

Raymond Waddington. Titian's Aretino: A Contextual Study of All the Portraits

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RECENSIONI / BOOK REVIEWS / REVUES DES LIVRES

Raymond Waddington. *Titian's Aretino: A Contextual Study of All the Portraits*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2018. Pp. 152 + 32 color plates. ISBN 9788822265715.

Raymond Waddington, Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Davis, has had a dramatic impact on scholarly analysis of Pietro Aretino over the years. In a previous monograph, *Aretino's Satyr: Sexuality, Satire and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art* (University of Toronto Press, 2004), which was awarded the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Italian Studies, Waddington demonstrated how Aretino used portraiture and medallions to bolster his public image among the powerful. While literary critics tend to view authors solely in terms of their writings, Waddington illustrated how Aretino employed the visual arts to move among political figures and wealthy patrons; literature, history, and art history are all different academic fields that converge in the person of “the Scourge of Princes.” Of course, given the arts and culture of the age, Waddington’s earlier work only scratched the surface. Thus, the latest study is a welcome continuation of Waddington’s work, this time exploring the long-lasting friendship between Aretino and the Venetian painter Titian Vecellio. As its no-nonsense title indicates, it is an in-depth analysis of all the portraits of Aretino painted by Titian, both extant and missing. And yet, it is far more than merely a study of several paintings.

Among Titian’s five documented portraits of Aretino, two have been lost, one was sent to Francesco Marcolini (1538), and another was sent to Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici (1545); Titian is also credited with a woodcut print and may have been responsible for a second. In addition, Pietro Aretino figures in two of Titian’s narrative paintings, *The Allocution of Alfonso d’Avalos* and *Ecce Homo*. As Waddington notes, the lives and works of Aretino and Titian were intertwined, a fact that baffled many critics of the artist, particularly in the nineteenth century. They could not grasp why a giant of the artistic world might rub shoulders with a writer whom they characterized primarily as a “pornographer.” In recent decades, literary critics have reassessed Aretino as an important author of the age, and it is increasingly clear that the lives of the two men paralleled one another to a degree. Both were responsible for large bodies of work while seeking out patrons and support from the safety of Venetian Republic.

Divided into five chapters, Waddington's study goes into great detail about all the portraits. Regarding the two lost paintings, he derives all the available information from letters and contemporary descriptions. With the others, Waddington blends art history with historical studies, examining the documentation around the creation of the portraits. Additionally, he discusses the intended uses of the portraits, often as gifts to powerful individuals, and the book provides ample background on the political figures of the age. Waddington also writes exacting descriptions of the artworks, and this is where the inclusion of the color plates is a benefit. He is able to discuss Titian's color palette and artistic techniques, as well as incidental items such as jewelry and clothes, without losing his readers. For example, in the two major portraits, those held in the Fricke Gallery and Palazzo Pitti, respectively, Aretino wears a chain that was a gift from King Francis I of France. This characteristic allows Waddington to explore the nature of presents in the Cinquecento, broadening the study to be more than just analysis of the works of art. Instead, he launches into the wider issue of how political figures exerted soft power during the very decades they were also waging the Italian Wars. Part biography and part history, Waddington weaves together episodes from Aretino's life, historical events of the early sixteenth century, and Titian's portraiture.

In conclusion, Waddington's latest study demonstrates how important figures in the sixteenth century cannot be confined to only one field of academic study. Aretino was a major author, it is true, but he also involved the artistic community as a means to curry favor with kings and princes. He used the visual arts to enhance his public reputation, and in the process, he became an actor in the political machinations of the age. Hence, Waddington again makes an important contribution to the field of Aretino criticism.

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Bryan Brazeau, ed. *The Reception of Aristotle's Poetics in the Italian Renaissance and Beyond*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020. Pp. 299. ISBN 9781350078932.

This volume, part of the "Bloomsbury Studies in the Aristotelian Tradition" series directed by Marco Sgarbi, is the latest addition to the scholarship on Aristotle's legacy in the Renaissance and on early modern poetics in general that, in this past decade, developed especially thanks to projects carried out between the University