

Cristina Caracchini, *Cognizione e discorso poetico: a dialogo con Dante, Pessoa, Guillén, Caproni, e Ashbery*, Volume 26 of „Il Confronto”, Cadmo Editore, 2009, pp. 293

The book *Cognizione e discorso poetico: a dialogo con Dante, Pessoa, Guillén, Caproni, e Ashbery* by Dr. Cristina Caracchini offers a careful analysis, rigorously and thoroughly documenting the problem of meaning and understanding in poetry as seen as a producer of meaning. The author covers the different ways of learning poetry by offering a vision of poetry as a complex organism that incorporates both the critic and the reader, language and the environment, the interpretation and the discovery of meaning, and making all this converge towards the production of knowledge.

The author Cristina Caracchini begins her dialogue with Dante, then continues with famous poets of different nationalities of the Twentieth century: from Caproni to Pessoa, and from Guillén to Ashbery. The fundamental units of the different poems that are analyzed by the author, as she herself says, are established by a particular aspect of the question concerning the possibility of understanding and express the relationship of man with his own world. In the Cristina Caracchini's comparative analysis, two branches converge: one that develops the problem of „how to know the poem”, an approach that tries to detect what are the strategies put in place by a given poetic text and in what way it induces a reader to develop a given relational behaviour in his interaction with the text itself; another that develops the problem of „what the poetry knows” and in this case, we are presented with a range of modality according to which knowledge is thematized in various works of poetry.

The author also reveals two main configurations that come into being and give substance to the cognitive potential of the discourse: in the first the reader takes possession of the poem as an object that can be moulded, and the second is an activity of a hermeneutic consciousness that develops its own relationship with each poem. Caracchini, in addition to concentrating on the path that leads to cognition, also wonders about the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, and about how and why poetry as

a manifestation of art brings its own contribution to life by exploring the interaction of poetic work with the universe of knowledge of its reader, and by highlighting the ethical value of art operations.

The first chapter is dedicated to the *Divine Comedy* and the long path of knowledge. Knowledge in the poetry of Dante certainly plays a predominant role. The poetry of Dante captures and leads the reader to know, not only by openly teaching a doctrinal matter, but also by aiming at expanding the boundaries of what can be said, enabling one to almost touch the ineffable. The *Divine Comedy* is a work of art which serves as a base for subsequent literary works, and continues to be a source of the cultural and ethical development up to the present time.

The second chapter analyzes the work by Giorgio Caproni entitled „Poetry as Music. With Giorgio Caproni in Search for Meaning”. Dr. Cristina Caracchini chooses to follow the analysis of Dante’s poem by that of Caproni’s because it shows an important contrast. Poetry is the space in which is stated and performed the vain struggle in for penetrating “the wall of the earth”, i. e. to know the essence of life and understand the logic of worldly events. In his poetry we become aware of the inevitable failure and accumulate questions about the mission of a poet who „cries for help”, who has no certainties to be shared, and seems not to „believe” anymore in the capacity to transmit truth by the written word. Caproni’s poetry mirrors also formally this lack of Aristotelian logic by juxtaposing contradictory statements (as in the case of *Il fagiano*, part of the collection *Il franco cacciatore*) and offering to the readers metaphors that are impossible to interpret univocally (as for example „la bestia”, in *Il conte di Kevenhuller*). Caracchini proposes to renounce the quest for the specific sense of each metaphor, replacing it with the appreciation of their internal articulations and of the alternative logics that seem to regulate this poetic world.

Caracchini then opens the third chapter with an analysis of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa. The study opens up with a discussion of the canonic characteristics of enunciator and enunciation in the context of poetic genre (and particularly the attributes of singularity and sincerity), to focus then on the specific case of Pessoa. The analysis highlights the growing number of proposals for cognitive modes, which are the foundation of distinct ways of being in the world embodied by its heteronyms. Establishing an interesting parallel with Eliot’s *The Three Voices of Poetry*, Caracchini asks what kind of knowledge the reader receives from the plurality of visions, and questions the possibility for the reader to entertain a trusting relationship with such a multifaceted author.

Then comes the fourth chapter devoted to the analysis of the poetry of American poet Ashbery entitled: „The reader left adrift (with guide): John Ashbery and the uncertain meaning”. Ashbery, set aside the preoccupation to get to know the essence beyond „the wall of the earth”, accepts the confrontation with the world as object of our perceptions whose events, aspects, relationships he reproduces as „raw”, and apparently without any reorganizing intervention. Caracchini shifts the focus of her analysis entirely to the reader, a reader disoriented by the apparent lack of consequence and of meaning of many of the texts. Caracchini examines the hypothesis of a change in the interpretive perspective, renouncing to search for enlightening statements in the text. She concentrates instead on describing the modalities according to which the reading process is carried on, thus creating the meaning that is allowed but not provided by the texts. She proposes,

in so doing, a description of the approach that enables these poems to be enjoyed along with the reasons that lead to their reading, and the cognitive effect that arises from the interpretation.

The last chapter is devoted to an examination of the cognitive foundations of the poetry of the Spanish poet Jorge Guillén. The analyses closes the circle opened by Dante and focuses back to the poet and to the positive categories according to which his literary work is organized. The words are by the poet to understand human condition, to create and comprehend everyday reality, but they are also to transform it and create that which in narratology is called „small world”. Guillén’s small world is an idealized one, geometrical, luminous, shaped in the form of a garden, made for man and understandable by him. The reader recognizes that even in these poems, as in Ashbery’s, the interest in acquiring knowledge of the world through poetic means, of which the word is the primary instrument, leaves aside the question being debated in the last of things, which remains an enigma and as such is accepted, without being made problematic. Caracchini stresses the value of the historic word seeking its inclusion in a cultural context, stating in its own meaning and reacting to social stress. The poem is intended as the native language of humanity, whose word is linked to the social contest. Knowledge is rooted in a worldview and is articulated only in writing.

In *Cognizione e discorso poetico: a dialogo con Dante, Pessoa, Guillén, Caproni, e Ashbery*, the author Dr. Caracchini discusses with great skill the cognitive elements that arise from a deep reading the poetry of the five poets through a living dialogue with them. The dialogue is an opening towards one another. It is the way to understand each other and therefore ourselves, and is the straight path that leads to knowledge. The „other” is, in this case, the poetic text and the knowledge encompasses both the „object” and the subject.

Cristina Caracchini in the course of her analysis of the *Cognizione e discorso poetico: a dialogo con Dante, Pessoa, Guillén, Caproni, e Ashbery*, has skilfully succeeded in expressing with depth and genius the overall complexity of the poetic knowledge. Her analysis brings a valuable and compelling addition to the field and will surely stimulate other scholars.

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