

1989

Poeti italo-americani edited by Ferdinando Alfonsi and The Hidden Italy edited by Hermann W. Haller

Robert Viscusi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia>

Recommended Citation

Viscusi, Robert (1989) "Poeti italo-americani edited by Ferdinando Alfonsi and The Hidden Italy edited by Hermann W. Haller," *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought*. Vol. 3 , Article 45.

Available at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia/vol3/iss1/45>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought* by an authorized editor of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu, hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu.

spective, the use of metaphors of "illumination" and "disclosure," both in Heidegger and Wittgenstein, to connote the *happening* of sense. An authentic, "transcendental" Aesthetics can be thought without referring to any "art" whatsoever; its questioning concerns comprehension and experience themselves.

Garroni's readings of Kant, Heidegger and Wittgenstein are provoking and original and different from the philosophers of "weak thought," explicitly criticized in a section of the book. His discourse is always well articulated and controlled and in its conclusions even passionate. Its difficulties are related to the nature of the questions it raises: it states that paradox and sense are the two inseparable faces of the human condition; it stresses the necessity, for an authentic comprehension, of radical movements of de-familiarization; and puts into question the certainties of knowledge in general.

Garroni has returned to the problems discussed in *Senso e paradosso* on various occasions, among which we would like to recall his long essay on "Aesthetics and Literary Criticism," published in the fourth volume on the *Letteratura Italiana* edited by Alberto Asor Rosa (Einaudi, 1987).

PIETRO PEDACE
New York University

Poeti italo-americani / Italo-American Poets
Antologia bilingue / A Bilingual Anthology
Ferdinando Alfonsi, ed.
Catanzaro: Antonio Carello Editore,
1985

The Hidden Italy: A Bilingual Edition of Italian Dialect Poetry
Hermann W. Haller, ed.
Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986

On the crowded subway,
making my way
to the prison to teach
Black and Puerto Rican inmates
how to write,
I think of the fable of the shoemaker
who struggles
to make shoes for the oppressed
while his own go
barefoot
over the stones
(Daniela Gioseffi, in Alfonsi, 217)

Cintin no'l va a li sagris, pai país dal Friul,
a sunin li ciampanis, no i viulíns pal Friul!
Co al jòt in plessa un puòr pierdút in tal Friul
ghi dà la so giacheta dongia il clípit di un
mur,
co al jòt un dai puòrs ch'a van soj pal Friul
content ghi dà il so còur sot il sèil ch'al ven
scur.
"Adio mari, adio pari, jo i vai via dal Friul,
e i vai via ta la Mèrica, l'aligria dal Friul!"
Treno, ti l'às quartàt viers il mar azúr,
ah se malincunia via dal Friul.

[Vincent doesn't attend the feasts of the
Friulan town,
the bells are ringing, and the violins are not
playing in the Friuli!
When he sees in the square a poor soul lost
in the Friuli,
he gives him his jacket, near the small warm
wall,
when he sees one of the poor souls go by
lonely through the Friuli,
he gives him happily his own heart, under
the darkening sky.
"Good-bye, Mother, good-bye Father, I am
leaving the Friuli,
I am going away to America, the happy land
of the Friuli!"
Train, you took him to the blue sea,
oh what a gloom, far away from the Friuli.]
(Pier Paolo Pasolini, in Haller, 266-67)

The novel has a liking for families. It prefers houses, it likes generations that trace their melancholy back through recollected conversations, scenes that require drapes in the backdrop, a pianoforte shawl supporting twenty photographs in silver frames, a phonograph, a wall of paintings, a secret place behind the hill. This is part of what it means to say that the novel is a bourgeois form. There is more to it than that, of course. The novel also likes readers who will pay the price of a visit to the doctor to buy a book that will only be read one time by any given person, a person who can dispose of two or three days in the space of a single week to pass with his or her feet up on the couch while following the narrative. Occasionally reaching for the finger-food, the hot chocolate. The novel also likes people who are tired of all of this, the villa, the couch, the car, and wish to make it all more interesting by engaging in sexual transgressions, by dreaming of unusual deaths.

These must be among the leading reasons that so few novels, in either Italian or English, give back what the poems cited above reflect. In the American Gioseffi, a frame of attention to the suffering of the American city, not merely the broken glass along the wall of the immigrant-made-good, not just how they got to Long Island but why, instead, they might choose not to go there. In the late Pasolini, leaving Friuli rendered in thorny Friulan, not salable at Feltrinelli as the dialect of narrative.

Professors Haller and Alfonsi, that is, in their anthologies have constructed basic reference points for the study of those branches of Italian literature that do not yet have places in the academies. Alfonsi has entered a vast jungle of unknown and perhaps unknowable bibliography, cutting away with an energetic Bowie knife, and has found over four hundred poets, pre-

senting a poem or two or three by one hundred of these. Every poem appears in two languages, those written in any Italian language (Calabrian, Sicilian) being translated into English, those in English translated into Italian (never Sicilian). The bibliography is an excellent place to begin the encyclopedic work necessary for a comprehensive feel of the literary ground in Italian America. The poems and the translations open a large arena of expression so far removed from ordinary literary conversation, in Italy *or* in America, that one feels, upon first surveying it, large and complex emotions. It is an undiscovered nation, this Italian America, full of versions of Italy not well understood in the centers of cultural production in that country. There is much work to be done in charting this new territory. One is pleased to find it there, relieved to see that so much and such complex experience has not gone without its chroniclers. One is also saddened to see how little basic effort has been expended before this on the project. Alfonsi has few predecessors, and none half so ambitious. Here are dozens of poets without biographies, bibliographies. Where will we go to study them? Which of us will do this work? On what plan? These are questions that need, that demand, answers. Alfonsi's book, by its very existence, puts these pressing questions on the agenda.

Hermann Haller enters the tradition of his subject at a point rather further along in the cycle. He is not forced to invent the very parameters of his theme. Indeed, the relationship among the various languages of Italy is the oldest and most persistently argued question in Italian literary history, and Haller introduces this anthology with a masterful overview of the long debate upon the languages of writing in Italy. Nonetheless, despite the antiquity of its theme and despite the unflinching

richness of the scholarly bibliographies that support this enterprise at every turn, Haller's is a revolutionary book, particularly in the English-speaking world. He makes it possible for us to enter the worlds of Campanian, Friulan, Piedmontese, Venetian, Milanese, Romagnol, Roman, Genovese, Abbruzzese, Apulian, Lucanian poetry, to go among the variants and shadows that exist between these, and to do so in the lines of great poets and others less than great but always interesting, never banal. Haller's translations stress accuracy, extremely important when the texts in question are written in languages few readers are likely to have studied, and they make it possible for a person with a reasonable background in standard Italian to begin to explore the pleasures of the great non-Tuscan traditions in Italian writing.

Both of these books deserve a wide readership. Haller's anthology, because of its vast range, its impeccable scholarship, its superb introductions, has already begun to have a wide impact, inspiring readings of Italian dialect poetry in this country and finding a place in the curricula of college departments of Italian. Such a shift of emphasis has also begun to occur in Italy, and it deserves particular attention in the United States, where very few persons of Italian origin derive from families that do not speak a dialect, where the historical specifics of our identities begin not in Tuscany but in Friuli, Bari, Caltanisetta—outside, off center, difficult places with difficult languages, where, nonetheless, our comprehension of who we have been must recommence. Such a new understanding ought to help us decipher, not merely the languages, but the diverse experiences Alfonsi's poets record.

ROBERT VISCUSI
Brooklyn College/CUNY

Italian Journal

A QUARTERLY DIGEST OF ITALIAN AFFAIRS

The *Italian Journal* is published four times a year by the Italian Academy Foundation, Inc. Editorial and executive offices at 278 Clinton Avenue, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522. Telephone (914) 693-5329, Telefax (914) 693-7399. Reproduction in whole or in part is encouraged giving the source but subject to copyright restrictions as and when indicated. Subscriptions: U.S., Canada, Mexico and Italy: \$24.95. Sustaining subscriptions: \$500 per year.