

The Renaissance Dialogue

Although this special volume dedicated to the Renaissance includes only one essay on Ariosto, it aims at joining the many celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the first publication (1516) of his epic masterpiece, *Orlando Furioso*. Following this modern multi-thematic approach enticing micro-narratives with a mixture of “le donne, i cavallier, l’arme, gli amori, / le cortesie, l’audaci imprese,” declared *ab principio* by Ariosto as poetic theory in the opening lines of the epic (1.1-2), this project embraces such a vision of a multi plot within interdisciplinarity, now more than ever at the center of the intellectual (and pedagogical/didactic) debate in academia. Among the distinguished international celebrations dedicated to this remarkable anniversary in Western literature, let us here at least mention where everything started: Ferrara, with the authoritative exhibition at the Palazzo dei Diamanti (24 Sept. 2016 – 8 Jan. 2017), titled *Cosa vedeva Ariosto quando chiudeva gli occhi*, which contains eighty-three works of art, ranging from engravings, letters, paintings, drawings, to manuscripts, editions, and artistic objects. While assembling our contributions, we liked to imagine Ariosto leading us through the rich multifaceted dialogue among disciplines presented here. Ariosto’s modern notions of *coralità polifonica*, a plural interchange, and *labirinto*, a multi-dimensional metaphysical space, constitute the philosophical core of this volume: to explore the cross-cultural traits of the Renaissance and to highlight the manifold interactions occurring within the artistic productivity of this time. That makes, in our opinion, the Renaissance Dialogue both original and modern. By promoting new ways of thinking and advancing intellectual exploration, *Orlando Furioso* escapes the linear narration of events, claiming irrationality, fragmentation, and digression as programmatic formulation of poetics, thus opening the space of modernity, which embraces absurdity, instability, and failure. Moreover, and more to the point of this volume, the paradigm contains epistemological questions (addressed in different ways) that can lead us to recognize the dialogic model as a tool of aesthetic exchange and meaningful discussion. By creating a new poetic space dedicated to difference as a human thought, Ariosto aims to challenge the classical worldview, intersecting various fields of knowledge and new parts of the world as well. At the time of Ariosto, the Este Court in Ferrara emerges as a sophisticated geographical cultural space, where an exceptionally learned community of literati, artists, philosophers, and authorities from around the world comes in contact, exchanges views, and debates ideas.

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Keeping in mind Ariosto's modern epistemological approach to reality and knowledge by interlacing, embracing, connecting, and disconnecting themes, characters, levels of narrations, the goal here is to present the Renaissance as a continuous dialogue among many authors from various cultural milieus that includes the arts, language and literature, philosophy, and the sciences. Mindful of recent studies on gender and feminist scholarship, cities and space, marginal groups, and broader critical articulation of public and private life in the analysis of constructing identity, this monographic volume reflects closely upon such textual and cultural intersections. Within the humanities and the sciences of the early-modern time, specific attention has been given to vernacular production (in philosophy and literature), decoration and paintings (in art history and literature), rhetoric and theory (in theater), scientific investigations (in neuroscience and philosophy), empirical observations (in environmental studies and natural philosophy), scripts (in paleography and philology), and magic (in literature and, again, theater). By intersecting history, literature, art history, philosophy, and paleography, our objective is to foster a multi-disciplinary dialogue, to propose new cultural itineraries, and to open new pathways in Renaissance Studies. In bridging disciplines, we hope to highlight the significance of unorthodox investigations of genres, cultural productions, and subversive strategies that can help us unpack the complex universe of early modern Europe. This collection intends to situate itself at the crossroads of a re-examination of canonical and non-canonical authors and works, with essays written by art historians, literary critics, philosophers, philologists who, in dialoguing with each other, add different perspectives, challenging the notion of a single historical and cultural vision. While we hope to avoid repetition of previous artistic assumptions on this period, we aimed at enriching our understanding of the complex dialectic between tradition and innovation, which so informed the milieu of the Renaissance.

This 2016 monographic issue of *NeMLA Italian Studies* beautifully coincides with the 500th anniversary of the publication of *Orlando Furioso*. Yet its publication happens, sadly, at the same time as alarming episodes of discrimination pit groups and individuals against each other on the basis of national origin, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, migration status, and class. Stressing the role played by Ariosto in re-mapping knowledge in 16th century Italy (and beyond) provides the opportunity to link his literary genius to the interdisciplinary core of our volume, where we emphasize that diversity, pluralism, and difference ought to remain the basic principles of human understanding.

His open fictional model, replete with interruptions, diversions, and discursive ellipses, did not only open new narrative perspectives, it also helps us appreciate the political significance of the cross-disciplinary discourses that distinguish the Renaissance. What was at stake then, and is most certainly relevant to contemporary reality, is the notion that dialogue is central to intersubjective inclusiveness and social understanding of differences, and essential to the progress of our democracy. The centrality of such a model not only broadens our perspectives of otherness in Renaissance Studies, but also valorizes the importance of plurality in contemporary society.

In the first part of this volume Roberta Ricci's introductory article, *Umanesimo letterario, riforma grafica: Poggio Bracciolini editore, filologo e copista*, invites the reader to explore the new critical consciousness that marked the passage from the Middle Ages to Humanism, following the lines indicated by distinguished scholars like Eugenio Garin and Paul Oskar Kristeller, who emphasized that the re-discovery of the Classics impacted both the philosophical and civic as well as the rhetorical and linguistic dimensions, while supporting the historical transition to modernity. Ricci's study elaborates on the increased significance of the written word within the *studia humanitatis* and on the value given to the adjective *humanus*, which contemporary scholars intuited as the privileged location of understanding and persuasion, as well as the vector of truth within the historical and philological dimension now acquired by the written text. The second part of Ricci's exploration focuses on the author's central scholarly interest, Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) who put the new intellectual doctrine to the test, all the while contributing with cogent methodological and ideological considerations on the ongoing philological disputes. By locating Poggio Bracciolini's work at the intersection of the contemporary debate, Ricci highlights his paramount presence within the intellectual milieu of his time and recognizes him as one of the fundamental figures of the modernization of Italian and European culture, engaged in articulating the foundations of what will become the specialized culture of the sciences and technologies. In opening new directions of thought for the future, Bracciolini's manuscripts (see Tables 1, 6, 7, 8, 9), at the Biblioteca Medicea in Florence, clearly speak about the importance of his paleographic contribution in the revival of the elegant Florentine minuscole, which: "sobria e misurata, ha un effetto profondissimo nella conservazione qualitativa della letteratura classica, solidamente e finalmente restaurata in una forma da leggere con facilità e piacere" (28).

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Lorenzo Sacchini's *Tra latino e volgare nei Dialoghi piacevoli di Stefano Guazzo: una questione di "fedeltà"* examines one of Stefano Guazzo's lesser known works, the *Dialoghi piacevoli*, to invite more study into the debate raging at his time, involving the comparison between Latin and Vulgar Italian, a language, the latter, that was emerging as a mature and powerful instrument in the hands of the literati, essayists, and scholars of the sixteenth century. Sacchini's research, which delves into both the style and the content of Guazzo's work, intends to illustrate the modalities utilized by the author to resolve the ongoing tensions between the two idioms, articulating his investigation by considering the following: what relationship did Guazzo see possible between the two languages; which criteria would move authors to prefer one or the other of the linguistic solutions; would it be possible to allow Latin into the metric of vulgar Italian, and, if so, how and in which forms. Linguistic choices, Sacchini recognizes, have ethical and social implications for Guazzo as for his contemporaries, and with the present study the author demonstrates how the dispute between Vulgar and Latin adumbrates much weightier questions than the purely linguistic one. Sacchini sees the link between the ethical elements elaborated in the *Dialoghi piacevoli* and the illustrious group of literati who were the recipients of the work, that is the intellectuals who populated the literary academies of the second half of the sixteenth century. A central role in the *Dialoghi* is given in fact to the notions of convenience and conformity, as well as to criteria such as fidelity and loyalty within the linguistic tradition, which inform Guazzo's work from the stylistic/rhetorical and the thematic point of view.

In the second part of the volume, dedicated to the Renaissance Dialogue in literature, theater and the arts, Antonella Ansani's opening article, *Questioning Poetry in Ariosto's "Negromante,"* focuses on the magical elements in Ariosto's comedy by studying the figure of its protagonist, the pseudo magician Iachelino. Ansani recognizes the particular nexus that Ariosto sought to draw between magic and poetry, both in the *Furioso* as well as in his minor works, and argues that within the author's rhetorical structure magical powers appeared on one side to embody the control and authority the poet exercised over his material, on the other to hint at the possibility to harmonize two differing yet ostensibly complementary currents of thoughts: Humanism, where language and method take center stage, and Neoplatonism, which embraced the category of the magical as instrument of supernatural knowledge. However, this hopeful harmonization remains impossible and the two characters, Iachelino and Atlante, who are the

personification of these philosophical currents, reveal, through their professed trickery, that a conflation is either not viable or possible only through a measure of illusion and deception, which is in turn the trademark and challenge of poetry. Through *Negromante* Ansani explores Ariosto's rhetorical discourse in order to reveal his skepticism towards the reconciliation of rationality and irrationality in the realm of doctrine. At the same time, at the literary level, Ansani sheds light on Ariosto as he examines the notion of a poetic operation where the careful control of rhetorical strategies fosters the invention of a hyperreality that is both magical and poetic.

Andrea Gazzoni's contribution to this volume, *L'operazione e il repertorio. Due categorie barocche tra retorica e commedia dell'arte*, invites the readers to analyze the differences between the notions of *operazione*, the activity through which changes are produced in a specific element, and *repertorio*, the established *corpus* which receives the *operazione* and is impacted by the stylistic or ideological variations the latter affects. In other words, cause and effect, poles that are in direct and immediate relation to one another, become the focus of attention, especially impacting the late Cinquecento and the Seicento, when they become foundational of that ever evolving and open mindset, artistic, poetic and stylistic that is known as the Baroque. In prefacing his study, Gazzoni reflects on the interdisciplinary nature of the Baroque, which determined so much of its critical fortunes, as well as on its penchant for embracing oppositional ideological and philosophical tendencies, which in turn results in new aesthetic categories. By focusing on the two principles of the *operazione* and *repertorio*, the author elevates both notions to critical driving forces behind what Luciano Ancheschi classified as the “*multipolarità sistematica*” of the Baroque, incessantly redefining its *corpus* as well as its poetics. At the same time, Gazzoni exposes the nexus that transversally affects the conditions of production and interpretation of cultural phenomena, facilitating the transition to a post-Renaissance *Weltanschauung*. According to Gazzoni, this complex set of operations is radically theatrical, as it involves forms of socialization that are performative in nature. Not surprisingly then, rhetorical treatises, as Emanuele Tesauro's *Cannocchiale aristotelico* (1654) and Matteo Pellegrini's *Fonti dell'ingegno* (1650), as well as foundational texts of the *commedia dell'arte*, in particular Flaminio Scala's *Finto marito* (1618) and the *Teatro delle favole rappresentative* (1611), provide interesting stimuli for Gazzoni's exploration and constitute his privileged observatory. In the theatrical logic of the *commedia* and the pragmatic nature of rhetoric, the performance is never

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definitive and the corpus always in flux, decentering the notion of text, complicating it with the principle of hybrid and heterogeneous expressions, pointing to an endless process rather than to a finished product, that is to an elsewhere that is beyond art itself.

Departing from Reverend William Gilpin's 1782 observations on stylistic consistency, particularity and variety in art, David Cast's *On Maniera, Moral Choice, and Truth* sets to examine the notion that artists promote a consistent trait, indeed a stylistic mannerism that becomes synonymous of uniqueness, originality, and creativity. For Cast the idea of mannerism, contextualized in the historical period that goes from the late 16th to the 19th century, raises a series of theoretical questions that are relevant to art in general, and in particular to contemporary art. In Cast's view, style and manner are coterminous with art itself. In the present study he undertakes an exploration that will span a few centuries and implicate both artists and art critics, from Reverend Gilpin to John Constable to name a few, while focusing on Giorgio Vasari, whose *Le vite*, published in Florence in 1550 and again in 1568, uses the term *maniera*, embracing a variety and a complexity of different meanings, in an astonishing two thousand instances. Much of these meanings are of interest today as they become implicated in the work of artists such as John Shearman, Antonio Pinelli, and Elizabeth Cropper, among others. Cast recognizes, however, that the observations made by both Gilpin and Constable ideally set in motion new interrogations on both the force and the limits, as well as on the moral dimensions, of this term. If in fact Vasari uses *maniera* to set up a category that supports his exploration of the artistry and specificity of each particular style, he is also able to identify a progression, a series of articulated relationships that gave rise to new orientations, trends, and dispositions, fostering both imitation and innovation. Reverend Gilpin's observations attest, however, that in later centuries the debate took a different form, becoming complicated by ethical dilemmas, which Vasari, in his cultural milieu, was not particularly keen on identifying. Specifically, "that if an individual *maniera* is the result of a certain choice, of a clear intention, indeed as a sign also of a certain personal integrity and self-definition . . . such a *maniera*, once so established, ran the danger of losing its moral authority and becoming nothing more a mere pattern of choices" (129). Constable, as Cast notes, in a lecture in 1836, provides more food for the debate with the question of representation, imitation of nature, and truth, a thorny question that was addressed in the scientific world through the notions of taxonomy and method, re-popularized in England precisely round the years of Constable's observations. Contrasting Vasari's

comments with those of Reverend Gilpin and John Constable gives David Cast an original point of view from which to continue the dialogue that is both necessary and beneficial for contemporary art.

In *Experiencing the Chapterhouse in the Benedictine Abbey at Pomposa*, Alison Fleming examines the frescos of the famed Benedictine Abbey with the objective of illustrating the originality and particularities of this pictorial project as well as to shed light on its historical significance. In observing the frescos, Fleming confirms that the Benedictine monks utilized illusionistic images to bring about a dialogue, rich in references and rhetorical symbols, between the sacred representations and the faithful convening in that space. Through illusionistic painting techniques, Fleming believes the monks hoped to produce an interactive engagement that would elicit the viewers to a higher understanding of the scriptures and their religious and theological underpinnings. While acknowledging the lack of a standard iconography at the time, the author however notes that a prominent position in the pictorial space of the abbey is given to the *Crucifixion*, which is placed at the center of the narrative and is articulated in complex groupings, pairs, and single figures encased in architectural spaces and flanked by pictorial decorations that are unusual for the time and possibly unique to the Benedictine order. It is through a comparative study of their abbeys and charterhouses, of the subjects represented in their figurative cycles, in the illustrations and decorations of the friezes, and in the illusionistic aspects of the pictorial programs that Fleming engages with the religious context to highlight the fundamental tenets of the order and its theological principles.

In *Beheading: The Lesson of Caravaggio*, Alessandro Giardino explores the last phase of Caravaggio's life, as the painter fled to Naples to escape the death sentence that awaited him in Rome. His last years in Naples were most productive and allowed Caravaggio to leave a lasting mark on the city. In particular, his obsession with the representation of beheadings influenced a series of painters and resulted in the proliferations of works with similar themes. Giardino's study examines Caravaggio's Neapolitan production focusing specifically on two major works, the two versions of *Salome with the Head of St. John the Baptist*, which the author considers paradigmatic of the artist's search for artistic subjectivity. These particular paintings, Giardino recognizes, dialogue with other similar representations in contemporary art, and especially in the works of female and feminist artists, such as Cindy Sherman and Adriana Varejão. In challenging the frequent dismissal of psychoanalytic interpretations of Caravaggio's work, Giardino interrogates those

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biographical elements that provide a different reading, merging both the symbolic as well as the iconological aspects of the theme of the beheading. The study thus complicates the two versions of the artist's *Salome* with two notions dear to psychoanalysis, the castration complex and fetishism, to provoke a larger discussion on the possibility that artworks become "discursive objects strained between the unfathomable intentions" of their authors and their "successive cultural appropriations" (158).

In the third and final part of this volume, dedicated to the sciences and philosophy, Stephanie Jed prefaces her essay, *Renaissance Dialogue: Humanities and Science*, with a tale told by Galileo in his *Il Saggiatore* (1623), where the scientist used a fable to describe modern man's changing approach towards scientific research. Jed is interested in focusing on those Renaissance texts which, notwithstanding their contextual historicity, present an issue of spatiality and knowledge, the connection between hand and brain. Such a link occupies a large area of research in the neuro- and cognitive sciences today. Jed argues how early modern authors were aware of the shifts and changes in the perception of the writing activity, provided new paradigms of representation of the physical dimension of handwriting, and concentrated in particular on the implications that the association between brain and hand had for the perception of the world and its scientific interpretation. Similar questions and investigations, Jed notes, proliferate in contemporary scientific circles, producing new studies on intersubjectivity in the sciences. As exemplified in Galileo's story, where the hand studying the cicada eventually causes the latter's demise, the hand's activities and its movement may lead to a "depletion and impoverishment of an intersubjective research space," (179) a concern that the neuro-sciences have embraced as they approach notions of empathy, sociality, and intersubjectivity, which Jed explores with particular attention to the studies by Sklar and Foster and by Vittorio Gallese.

With *Wholesome or Pestilential? Giovanni Battista Doni (1594-1647) and the Dispute on Roman Air*, Sara Miglietti draws attention to the environmental discourse weaving through disciplines such as medicine, political thought, and natural philosophy in the early modern period. By focusing on the specific case of the dispute over the insalubrious Roman air affecting the city between the late sixteenth and the early eighteenth century, Miglietti explores the tensions and conflicts that characterize early modern environmental discourse, and produced a remarkable number of texts, both in vernacular and Latin, often authored by well known and respected physicians and scholars. Over the span of

one and a half centuries, the dispute involved Roman and non-Roman luminaries, from the Florentine Giovanni Battista Doni to the Veronese Marsilio Cagnati, to Domenico Panarolo, who taught at La Sapienza, and to Giovanni Maria Lancisi, well known and respected for his groundbreaking epidemiological studies. Miglietti's exploration of the body of work reveals the many stylistic and thematic peculiarities of such a dispute, highlighting how their implications went far beyond the local cultural scene. In fact, if on one side the authors recognized the importance of the well organized and systematized knowledge inherited from both the Hippocratic school of medicine and Medieval tradition, on the other they welcomed empirical observation, which would in turn challenge previously acquired knowledge. In addition, Miglietti pertinently points out, the dispute over the insalubrity of Roman air allows us to understand the development of early modern Europe's intellectual history, as it "embodies one of the most prominent traits of early modern environmental discourse . . . the coexistence between multiple and even contradictory ways of conceptualizing the environment and its influence on human beings" (204). Miglietti's exploration and comparative study sheds new light on the epistemological underpinnings of early modern environmental discourse, helping the reader to answer questions such as the value authors attributed to their own work, to reflect on the tradition or disciplinary domain to which these authors felt connected, and how they negotiated the contradictions between traditions and the emergence of new scientific approaches.

In Grace Allen's *Addressing the Reader: Lodovico Dolce's Somma della filosofia d'Aristotele and the Audience for Vernacular Philosophy in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, the final essay of this volume, the author examines a lesser known and studied work by Lodovico Dolce, the *Somma della filosofia d'Aristotele*, a vulgarization of Aristotelian philosophy published in Venice in 1565 and embracing, albeit loosely organized, books on logic, practical and natural philosophy. Allen recognizes that although Doni's work has not, at least until the present, been the object of careful inquiry, it certainly contains elements that are worth reviewing and considering. For one, it invites a close investigation of how the vernacularization of Aristotle's thought was conducted with increasing stylistic sophistication by sixteenth century authors, who used rhetorical strategies to appeal to their readers. Thus, Allen's contribution illumines the ways in which Doni's compendium sought to persuade, challenge, and interpellate his audience, at the same time attempting to produce a readership that would be shaped, culturally, by the

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popularization of Aristotle's *summa philosophiae*. Doni's ability as a *poligrafo*, as noted by Allen, was that of an author accustomed to producing texts for a diverse audience, attuned to the necessity of differential readings and hence of popularizing techniques that would please at the same time the most learned and sophisticated minds as well as non-scholarly ones. Maintaining the significance and reputation of Aristotelian philosophy in the Renaissance, and aligned with what Charles Schmitt has argued in his well-known *Aristotle and the Renaissance*, Allen sees in the existence of a plurality of Renaissance "Aristotelianisms," produced by the multiplicity of authors seeking the popularization of the Stagyrte's thought, their intention to elevate Italian vernacular into a language "suitable for high philosophical discourse" (221). Unlike Piccolomini's or Varchi's versions, however, Allen indicates Dolce's *Somma della filosofia d'Aristotele* as a popular example of vernacularization, aimed at a less scholarly audience, and more oriented toward commercial success on the Venetian book trade market.

Although the following essays are not necessarily in perfect harmony with each other in the representation of multiplicity and interdisciplinarity within a new notion of humanity in the Renaissance, contributions are divided into three main groups as they emerge as a collective effort to cross several sets of boundaries between scholars of different disciplines, schools, and generations. The bulk of the following essays elaborates on questions connected with geo-political issues and ongoing social and moral interactions, reflecting on how strongly they resonate in early-modern time and today. While spanning across fields, this volume encourages the reader to think more than ever about the contemporary world in relation to the past, by presenting a broad account of the complexity and ideological tension that undergirds the Renaissance. In this regard the 2008 volume (vol. 26) of *Annali d'Italianistica* edited by Massimo Lollini becomes an inspiring and powerful example of reflection on the idea of *humanitas* in our time. As the editor notes in the *incipit* of his introduction, distinguished studies by Michele Ciliberto and Paolo Rossi invite to valorize the "richness and plurality" of the critical approaches and artistic production of early-modern time, "if one wants humanism to be part of contemporary cultural and literary debate, addressing contemporary society's most profound cultural needs (13). In embracing the historical shift towards a less harmonious Renaissance, we continue to see as central and most pertinent for our investigation the recovery of a classical tradition where the concepts of *humanitas*, *civilitas*, *dignitas*, and *verbum* extend beyond

their etymological roots and point to a “human factor (beyond biological differentiation) . . . [as] a motivating force for action in the world.”¹ Reflecting upon the importance of language, the freedom of thought and expression, and the value of learning in a plural cultural setting, gives us the opportunity to convey our concern for expressions that run against *humanitas*, problematizing racial ideology and political hegemony. Notions of diversity, plurality, and marginalization interpellate ethical issues, which are of fundamental importance for intellectuals, citizens, and civil society. We hope that by presenting new perspectives on a selected number of Renaissance authors we have paved the way for further investigations that uphold the value of dialogue as instrument of progress and understanding among human beings. The *Renaissance Dialogue*, appunto.

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NOTES

¹ Celenza, Christopher. "Humanism and the Classical Tradition." *Annali d'Italianistica*, vol. 26, 2008, p. 25.