

Gianluca Genovese. *La lettera oltre il genere: Il libro di lettere, dall'Aretino al Doni, e le origini dell'autobiografia moderna.*

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Gianluca Genovese's study positions the early modern letter "beyond genre" — at the intersection of private and public, between self-fashioning and autobiography. While acknowledging that early modern letters do not constitute autobiographical documents, but rather undergo a wide range of selection and revision at the hands of their authors, Genovese seeks to highlight the ties between the early modern letter and the development of autobiography. For Genovese, the

crucial legacy of the letter lies in its attention to crafting and presenting the self and to managing the reaction of the reader to deliberate ends.

Genovese's study is comprised of an introduction and four chapters devoted to the analysis of epistolary texts by Pietro Aretino, Niccolò Martelli, Niccolò Franco, Anton Francesco Doni, and Tommaso Campanella. The introductory chapter contextualizes the development of the vernacular letter and its links to autobiographical writing, making use of both French and Italian examples; much discussion is devoted to Montaigne, an avid reader of Italian letter-books (14). Throughout, Genovese draws on a thorough array of scholarship on both the vernacular letter-book and autobiography.

Chapter 1, "The Letter-Book and Modern Autobiography," sets out to crystallize the important distinctions between these genres along with their similarities. Genovese situates the letter-book against the backdrop of the expanding print industry and the changing relationship between Latin and Italian, rightly noting that these factors helped set the stage for the explosion in popularity of vernacular letters after 1538. Genovese methodically distinguishes between "libri di lettere" — letter-books compiled by their authors with publication in mind — and other kinds of epistolary collections, for example private correspondence and posthumous volumes; he also gives attention to the shifting relationship between writer and audience. Genovese's interest throughout this chapter — and, indeed, the entire study — lies in exploring the diminished reticence about speaking of the self that began to make itself felt in the sixteenth century, most notably in the letters of Aretino.

Aretino's letters are the subject of chapter 2, perhaps the strongest of this study. Aretino's influence on the development of the vernacular epistolary genre has been widely studied, but Genovese takes a fresh approach by focusing on Aretino's masterful manipulation of his public persona through images as well as words — an "aggressive strategy of self-promotion without precedent for a man of letters" (63). After discussing the many portraits of Aretino made by artists such as Titian and Tintoretto — which served to make Aretino's face as familiar to the general public as the visages of much higher-status figures than he (66) — Genovese engages in a detailed discussion of Aretino's first volume of letters. Noting that the volume contains a portrait of Aretino on the frontispiece and a motto at the conclusion, Genovese suggests that in its presentation the volume is compositionally and visually similar to portrait medals such as the one that Aretino had ordered just weeks prior to the publication of the *Letters*. Aretino's efforts to manage and publicize his own image thus come together in a confluence of visual and print mediums.

Chapter 3 examines a selection of works that appeared soon after Aretino's *Primo libro delle lettere*: Franco's *Pistole vulgari*, Martelli's *Lettere*, and several works by Doni. In each case, Genovese examines the influence of Aretino as well as the new directions some of these works begin to take. Martelli's close imitation of Aretino is worthy of note for what it says about the centrality of Aretino's model, while Franco's letters offer glimpses of the kinds of stylized and fictionalized letters that

would become increasingly popular over the course of the century. Doni's letters, finally, are characterized by his attempts to promote his own reputation and, conversely, to denigrate those of others (192).

Genovese's final chapter, devoted to Campanella's much later epistolary self-representation in his letters to Galileo, offers an interesting — if abrupt — counterpoint to the cases studied in the previous chapters. Noting the prominence of the letter as a vehicle for scientific discourse, one that had begun to displace the treatise, Genovese argues that Campanella presented himself differently to Galileo — to whom he wished to appear a figure of both theological and scientific authority — than in letters to those he hoped might help free him from his long imprisonment.

This is an engaging and well-documented study that offers useful observations regarding the structure of the early modern letter-book and its relationship to autobiography. While it might have benefited from a larger and more inclusive group of case studies — perhaps including some of the women writers who also profited from Aretino's example — *La lettera oltre il genere* will be of great interest to those interested in the development of epistolary writing in early modern Europe and in the origins of autobiography.

MEREDITH K. RAY

University of Delaware