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Dipartimento di Storia e Culture del testo e del documento

*Cinquecento*  
Testi e Studi di letteratura italiana

Studi - 12

IL RINASCIMENTO ITALIANO  
DI FRONTE ALLA RIFORMA:  
LETTERATURA E ARTE

*SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN  
ART AND LITERATURE  
AND THE REFORMATION*

*Atti del Colloquio internazionale  
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A cura di  
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## PREMESSA

In attempting to understand the religious climate of Italy in the sixteenth century and its impact on writers and artists, the topic of the conference at which the papers printed here were delivered, terms such as Reformation and Counter-Reformation are often more misleading than helpful. The actual outcome of the crisis facing the church after 1500, the emergence of separate Protestant denominations in Northern Europe and the transformation of the Catholicism that followed the Council of Trent, could not have been predicted at the time, so the labels which are so convenient today for categorising the behaviour of individuals only acquire their validity *ex post facto*. Thus, to take a particularly striking example mentioned by several of the contributors, to read the Bible in the vernacular, which was to become such a distinctive feature of Protestantism, was in the 1530s the mark of a good Christian both North and South of the Alps. It was only after the Council of Trent that the practice was actively discouraged in Italy. In that new atmosphere individuals were liable to be condemned for opinions expressed quite openly decades earlier, in a way that has obvious parallels in the history of the twentieth century.

The reasons why Italians, in the 1530s and 1540s, might have expressed one or another religious view later regarded as dubious or heterodox, could have included, in some instances, sympathy for the ideas of the leading reformers of Northern Europe, but it could equally well have reflected a sincere effort to conform to the teachings of the Catholic church as expressed by some of its leading figures, or it could have been merely an expression of conventional piety. Rather than attempting to categorise individuals by their convictions, it is often more revealing, as Antonio Corsaro points out in his paper, to examine how they dealt with religious ideas in their works. For one of the striking features of the period was the extent to which religion became an acceptable and even prominent theme of lay writing in the vernacular, often intended for a

broad although usually ill-defined public. Corsaro also reminds us that one of the common themes of the early sixteenth century, a reaction against the apparently pagan content of much of the literature inspired by humanism, was itself promoted by humanists apparently untouched by reformation ideas or even anticipating them. Add to this the fact that the explosion of vernacular publishing and the new career structures which this provided for writers meant the old conventions about what might or might not be an appropriate topic for literary treatment were no longer valid, while new ones had yet to be established.

No one better exemplifies the uncertainties and ambiguities of the period than Pietro Aretino. It is therefore entirely appropriate that Aretino is the leading protagonist of the present volume. He was, of course, one of the most prolific lay authors of religious texts of his time. In 1559, three years after his death, his entire literary output was placed on the Index, but he seems to have considered himself, and to have been considered by contemporaries, as doctrinally entirely orthodox. Indeed, he even persuaded himself that he stood a good chance of being made a cardinal. Given the lurid and largely unjustified reputation that he would later enjoy as a pornographer and blackmailer, this might seem no more than a grotesque miscalculation on his part. Yet he was a highly sophisticated and generally acute observer of the political realities of his time, so it would probably be wrong to suppose that his ambition was entirely unreasonable; and since he depended for the greater part of his income on the favour of the European ruling elite, he would hardly have courted the risk of appearing in any way unconventional in his religious views. In his devotional writings, as Paolo Procaccioli demonstrates, the political dimension is never absent.

Among Aretino's circle of acquaintances and collaborators, as Christopher Cairns stresses in his contribution, were a number of figures who would later find themselves in trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities, such as Antonio Brucioli. How much one should read into this is unclear, given that the same could be said of almost anyone living in Venice at that period. In any case, to attempt to derive Aretino's own attitudes from his publications is fraught with problems. To take merely the case of his published letters, it is obvious that the arrangement, content and selection was partly determined by the fact that they were to appear in print; but how much Aretino himself was involved in the editorial process, and how much he cared about it, remains an open question.

It is still the case that we know Aretino's world primarily through his own, necessarily partial, account of it. In this respect the suggestions of Cairns and, in a different way, of Hendrix, that we need to explore the possible influences on him, open important perspectives. Aretino's was one possible reaction to the uncertain religious and political climate; and the later condemnation of his entire output was probably due less to the suspicion of heterodox ideas than to his overt anti-clericalism. The contrast with someone of apparently much stronger and less conventional religious convictions, Celio Secondo Curione, whose relationship with Olimpia Morata is examined here by Angelo Romano, could hardly be stronger. Different again is Lodovico Domenichi, the subject of a study by Enrico Garavelli, who shows how his later career was blighted by the suspicion of heresy.

Other papers in the present volume explore different aspects of the literary world of sixteenth-century Italy, and especially of the expression of controversial ideas in some way relating to the changing religious landscape. Thus Luca D'Ascia and Stefano Simoncini, in their discussion of the possible influence of Erasmus on the *Simia* of Andrea Guarna, and Letizia Panizza, in her account of the use of some Lucianic motifs by a variety of writers, bring us back to the continued influence of approaches and ideas characteristic of humanism, while Fabio Massimo Bertolo considers the career of John Wolfe, whose publications included works by Aretino and Machiavelli.

The last three papers are concerned with the visual arts, where the possible impact of new religious ideas are necessarily much more difficult to detect, at least in a Catholic context, since painters and sculptors typically worked for patrons who exercised some control over the content of what they produced. Just how much control is notoriously often hard to determine, a fact underlined by the famous account of Paolo Veronese's interrogation by the Inquisition in 1573, a document whose interpretation remains to this day elusive and ambiguous. Also unclear are the implications of the presence in a work of Tintoretto of a representation of a vernacular bible; but the fact that he painted such a feature, as Michael Douglas-Scott points out, can hardly be without significance. With Jacopo Sansovino's sacristy doors in San Marco, whose imagery is discussed by Chrysa Damianaki, the inclusion of portraits, as well as the long period of gestation and execution of the work itself, from the 1540s to

the post-Tridentine epoch of the 1570s, underlines the need to understand the exact context in which it was produced. In the final paper in the collection, a study of the representation of poverty in both Protestant and Catholic art, Tom Nichols shows how the treatment of the subject of the deserving poor was surprisingly uniform across the confessional divide. As with so many of the other papers, the reader is reminded that although Christendom was split in the course of the sixteenth century, the religious writing and imagery of the period does not necessarily reflect the doctrinal divisions, or at least not in a direct or easily detectable way.

I and my colleagues at the Warburg Institute are happy to have hosted this stimulating conference, held on 30 and 31 January 2004, and organised by Angelo Romano and Chrysa Damianaki. I am grateful for the contribution of members of staff of the Institute, especially Charles Burnett and Elizabeth Witchell, and for the financial support of the Dipartimento di Scienze Sociali e della Comunicazione, Università di Lecce, of the Dipartimento di Storia e Culture del Testo del Documento, Università della Tuscia, Viterbo, and of the Centre for Italian Studies, University College London.

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## NOTA DEI CURATORI

Chi vorrà intendere a pieno il senso del Colloquio londinese del 2004, e con esso della maggior parte degli interventi lì prodotti e qui raccolti, dovrà tenere presente che l'uno e gli altri rappresentano una fase di un progetto più generale di (contributo alla) lettura del Cinquecento italiano. Una stagione, lo sappiamo tutti, ricca, ma, e sappiamo bene anche questo, straordinariamente complessa. Che talora però, su alcune tematiche – e per paradossale che possa sembrare – appare ancora poco indagata e addirittura sfuggente; e che per decenni che sarebbero risultati decisivi per i destini culturali dell'intera Europa (sono gli anni di Machiavelli e Guicciardini, di Ariosto, di Bembo e Castiglione) ha ascoltato e coltivato, dapprima senza o con poche preclusioni, poi con rigidità crescente, fino all'intolleranza, le non poche voci nate al suo interno. Nei dibattiti civili e di religione, ma anche nella letteratura e nell'arte, e naturalmente nelle rispettive poetiche.

I promotori del Colloquio e parte degli intervenuti si riconoscono nel progetto di studio di un "Cinquecento plurale". Tale, plurale cioè, nella molteplicità dei percorsi disciplinari (letteratura, arte, religione, discipline del libro e della stampa...) e delle metodologie messe in campo. Essi si interrogano su quella presenza di voci e di anime che nella prima metà del secolo sfociò in una contraddizione aperta, che in qualche modo sembrerebbe se non proprio programmatica, almeno accettata, e che sempre è risorsa e stimolo. Sugli esiti tematici e formali che ne seguirono, in non pochi casi problematici e persino provocatori. Sulle modalità di svolgimento del dibattito culturale e civile che ne scaturì, e che negli anni videro dapprima la restrizione progressiva e inesorabile del campo d'azione dei linguaggi della parola e dell'immagine, poi una loro nuova finalizzazione funzionale alle idealità della cultura posttridentina. A essi, nella circostanza londinese, si sono associati cultori di studi letterari e storico-artistici che non hanno rifiutato il confronto su e con quelle problematiche.

Una breve avvertenza tecnica, per quanto ovvia. La duplicità delle lingue e delle discipline comporterebbe anche una pluralità di convenzioni bibliografiche e di criteri di lemmatizzazione dell'indice dei nomi. D'autorità – à *dire*, per evitare duplicazioni e ambiguità –, si è imposto il criterio (italiano e storico-letterario) in uso nella collana. Pertanto, anche nei contributi inglesi, i rinvii bibliografici agli autori regestati sono stati volti in italiano (per cui il rinvio sarà a «Erasmus», «Luciano», «Orazio», e non a «Erasmus», «Lucian», «Horace»). Lo stesso vale per l'Indice dei nomi, dove sotto la forma italiana confluiscono anche le occorrenze inglesi.

Delle proposte critiche avanzate, delle acquisizioni e della loro portata non sta a noi parlare. Si invece, e con gratitudine, del coinvolgimento delle persone e delle istituzioni che hanno promosso e reso possibile il Colloquio: le università di Lecce e della Tuscia e il Warburg Institute. Pari gratitudine esprimiamo al Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche olandese (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek NWO) che, unitamente all'Università della Tuscia, ha contribuito alla stampa degli atti. Al Warburg Institute, in particolare, dobbiamo il ricordo di un'ospitalità calda e inappuntabile; e lo facciamo con un piacere che gli orrori della stagione più vicina hanno sì velato, ma anche rafforzato nelle ragioni profonde della prossimità umana e ideale.

Agosto 2005

c.d., p.p., a.r.