

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Venturi, Francesco, ed. Self-Commentary in Early Modern European Literature, 1400–1700

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la résolution. En même temps, le dialogisme garantit la spontanéité de l'*heuresis*, emblématique de la recherche désintéressée qui avance à tâtonnements vers une conclusion non prédéterminée.

À la fin de l'ouvrage, motrice d'un dernier rebondissement, Pasithée oriente le Solitaire/Tyard dans une direction outre-poétique en lui demandant de l'entretenir le lendemain de la musique. D'étude close, le *SP* se transforme ainsi en une recherche ouverte, mais vers les disciplines du *quadrivium* et donc vers les « discours » scientifiques que Tyard allait composer en 1555–1558. Carron, par la qualité du travail et de l'analyse qu'il a consacrés à ce dialogue, le restitue à la place qui lui est propre. Non pas celle d'un « art poétique » marginal, mais celle d'un texte qui démarre en France un glissement intellectuel opérant déjà en Italie, à savoir l'abandon de la saisie rhétorique de la réalité en faveur d'une méthode rationnelle.

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**Venturi, Francesco, ed.**

***Self-Commentary in Early Modern European Literature, 1400–1700.***

Leiden: Brill, 2019. Pp. 432 + xiv. ISBN 978-90-04-34686-4 (hardcover) €149.

Francesco Venturi, the editor of this splendid collection of essays on authorial self-commentary, acknowledges at the outset both the controverted etymology of the word “commentary” and the complicated matter of appraising the personae of a given author as both interpreted writer and interpreting reader. The Latin terms *commentarium* (note, memorandum) and *commentatio* (reflection, consideration) are rooted in the noun *mens* (mind; a “commentary” registers the encounter of one writer’s mind with another’s) and in the deponent verbs *commentari* (consider thoroughly) and *commisisci* (think out, but also contrive, invent). Venturi brings lucidity to these competing claims in a strong introduction that charts the territory with dazzling erudition. His sense of self-commentary—and that of his contributors—embraces an array of genres in both verse and prose and of modes that include philosophical deliberation as well as parody and self-promotion. It unfolds in diverse forms, ranging from systematic glosses to discontinuous annotation and from prefatory

introductions to extended discourses. Conceptually it resembles a Rubik's Cube that overlaps in multiple dimensions with nearly infinite combinations.

Each essay that follows substantiates Venturi's claims. Martin McLaughlin opens the proceedings with Leon Battista Alberti's eccentric commentary on his own youthful Latin prose comedy *Philodoxeos*. Writing some fourteen years after the play, Alberti seeks to excuse its vulgarities by emphasizing the author's bookishness, scholarly brilliance, and evidence of hard work. Jeroen De Keyser follows with an examination of Francesco Filelfo's manuscript marginalia on his Latin translations of Xenophon, illuminating his versatility in dealing with diverse genres, modes, and styles. Ian Johnson compares Christian moralizing in auto-commentaries upon doctrinal treatises by the fifteenth-century theologian Reginald Pecock and upon Vergil's *Aeneid* by its sixteenth-century translator Gavin Douglas. Fedrica Pich offers a subtle and complex argument about the encroachment of narrativity into the domain of lyric poetry through polycentric rubrics that model the concerns of medieval *vidas* in sketching the biographies of poets and of *razos* in evoking the circumstances of their compositions. Many Cinquecento poets who emulated Petrarch deployed such rubrics to delineate the structure of their *canzonieri*. Brian Richardson likewise detects a sense of centrifugal bearings in the language and style of sixteenth-century literary prefaces. Though Bembo's Petrarchan strictures remained influential, the linguistic flexibility advocated by such writers as Castiglione, Bernardo Tasso, and Lodovico Dolce came to prevail.

The book's focus moves beyond the Italian peninsula with John O'Brian's engaging essay on Montaigne's internal glosses. Taking a cue from neuroscientific theories of "extended mind," O'Brian concentrates upon the essayist's self-identification with Julius Caesar, the military strategist and author of his own *Commentaries* whose counter-intuitive genius infiltrates Montaigne's self-reflections. Harriet Archer investigates the preface and glosses of Edmund Spenser's *Shepherdes Calender* by its fictional editor "E. K." in relation to the ironic Menippean self-commentaries of Spenser's contemporaries William Baldwin, George Gascoigne, George Whetstone, and Nicholas Breton, whose Erasmian skepticism imbues his innovative collection. Colin P. Thompson's close study of St. John of the Cross's prose commentaries on three of his lyric poems uncovers a profusion of cross-references to Scripture embedded there, enabling the Catholic poet—without adhering to Luther's insistence upon *sola Scriptura*—to interpret his own texts in a sublimely mystical sense.

Counter-Reformation theology likewise informs Russell Ganim's study of Jean de La Ceppède's annotations upon the 515 meditative sonnets of his *Théorèmes*. In this case, an emphasis upon the humanity of Jesus reinforces the poet's submission to canonical teaching. Shifting to secular humanism, Gilles Bertheau's essay on George Chapman demonstrates how the writer's appeals to educated readers counter the misinterpretations of his work by hostile critics.

Four concluding essays address late seventeenth-century texts, showing how the dynamics of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century self-commentary played out in a later period. Joseph Harris examines Pierre Corneille's prefaces to his collected plays in 1660 as attempts to address divergent responses of audiences, critics, and contemporary readers. Els Stronks applies Pierre Bourdieu's model of a "literary field" to works by young Dutch authors who aimed to establish a formative national literature in their Republic. Magdalena Ożarzka speculates upon Anna Stanisławska's prose glosses in her versified autobiography (1685) as efforts to empower it with authority. Carlo Caruso offers a study of artistry in the erudite but parodic self-commentaries by Alessandro Tassoni for his mock-heroic poem *La secchia rapita* (1630) and by Francesco Redi for his dithyrambic *Bacco in Toscana* (1685). In a thoughtful Afterword, Richard Maber iterates the great variety of forms and transformations, combinations and overlaps that characterize these commentaries. The fertile insights and extensive bibliographies that mark every contribution to the volume make it required reading for historians of Renaissance and Reformation literature.

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**Warren, Nancy Bradley.**

*Chaucer and Religious Controversies in the Medieval and Early Modern Eras.*

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019. Pp. xiii, 213. ISBN 978-0-268-10582-2 (paperback) US\$45.

In her new book, Nancy Bradley Warren shows how Chaucer, as an author and an idea, has been used to define a range of early modern religious and political oppositions: Catholic and Protestant, medieval and modern, Latinity and vernacularity, Old World and New World, feminine and masculine, heterodoxy and orthodoxy. The strongest chapters in the book uncover, through careful