

Annalisa Andreoni. *La via della dottrina: Le lezioni accademiche di Benedetto Varchi*.

alla giornata; Studi e testi di letteratura italiana 9. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2012. 456 pp. €35. ISBN: 978-884673337-5.

Annalisa Andreoni's book is the most important study to date on Benedetto Varchi, and probably the definitive research for the next generation of scholars of Renaissance literary criticism. In her book Andreoni focuses primarily on the academic lectures given by Varchi between 1543 and 1565 at the Accademia fiorentina. Less prominent in her study are Varchi's lectures at the Accademia degli Infiammati, concerning which there is indeed very little material. She shows how in the 1540s Bembo's proposal for a linguistic and rhetorical classicism met with widespread opposition among scholars, who preferred to adopt a freer approach to language. This was due in particular to a shift in the intellectual framework: the rebirth of Aristotelianism, with its new poetics focusing on theorizing the autonomy of poetry and disseminating vernacular languages, threatened the establishment of a vernacular classicism. In Andreoni's view, Varchi in his academic lectures on Petrarch and Dante carries forward Bembo's project to integrate rhetorical and poetical aspects with a strong philosophical component, emphasizing the importance of poetry in the formation of the citizens and the wide access to culture.

Andreoni begins her investigation with Varchi's literary and philosophical activity at the Accademia degli Infiammati. Varchi's stay in Padua was brief, but with its strong emphasis on Aristotelianism, decisive in the formation of his general philosophical ideas and attitudes. During this period Varchi taught Aristotle's *Ethics*, but he was also engaged in the translation into vernacular of other Aristotelian works, such as those on logic and psychology. Besides this important philosophical experience, Andreoni recognizes a parallel interest in the teaching and translation of the Latin poetry of Ovid and Horace. Varchi's return to Florence marks the beginning of a new phase in his life, during which his efforts were devoted primarily to the study of Dante and to a general redefinition of the system of literary genres. In Florence, Varchi became acquainted with Plato's philosophy, and the result is a new eclectic conception of poetry, which is evident in the first lectures

on Petrarch and in the lecture on Dante's *Paradise* 22, which Andreoni dates to 1543.

Also from this period is the lecture on the sonnet *Orso, e' non furon mai fiumi né stagni*, and the lecture on Dante's *Purgatory* 25. In particular this last lecture reveals strong influences from the psychological conceptions of Varchi's mentor, Ludovico Boccadiferro. Psychological and physiological issues are the core of the *Lecture on the Generation of the Human Body*, where Andreoni recognizes the influence of Andreas Vesalius, which testifies to Varchi's wide interests in natural philosophy. The election to *console* of the Accademia fiorentina in 1545 was the beginning of a tumultuous period characterized by personal problems with his many opponents, such as Carlo Lenzoni, Giovambattista Strozzi, and Bernardo Segni. Andreoni reconstructs these political and literary vicissitudes within the Accademia, and Varchi's teaching, for ten lectures at least, of Dante's *Paradise* 1. During this period Varchi tried to reconsider Dante within the framework of Bembo's project, which favored Petrarch and Boccaccio, with the aim of eliminating the centrifugal forces generated by the vernacular language and circumscribing it within fixed rules. As Andreoni acutely observes, Varchi's investigation on Dante must be considered not within the Florentine context, but rather in relation to Paduan philosophers and literary critics who made the distinction between a literary, poetic language and a philosophical, scientific language. Indeed, the lectures on Dante are primarily philosophical treatises, but Andreoni also shows Varchi's careful philological exegesis. Varchi, on the other hand, approaches Petrarch through the filter of Platonism, as the *Lectures on Canzoni degli occhi* show. Andreoni very convincingly shows in Varchi traces of Ficino, Leo the Hebrew, and Francesco da Diaccetto. After 1547 Andreoni shows Varchi's progressive marginalization from the Accademia. This period is characterized by the lectures on sculptures and painting, and on grammar (1550–51), but Varchi devoted most of his time to lecturing on Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, focusing mainly on the topic of love.

By means of a careful reconstruction of the chronology, textual manipulations, and misunderstandings of Varchi's lectures, this book offers a complete account of a very multifaceted figure within the complex dynamics of the Accademia fiorentina, restoring him to his central position within the literary and philosophical discussion of the mid-sixteenth century. Last but not least, the book comes with over a hundred pages of appendix in which Andreoni transcribes unedited works and manuscripts, such as the *First Lectures on Aristotle's Ethics*, the *Lectures on Bembo's sonnet* *Se la più dura quercia che l'Alpe haggia*, the *Lectures on poetics*, the *Second Lectures on Twenty Questions on Love*, the *Dedicatory to Lucio Oradini*, and various philosophical writings containing psychological and logical treatises.

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