracciolini’s and Stefano Guazzo’s standpoints on the linguistic and cultural individuality of vernacular Italian in relation to Latin. Sacchini demonstrates the effects of community ethics on poetry and language in two dialogues from the *Dialoghi piacevoli* (1586)—the seventh, revolving around which language is more suitable for poetry, and the eighth, in which two new interlocutors, yet still members of an intellectual academy, like Guazzo himself, argue the spelling of the word *fedeltà* versus *fideltà* proposed by supporters of Latin. Usage among writers is offered as resolution to be complemented with knowledge of

language theories, foremost Bembo's. The verdict is in Latin's favor, however Guazzo points out the bilingualism of Italian culture, and how veering off tradition needs restraint to secure support from one's peers in order to legitimize membership in the literary society and, in Guazzo's case, the *Accademia degli Illustrati*. In his conclusion, Sacchini evokes literature's contribution to the development of a sense of community, especially in Italian culture.

In the second section, involving theater ("L'operazione e il repertorio. Due categorie barocche tra retorica e commedia dell'arte" by Andrea Gazzoni) and the arts in the interdisciplinary colloquy of this essay collection, Antonella Ansani in, "Questioning Poetry in Ariosto's 'Negromante,'" revisits the themes of magic and rhetoric as staged in Ariosto's comedy through the character of the magician Iachelino. Beyond this character, her insightful analysis addresses the roles of magic and rhetoric in Ariosto's oeuvre, particularly in *Orlando Furioso*. In her investigation, Ansani includes how Humanism and Neoplatonism conceived of magic and rhetoric in relation to poetry. Since magic and rhetoric challenge the poet's power to impose order on the world—as means of deception and illusion—Ariosto feels compelled to question his own poetic endeavor.

In his essay, "On Maniera, Moral Choice, and Truth," David Cast inquires into the idea of *maniera* across the centuries. By discussing later comments, he goes beyond some of the meanings attributed to the term by Vasari in *Le vite*—a diachronic approach that currently applies also to art criticism, as testified by Clement Greenberg's interpretation of artist Joseph Cornell's style included in this study. Vasari claims that artists' individual manners originate from imitation of nature and selection of masters, following personal identities and aspirations. In light of William Gilpin's 1782 remarks on the topic, a moral dilemma follows. While *maniera* can result in repetition, it reflects truthfulness to one's self. In 1836, artist John Constable accused some painters of falsehood because they betrayed the main purpose of painting—the investigation of and truthfulness to nature. Cast notes that such a notion, stemming from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scientific revolution, conflicts with the idea of artistic truth as expressed by Vasari, who favored the study of antiquities in order to look at the world through the guidance of traditional *maniere*.

Alison Fleming leads us through the fourteenth-century wall decorations in the chapterhouse of the Benedictine abbey (built five centuries before) in Pomposa, Italy. Her study highlights the originality of the painted figures—vis a vis the artistic conventions applied within

the order's religious objective—investigating for instance the illusionistic architectural settings in which the apostles Paul and Peter, the saints Benedict of Nursia (founder of the order, ca. 529) and Guido (one of Pomposa's abbots in the eleventh century), as well as twelve prophets are placed to the sides of the Crucifixion. Fleming contextualizes her interpretation of the pictorial techniques by reviewing the significance of each painted category within Christianity and, more specifically, within the Benedictine order. These figures seem to break the architectural boundaries between representation and reality, and therefore engage the viewer in a personal and effective dialogue in pursuit of *imitatio Christi* as advocated in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Fleming offers a well-grounded interpretation of illusionistic pictorial techniques when she points to the relevance of fourteenth century rhetoric and dramatic performances for the chapterhouse at Pomposa.

In the last section of *The Renaissance Dialogue*, the contributions by Stephanie Jed (“Renaissance Dialogue: Humanities and Science”), Sara Miglietti, and Grace Allen open to science. In “Wholesome or Pestilential? Giovanni Battista Doni (1594-1647) and the Dispute on Roman Air,” Miglietti shows the evolution of environmental discourse in the Early Modern era. Notwithstanding the ongoing dialogue with the classics (Cicero, Livy, Strabo, Columella) on the insalubrity of Roman air, some late Renaissance intellectuals valued personal experience and first-hand knowledge of the natural world. Such an empirical approach is most evident in Giovanni Battista Doni's *De restituenda salubritate agri Romani* (1667). Like some of his contemporaries (Alessandro Traiano Petronio, Marsilio Cagnati) Doni engaged with the *auctoritates* but, unlike his peers, only with those who corroborated his own view, that environmental deterioration was imputable to people, and that human manipulation of the environment could fix Rome's unwholesome conditions. In her essay Miglietti emphasizes the multidisciplinary of environmental inquiry, connecting literature, natural philosophy, medicine, diplomacy, and urban planning from antiquity.

Allen discusses the types of readers whom Ludovico Dolce envisioned taking an interest in his *Somma della filosofia d'Aristotele* (ca. 1565), a treatise making classical philosophy accessible to a non-scholarly audience (a common goal among authors, editors, and publishers in Renaissance Venice). Allen's investigation focuses on the use of paratexts (like frontispieces) to persuade readers into buying books and, more loftily, to educate them. To such ends, these paratexts would offer explanatory remarks in dedications and addresses to the

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reader, in order to facilitate comprehension and point out the value of the books, as Dolce does in “Ai Lettori” in his *Somma*. Unfortunately, the popularizing intent and the commercial drive of the *Somma* prevent a coherent and faithful rendition of Aristotle’s philosophy. Dolce is aware of such shortcoming, which will be manifest, he fears, also to the learned readers. Criticism is likely to come also from opponents of the dissemination of classical philosophy in vernacular Italian. However, in conformity to the changed cultural and religious environment of previously liberal Venice, in his *Somma* Dolce defends himself and his work against accusations of unorthodoxy by avoiding theological controversy and iterating the tenets of the Catholic doctrine.

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