

Review

Reviewed Work(s): 'Aristotele fatto volgare': tradizione aristotelica e cultura volgare nel Rinascimento by David A. Lines and Eugenio Refini

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biographies ever explicitly identifies one group of scholars as *humanistae* sharing a concern for the *studia humanitatis*, it is difficult to discern among the numerous illustrious men—doctors, lawyers, Byzantine scholars, orators, poets, historians, and indeed philosophers—who qualified as ‘humanist’. And yet Baker appears to conflate without discussion his ‘humanists’ with the *poetae* and the *oratores* celebrated by the Renaissance biographers, thus forcing perhaps the interpretation of certain terms and concepts into a preconceived understanding of what humanism is.

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MAUDE VANHAELLEN

*'Aristotele fatto volgare': tradizione aristotelica e cultura volgare nel Rinascimento.*

Ed. by DAVID A. LINES and EUGENIO REFINI. (Biblioteca dei Volgarizzamenti: Studi, 2) Pisa: ETS. 2014. 358 pp. €35. ISBN 978-88-467-4138-7.

It was especially thanks to the seminal studies by Bruno Nardi and Charles B. Schmitt in the last century that we became accustomed to regarding Aristotelianism as alive and kicking during the Renaissance and to thinking that the universities at the time were not after all those bastions of conservative scholastic thinking, intent on recycling and ruminating obsolete loci of reconstituted philosophy written in rebarbative Latin. Now we are becoming increasingly aware that Aristotelianism was so alive and well during that time that it prompted a whole new spate of vernacular literature made up of translations, paraphrases, and popularizations. *'Aristotele fatto volgare'*, a book on the early modern vernacularization of Peripatetic philosophy, reflects this recent awareness in all its complexity. As is well illustrated by the essays collected in the volume, to translate the Aristotelian encyclopedia of sciences (especially logic, natural philosophy, and those sections of the corpus dealing with moral education, household management, and political administration) from the Latin of the schools into Italian, French, and Spanish was not simply a matter of turning the same old ideas from one language into another in a more or less literal and straightforward way: fresh syntactical solutions were expected, a different expository order had to be devised in teaching the Aristotelian canon, a specialized lexicon needed to be created and, finally, a new readership had to be addressed, different from the one inhabiting the university classrooms. The result was the emergence of a new way to expand philosophical communication, ranging from courts to academies and engaging a growing readership of upper bourgeoisie, educated women, public office holders and business people. As explained by Eugenio Refini, one of the two editors of the volume, at a time when the boundaries between translation and interpretation (both activities significantly denoted by the Latin word *interpretatio*) were porous, often deliberately and programmatically so, the process of translation was seen—in a broader and yet technical sense—as an activity of cultural mediation involving change of formats, social adaptations, and rhetorical accommodations. The aftermath of this novel attitude was a host of annotated editions, popularizing commentaries, textbooks, compendia, and rewritings, all accompanied by various kinds of paratextual frames.

The book collects the proceedings of an international conference held at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, organized in September 2012 as part of the activities sponsored by a three-year project (2010–13) funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council on ‘Vernacular Aristotelianism in Renaissance Italy, c. 1400–c. 1650’, and directed by David Lines, who is also one of the editors of the volume. There are two trite and persistent commonplaces that a volume of this nature will certainly (and thankfully) help to dispatch: that writing in the vernacular was part of a movement against cultural elitism and—ideologically complementary to this assumption—that writing in Latin was to entrench oneself in the ossified world of scholastic ivory towers. These cartoons—surprisingly persistent, but comfortably in line with the demands of a scholarship which is constantly told to be ground-breaking, impactful, and engaging in public dissemination of knowledge—have led to all sorts of lingering equivocations, misunderstandings, and delicate acts of accidental patronizing. On the contrary, as is rightly argued by Violaine Giacomotto-Charra in her contribution to the volume, to vernacularize philosophy did not necessarily mean to simplify it (p. 233). Scipion Dupleix’s *Corps de philosophie* (1623), for instance, was scholastic philosophy for an audience that could not read Latin but was all the same capable of engaging with the subtleties of Aristotelian philosophy. Refini provides a timely reminder that sometimes translations were bold modernist experiments in cultural re-enactment, and so it could happen that ‘ancient’ texts became ‘contemporary’ when translated into Italian (p. 202), a remark that also applies to other European languages of the time. Being active in a culture that was still largely bilingual, writers were fully aware that their vernacular languages had the syntactical and semantic potential to allow complex thinking and original vision. As Lines shows in his contribution on Francesco Piccolomini’s *Instituzione del principe* (1602) and *Compendio della scienza civile* (1603), one should address bilingual authors of the time in ways that bring to light the complementarity of their different linguistic endeavours.

The volume stands out for its richness and diversity. The first chapter contains a fine analysis by Claudio Ciociola of Concetto Marchesi’s early involvement with the study of medieval Aristotelianism and its role in the history of neo-Latin thought. In her contribution, Sonia Gentili illustrates how the vernacular *Etica* attributed to Taddeo Alderotti can be read as a translation of materials of different origin, including the *Nicomachean Ethics* in Robert Grosseteste’s translation, a few excerpts from the related commentaries by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, and the *Summa Alexandrinorum*, an epitome of the *Nicomachean Ethics* originally in Arabic which was later turned into Latin by Hermannus Alemannus (d. 1272). Annalisa Andreoni’s study of Benedetto Varchi demonstrates that the history of Renaissance Petrarchism was intertwined with the development of vernacular Aristotelianism and the blossoming of academies in many parts of Italy. Simone Bionda concentrates on the importance of Bernardo Segni’s translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1549) into Tuscan, while Alessio Cotugno examines vernacular translations of Aristotle’s treatises on logic during the 1540s, especially those by Antonio Tridapale dal Borgo, Nicolò Massa, and Alessandro Piccolomini. The chapter by Ullrich Langer dwells on

Aristotle's discussion of *aequitas* to demonstrate that its jurisprudential, rhetorical, and ethical meanings were being appropriated in Renaissance France within the context of growing tensions between royal sovereignty and the *parlements* (the supreme courts in France). The concluding essays by Juan Miguel Valero Moreno and Paula Olmos focus on early modern Spain and, by highlighting a few emblematic case studies (among others, Alonso de Cartagena, Alfonso Fernández de Madrigal, Pedro de Osma, and Pedro Simón Abril), demonstrate that several translations of Aristotle into Castilian during the sixteenth century were designed to meet the demands coming from a culture that was dominated by civil servants, professional layers, and landowning nobility.

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GUIDO GIGLIONI

*Ruins Past: Modernity in Italy, 1744–1836*. By SABRINA FERRI. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation. 2015. xii+258 pp. £60. ISBN 978-0-7294-1171-4.

A central theme in the eighteenth-century imaginary, thanks to the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum and to the popularity of veritable best-sellers of the age such as Volney's *Les Ruines*, ruins are an all-pervasive presence in Grand Tour iconography, and especially a clichéd element in the representation of Italian landscapes. As Joseph Luzzi points out (*Romantic Europe and the Ghost of Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 53–76), the Grand Tour imaginary tends to the depiction of an image of 'Italy without Italians', connecting Northern European travellers with the vestiges of Italy's past glory while, in turn, eliding contemporary Italy and its contradictions: the aesthetics of ruins, from this angle, are fully functional to the construction of a 'Meridionist' perspective that seeks in the heritage of Rome the roots of its own self-legitimization, while progressively marginalizing Italian states—and, more broadly, Southern Europe—within the political scenario.

Whereas the role of ruins in the Grand Tour imaginary has been extensively explored, less effort has been made to analyse the extensive presence of ruins in Italian culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that is to say in the moment witnessing the slow (and often troubled) entrance of Italy into European modernity. Stretched between the passive assimilation of foreign political and cultural models—e.g. the French one after the Revolution—and the elaboration of autonomous patterns in the construction of national identity, as well as between the Classicist worship of the past and the 'Romantic' thirst for newness, Italy develops an ambivalent and problematic relationship with its own ruins, and consequently with its past. A source of 'picturesque' to be sold to foreign tourists and the living testimonies of Italy's unbroken connection with its millennial history, ruins epitomize in the extreme the apparent paradox on which Italian culture is grounded: retracing in the past the roots for articulating the cultural, and even political, future of the nation.

Sabrina Ferri's book explores the multifaceted presence of ruins in Italian culture from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, precisely focusing on