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1997

Review of *The Veteran (Parlamento de Ruzante) and Weasel (Bilora): Two One-Act Renaissance Plays*, by Angelo Beolco (Ruzante), edited and translated by Ronnie Ferguson

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Citation

Dersofi, Nancy. Review of *The Veteran (Parlamento de Ruzante) and Weasel (Bilora): Two One-Act Renaissance Plays*, by Angelo Beolco (Ruzante), edited and translated by Ronnie Ferguson. *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1997): 1216-1217.

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and glossary of archaic terms in the text (227-304). Here we find in addition to *bellezza* such variants as *beltate*, *bieltade*, *bieltate*, and *bieltà*. But why did Dante inflect the Siculo-Tuscan surface of his text with them? And how might translators respond with comparable English variants? The sonnet "Vede perfettamente onne salute," for example, presents such archaisms as *onne* for *ogni*, *merzede* for *mercede*, and *face* for *fa*. Cervigni and Vasta render the relevant lines as "One sees perfectly every salvation," "for beauteous grace, to render thanks to God," and "rather it makes them go with her clothed/ in gentleness, love, and devotion" (26:10, 113). Should they have sought the strangeness of such admittedly banal forms as "ev'ry" and "maketh"?

The issue of substitution looms large in the *Vita Nuova* because, as its very title suggests, substitution and novelty figure largely in both the poetry and the prose. The text's dominant question concerns the uniqueness of Beatrice. If after her death she can be replaced by another *donna*, as nearly happens with the "donna da una finestra" (35:2, 130), then Dante's experience of her seems devalued. His psychological achievement is to invest Beatrice's corporeal existence with transcendent significance, thereby gaining in dramatic, moral, and historical intensity. As one sort of language replaces another, verse replaces prose, archaisms yield to poetic diction, and the sense of seeing gives way to a sense of hearing. Put another way, the text asks us to distinguish the substance of things understood from the accidents of change. Cervigni and Vasta state the problem exactly, and we can be sure they will explore it in the notes they

are preparing. Until then we can be grateful for this richly detailed edition and translation.

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Angelo Beolco (Ruzante). *The Veteran (Parlamento de Ruzante) and Weasel (Bilora): Two One-Act Renaissance Plays*. Ed. and trans. Ronnie Ferguson. (Studies in Italian Culture: Literature in History, 17.) New York: Peter Lang, 1995. 140 pp. \$46.95.

Introducing his translation of Ruzante's *Parlamento (The Veteran)* and *Bilora (Weasel)*, two plays set and performed in Venice around 1530, Ronnie Ferguson writes that "a consensus is evolving which ranks Ruzante, Goldoni and (perhaps) Pirandello as the major protagonists in the history of the stage in Italy" (49). Ferguson's presentation of these plays, translated accurately and effectively and accompanied by a comprehensive introduction, notes, and bibliography, will hasten agreement on the value of Ruzante's work. Renaissance scholars and theater specialists will welcome this addition to a growing library of English translations including *La Moschetta*, translated with an introduction and notes by Antonio Franceschetti and Kenneth R. Bartlett (Ottawa, 1993) and my translation of *L'Anconitana/The Woman from Ancona* (Berkeley, 1994).

Ferguson's introduction begins with a discussion of how *The Veteran* and *Weasel* differ structurally and thematically from typical sixteenth-century comedies in five acts, based on the plays of Plautus and Terence. Ru-

zante's protagonists derive instead from farces and monologues composed in dialect for performance in Venice and surrounding regions by semi-professional buffoons. The plays also echo a body of satirical verse literature in rustic Paduan associated with the city's university life; but most striking is the taste of reality that modern readers, Ferguson among them, find in the author's representation of the farm laborers he portrays and whose role he played. His characters' principal language, *pavano*, caricatures their country voices and furthers the realism of their portrayal.

Driven by war and famine into the hostile refuge of Venice, where their wives had fled before them, the protagonists of *The Veteran* and of *Weasel* confront broken domestic lives; in both cases an encounter with a wife — lost to a Bravo in *The Veteran*, to a wealthy, elderly Venetian in *Weasel* — unmasks desperation and provokes violence. Reviewing the events and circumstances that had cast farmers from the *veneto* into a grim struggle for survival, Ferguson argues that “what emerges is a morality of the survival of the fittest” (31), an interpretation of Ruzante's theme of *snaturalità* (naturalness) that is key to his approach and a challenge to the critical discourse Ruzante's theater has generated in the last decade.

A section on Beolco and his patron, Alvise Cornaro, brings readers up to date on archival and other sources pertaining to a life story of the actor/author “famosissimo” in his lifetime, then forgotten. Ferguson addresses the centuries-long neglect of

Ruzante's work in a chapter on “Critical Reception and Production History,” testing Ruzante's polemic against normal expectations and assumptions, and noting that the playwright's most towering achievement, his use of dialect, led to his disappearance.

Ferguson recognizes that the problems of transposing a literary work, especially of an earlier period — “mismatches of register, style, cultural associations, audience-reader assumptions and reactions” — are especially acute for the translator of Angelo Beolco (63). His solutions give Ruzante a salty, countrified voice, neither inappropriately obscene nor distractingly archaic. Ferguson's Ruzante sounds natural even to an American ear, notwithstanding the use of such British terms as “sod it” and “buggar.” When Ruzante, returning from war, is asked if he had taken money from prisoners, he replies: “Are you kidding kinsman? I wasn't out to hurt folk, you know. What should I take them prisoner for? What have they ever done to me?” (73) Ruzante's wife Gnuia matches his tongue for plainness: “Let go of me . . . you pathetic, scruffy, lousy wimp” (83). Ferguson renders *Weasel* with similar energy, giving due impact to the only murder in Italian Renaissance comedy. Thanks to this elegant volume, English readers may now enjoy a sufficient number of Ruzante's plays to discover their variety, compare their merits, and weigh their contribution to Renaissance theater.

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