

Michele Stanco, *Rinascimento inglese. Lessico della cultura e tecnologie della comunicazione*, Napoli: Liguori Editore, 2013, pp. 168, € 14,99. [ISBN: 978-88-207-6394-7]

Michele Stanco's book, *Rinascimento inglese*, provides valuable considerations on Renaissance culture in the form of a series of detailed units each dedicated to specific issues. The units are divided into two sections, the first concerned with careful reflection on recurring keywords strewn in numerous significant Renaissance texts and the second analysing language in its more dynamic function of communicating.

In approaching the Renaissance as a period of rediscovery of the ancient past, a study of single terms is conducted through an investigation of their linguistic and cultural heritage. The instances taken into account include examples of vocabulary pertaining to the self – such as “rule”, “fashion” – effectively demonstrating how these words are charged with political overtones thus establishing an overlap between the private and the public sphere. Terms such as “mould” or “frame” indicate the influence of external factors in the definition of the self and “use” related to the body embraces natural law and moral behaviour. The words are examined within diverse texts of the time – numerous examples unsurprisingly occurring in Shakespeare's works – and Stanco's ability to move seamlessly from ancient origins to Renaissance use renders the concepts easily graspable and reveals the full ambit of their possible interpretation.

The second chapter of the first section shifts to the theories of poetry and its critical reception, still using individual terms as starting points. Particularly significant is the opposition between Sidney's concept of poetry as “idea” and Puttenham's definition of it as “utterance”. The author shows the derivation of this dichotomy from the well known contrast between Platonic idealism and Aristotelian theory and the consequent theorization around poetry which focuses on attention to the mind of the poet on one side and language of the poem on the other. The idealistic neoplatonic notion and the more linguistic oriented Aristotelian inspiration is seen to inform Renaissance reflections on the concepts of beauty and art. Attention to terms such as “mirror”, “eyes” and “heart” reveal poetic and theatrical intent: we see for instance the “play within the play” as a mirror of reality and the use of these words in a most interesting survey of sonnets by Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare.

With the two final chapters in the second section we come to what we might term as “words in action”. The first deals with the complex – and as yet not definitively resolved – question of Shakespeare's role in the publishing of his texts; Stanco meticulously follows through the probable various stages of composition and presents critical theories according to which it is feasible that some plays existed in two forms, one for acting and one for reading, coming to the conclusion that we must settle for a theory of hybrid reception. The conclusive

chapter deals instead with Elizabeth I as translator, opportunely beginning with an introduction to the status and theory of translation in the Renaissance highlighting the concepts of “imitation” and the use of classics as archetypes. Elizabeth is seen to have mastered many languages – ancient and modern – and interestingly her own translations are to be interpreted as “appropriations” in that she actually intervened, at times heavily, on the text in order to make it suit her ethical positions. These interventions help to shed light on the queen’s own prerogatives and characteristics, both political and literary, so her translations must be interpreted on the same scale as her literary production.

Stanco has succeeded in giving us a “picture” of English Renaissance culture from the very firm basis of the comprehensive study of individual terms; by presenting specific instances and enlarging on their more general reverberations, the book encompasses many of the most significant concepts more frequently encountered when approaching Renaissance studies.

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