

BOOK REVIEWS / RECENSIONI

Paolo Bartoloni, *Interstitial writing: Calvino, Caproni, Sereni and Svevo*, Harborough, Troubador, 2003. EUR18.

Bartoloni's main argument is that the work of these four authors "and of other modern and contemporary authors(...) is not marked by the condition and theme of negativity..."; but that it is "characterized by a positive hermeneutic where literature tends towards 'something' other than itself" (xii). The "interstitial zone" central to his argument is "predicated upon a movement that does not go anywhere outside but keeps on moving within the inherently dynamic borders of the interstices" (xiv). The scope of the discussion extends to "questioning the purpose of modern and contemporary literature" (xiv), and Bartoloni claims that the notion of interstitiality applies to "many other twentieth-century authors" (xv).

Modernist literature moves away from mimesis towards mediating the plurality of reality. In the process, the "subject/object separation" between the "the observer, the self of literature" and an outside falls away (6-7). The writing self is inside the text, the observer becomes part of what is observed. The object of literature becomes incomplete, elusive, even absent. Modern literature neither knows nor takes possession of its object, but "enters a process of making knowledge", the purpose of which is to "possess an understanding of the invisible and anonymous presence" (15). Narrative is an attempt to clarify and give shape to what is hidden and unsayable (16-17). The absent object is evoked by and remains hidden underneath the many layers of words produced by literature. It cannot be recovered through excavation. This is reflected in Calvino's *Palomar*, whose search for systematic knowledge is impeded by the inadequacy of language, frustrated by the incapacity of language to achieve transparency.

Like *Palomar*, Svevo's *Zeno* seeks answers through writing, yet in the very process of writing, definite knowledge becomes ever more elusive. Forever erring, missing the ungraspable object, writing becomes interminable. It crystallizes the world of the self and the world inhabited by the self into language, into forms, without ever arriving at definite answers and certain knowledge.

The poetry of Caproni, according to Bartoloni, offers an interstitial zone in which the self only exists as a potentiality, “journeying towards a non-verifiable arrival” (59). Inhabiting this zone, it “speaks without apparently saying anything. And yet in saying nothing, it opens up a space for an unadulterated experience of what cannot be said” (68-69). The traveller in Caproni’s poetry is a self suspended “in a anonymous time and a space”, (78), on his way to an unspecified and unknowable destination.

Sereni’s poetry is described as “a journey...which...gradually loses sight of its destination as it enters more deeply into the process of journeying” (83). The journey “ends in the indescribable zone of no movement”, in an arrival without departure...” (86).

Bartoloni’s slender volume (108 pages) does not measure up to the ambitious objectives mentioned at the beginning of this review. A number of the perspectives offered have been encountered elsewhere. Yet, on the whole, the argument is coherent and the author offer some valuable insights.

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