

Aldo Castellani, ed. *Nuovi canti carnascialeschi di Firenze. Le “canzone” e mascherate di Alfonso de’ Pazzi. Firenze: Olschki Editore, 2006. Pp. 295.*

Alfonso de’ Pazzi (1509-55) was one of the members of the Accademia Fiorentina and the literary scene of sixteenth-century Florence who has remained virtually neglected during the twentieth century. When scholars did refer to him, it was mainly because of his fame as a prolific writer of poems mocking Benedetto Varchi, the renowned lecturer of the Accademia Fiorentina and a prominent figure among men of letters and science. So stinging were these attacks that Varchi’s biographer Umberto Pirotti even calls Pazzi a “mignatta” (*Benedetto Varchi e la cultura del suo tempo*, Firenze: 1971, 29). This rather unflattering characterization has been typical of the poet’s reputation for several decades. Only recently has scholarly interest in Alfonso de’ Pazzi increased, and he has become an object of study in his own right. This newly found appreciation will undoubtedly be encouraged by Giorgio Masi’s recent find of new autographs in the Archivio di Stato of Florence. Aldo Castellani’s edition of Pazzi’s carnival songs contributes to the poet’s reputation as well. His collection, the first modern edition of Pazzi’s work, establishes Pazzi’s pre-eminence in the Florentine cultural scene of the 1540s and 1550s.

In this book, Castellani presents approximately forty carnival songs by Pazzi, each of them annotated and provided with introductory commentary. The vital body of this collection (about thirty songs) has been drawn from an autograph codex, the Codice Banco Rari 71 of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, a *quaderno* dedicated in its entirety to this type of composition. Castellani’s substantial introduction places the songs in an historical context, giving an anthropological overview of the Florentine tradition of carnivalesque songs and masquerades on the one hand (“Per le strade di Firenze: il canto carnascialesco di arti e mestiere” 3-54) and a biographical study of the poet on the other (“Alfonso de’ Pazzi accademico e poeta” 55-121). Furthermore, Castellani presents a bibliography of the manuscripts containing poems by Pazzi, both in autograph and miscellanies (109-11).

Although Pazzi’s poetic production was enormous, none of his poems was published during his lifetime. Girolamo Amelonghi, known as “the hunchback of Pisa” and member of the Accademia Fiorentina, presented a manuscript collection of Pazzi’s poems to Cosimo I de’ Medici two years after the former’s death, but it was not until two centuries later that a small part of his poems was published: a series of 113 sonnets deriding Varchi was included in *Il terzo libro dell’opere bernesche di M. Francesco Berni e di altri* (London, 1723). The *canti carnascialeschi* have suffered an even worse fate. They were

not included in Antonfrancesco Grazzini's *Tutti i trionfi, carri, mascheate [sic] ò Canti Carnascialeschi andati per Firenze dal Tempo del magnifico Lorenzo vecchio de Medici* (Florence, 1559), the only contemporary anthology of Florentine carnival songs, and only fragments appeared in Rinaldo Bracci's reissue of Grazzini's edition (Cosmopoli [Lucca], 1750). In Charles Singleton's early twentieth-century collections of Florentine carnival songs, Pazzi was again left out.

According to Castellani, the BR 71 codex stands out for three reasons (X). The poems are typical examples of songs representing various professions and guilds during the Lenten processions, the so-called "canti di arti e mestiere." The rich specialistic lexicon of working tools employed in these poems gives a sense of the daily functioning of sixteenth-century Florentine workshops and demonstrates the complexity of the erotic double meaning in the festive culture. In the second place, on the initial pages of the codex, the poet has recorded instructions for the staging of the songs, which allows the modern reader to visualize the performative aspects of this kind of carnivalesque poetry. The third, most striking characteristic of the manuscript is Pazzi's "grafia particolare" (IX; 115-20). The editor explains how reconstructing the *canti* became a tempting paleographic expedition. Not only did the *quaderno* prove to be work in progress, interspersed with corrections and omissions; Pazzi's mercantile shorthand turned out to be nearly illegible since it was highly personalized and subject to variations. Pazzi's handwriting may in fact have been one of the causes for the lack of publication of his work, since the codex BR 71 is not his only inaccessible manuscript.

Another reason for the lack of publication is surely the oral nature of the circulation and composition of Pazzi's poems. Castellani recalls that Amelonghi, in the dedication to Cosimo, mentions how Pazzi's poems circulated rapidly among the members of the Florentine academy. The compositions were often conceived as improvisations and memorized by the audience (57). Surprisingly, Castellani has missed, or chosen to ignore, Robert Nosow's argument that Pazzi was a poet-singer, famous for his musical and improvisational talent ("The Debate on Song in the Accademia Fiorentina," *Early Music History* 21 (2002): 175-221). In Nosow's reading Pazzi was highly esteemed by various Florentine literary and musical institutions, since he amused the members with poems accompanied by a *lira da braccio*.

Castellani's chapters on the genre of carnival songs and on Pazzi as poet and academician prove that tackling the paleographical difficulties of Pazzi's hand can be worthwhile. As for the biography, the author adds to Giorgio Pedrotti's monograph of 1902 and Michel Plaisance's notes from the 1970s by presenting new archival research and information derived from interpreting the poetry. He thus provides us with a vivid and learned sketch of the Florentine cultural scene, positioning Pazzi in contemporary academic debates and in relation to such well known colleagues as Grazzini, Varchi, and Giambattista Gelli. Moreover, he gives an interpretation of Pazzi's poetics, in particular with respect to his ideas on the aims of the burlesque. In this context, Castellani's neglect of Nosow's musical interpretation of Pazzi's poetry is somewhat of a shortcoming. The functioning of his works is defined by its improvisational and performative nature to such an extent that a strictly literary approach does not suffice. For the rest, we can only hope that in the future more scholars will undertake an editorial project like this one of Castellani in order to disclose the work of this fascinating poet.

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