

prattutto per comprendere la mentalità religiosa siciliana del Seicento.

GIANCARLO ANDENNA

The Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh, edited by AGNES LATHAM and JOYCE YOUNGS, Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1999. Un vol. di pp. LXIII-403.

Adventurer, learned writer, privateer and poet, Sir Walter Raleigh (1554-1618) has proved to be an appealing topic for historians and generations of *literati* ever since the seventeenth century. When one considers the popularity this Elizabethan courtier has known, it may be surprising to discover that his writings are still awaiting a reliable complete edition, the last large-scale collection being the 1829 Oxford University Press *Works*. Raleigh's letters have, until recently, often shared the fate of most of his prose: preserved in a nineteenth-century edition, the one appended to Edward Edwards's *Life of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1868), they have been not easily accessible, and have generally been looked on with some suspicion, given the incomplete and sometimes incorrect state of their text.

In the 1930s Agnes Muriel Clara Latham, established Raleigh scholar and editor of *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London 1929; rev. ed. London 1951), decided to undertake a revision and expansion of Edward's letters volume. The search for the originals lasted many years. As late as 1971 she agreed to join forces with the Canadian-based team that was, at that time, preparing a Raleigh 'Complete Works' series under the general editorship of Pierre Lefranc. This ambitious project was abandoned in the mid-1970s. Those in charge of its various sections were left free to finish and publish them individually, a diaspora from which Raleigh studies have certainly not benefited. Latham kept on working until late in years (providing, incidentally, very useful contributions to Seymour De Ricci's *Census* and Peter Beal's *Index*; see the introduction by Joyce Youngs, pp. xxi-xxiv), to finally entrust all her papers to the joint editor in the early 1990s. She died in 1996, well before proofs of this volume were ready.

Both for those who had no means of browsing through Edward's collection, and for consummated Raleigh scholars, these letters (given the inclusion of a good number of unpublished items) are certainly fascinating. At first glance, one does not find much of the writer or the poet behind the entangled man busy dealing with daily business, court politics or occasionally arranging naval expeditions (such as in letters 39-44). What these pages seem to present is the life of an Elizabethan entrepreneur and courtier, eager to please his Queen and particularly concerned to do so after he lost his privileged place in her affections (see e.g. letters 48, 51, 90). This man, who may be perceived as singularly unpoetic, turns out to be, however, an extremely versatile writer who can speak with an amazing range of voices. He can be the all-too-confident young favourite (no. 6 and 8), the forsaken lover (no. 46), and the devoted friend of yet another Elizabeth, the rather elderly Bess of Hardwick (no. 59). He can also play the tired old seaman and the learned moralist. Interestingly, Raleigh seems to have interpreted these roles as early as the 1590s, (cf. letters 103, 58 and 60), much earlier than what is traditionally considered the more 'meditative' phase of his life, in the Jacobean era.

Some vivid pictures of Raleigh's world emerge from these pages. One of the most interesting dates from the very brief period (between the Cadiz Raid and the 'Islands voyage', 1596/7) in which Raleigh, the Earl of Essex and Sir Robert Cecil appear to have been close associates. In letter 107, dated 6 July 1597, Raleigh writes to Cecil in a singularly relaxed tone: «I acqeynted my Lord Generall [Essex] with your letter to mee and your kind acceptance of your entertainment. Hee was also wonderfull merry att the consait of Richard the 2». King Richard II's dependence on his favourites was to become a very up-to-date theme a few years later, in 1601, when followers of the rebel earl of Essex had Shakespeare's play performed in London to elicit popular support and further the cause of their unfortunate rising. If Cecil had cracked a joke on 'Richard the second' it seems unlikely, however, that this referred to the ageing Queen and her minions. Sir Robert was a shrewd politician, and Raleigh, who had once



been the chief favourite, had resumed his role as Captain of the Queen's Guard just a month before.

Whatever Cecil had meant by his witty *jeux d'esprit*, this could not have been inspired by the first printed edition of Shakespeare's play, entered in the stationer's Register only on 29 August 1597. It is tempting to link this episode to a letter Cecil received from Sir Edward Hoby in 1595. Sir Edward invited him «to visit poore Channon rowe where, as late as it shal plase you, a gate for your supper shal be open: & K. Richard present him selfe to your vewe». E.K. Chambers (*The Elizabethan Stage*, London, I, 1923, 219-20) suggested that this could indicate a private performance of Shakespeare's play. If this has not always been accepted, that Hoby referred to a play seems plausible. One did not really want to entertain the principal Secretary of her Majesty just by showing him a picture or a book. There were, in fact, new books referring to Richard II about this period, but the idea of a book or a picture presenting «him selfe to your vewe», and this at dinner, would just be quite odd.

Cecil's mention in 1597 of 'Richard 2' before the printing of the first quarto points to his having had access to this story in some other way, and may therefore reinforce the hypothesis of a private performance. Certainly, if in 1601 Essex got the idea of putting *Richard II* on stage from what Cecil (or Raleigh) had said about this play four years earlier, this would have been just a peculiar trick of fortune, since both men were by then eager to have him out of the way as soon as possible (cf. letter 123).

Given the very interesting link with *Richard II*, it is unfortunate that no reference to Shakespeare is made in the index of *The Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh*. Undoubtedly, the somewhat entangled history of this volume, described above, is in itself sufficient explanation both for this omission and for the large number of misprints and slips of the pen which can be found in it. Transcriptions are, in fact, not flawless. A random check of some of the manuscripts quoted here — and, in particular, of the facsimiles included in the book — has led to the discovery of errors in letters 6, 11, 34, 46, 107, 207, 223 and 140 (where Raleigh's expression of friendship to Lord Cobham «I

can say no more butt that I am your Lordships before all that *leve*» becomes, rather clumsily «I can say no more butt that I am your lordships before all that *love*»).

Coming to matters more relevant to conscious editorial choice, it should be noticed that the absence of a glossary is regrettable. The editors have undeniably tried as far as possible to locate the manuscript originals of Raleigh's letters. When this has turned out to be impossible, what may be reasonably supposed to be later transcripts of these documents have been used (even if rarely collated when more than one copy is extant). This old-spelling edition, once the transcripts are corrected and a glossary is provided, would offer a unique selection of Raleigh's holograph texts, and could be the best guide for understanding his *usus scribendi*, something that future editors of his texts would gratefully acknowledge.

Similarly, the decision not to trace sources for Raleigh's quotations is rather disappointing. If some of them are far from obscure (in letter 60 the «Trojen Southsayer» who «cast his spear agaynst the wodden horse» but was «not beleved» is a reference to Virgil's *Aeneid* II, 50-56), many others may not be as evident. In the Jacobean phase of his life Raleigh makes reference, in almost each of his formal letters, to two or three learned authorities (cf. e.g. 166-68, 170-71; 173, 175). If listed, these sources could present an excellent picture of Sir Walter's readings, the inventory of the books he had with him in the Tower (published by Walter Oakeshott in «The Library», 5th ser., 23, 1968, 286-87) being only partially helpful in this respect. After all, if Raleigh does not emerge at all as a poet in this collection, it is also because occasional references are sometimes either ignored, such as the allusion in no. 218 to Spenser's Braggadochio (*Faerie Queene*, book II canto 3; III.viii; IV.iv, v, ix; V.iii) or minimised: the relationship with the poet George Gascoigne is not even mentioned when noting (a singular exception in this edition) an echo from his *Steele Glas* (no. 5, note 4).

Agnes Latham was surely one of the foremost protagonists of an exciting season for Raleigh studies. The publication of *The Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh* seems to have just marked the beginning of a new one.

Another publication has recently made available Raleigh's poetic texts (*The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh: A Historical Edition*, edited by Michael Rudick, Medieval and Renaissance Studies 209, Renaissance English Text Society 23, Tempe, Arizona: Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 1999). The present edition of the letters — hopefully in a corrected reprint — may therefore become part of the standard *corpus* of Raleigh writings modern scholars have long been waiting for.

CARLO M. BAJETTA

LINDA BISELLO, *Medicina della memoria. Aforistica ed esemplarità nella scrittura barocca*, Firenze, Olschki, 1998 (Biblioteca di «Lettere italiane». Studi e testi, 53). Un vol. di pp. XX-300.

Con la scorta di Andrea Battistini ed Ezio Raimondi, non riesce difficile collocare tra Cinque e Seicento la stagione zenitale della scrittura aforistica, quando *brevitas* e *stilus laconicus*, già tacciati d'oscurità dagli umanisti sulle orme di Cicerone e Quintiliano, acquistarono il pregio delle qualità essenziali, utili a indurre il pensiero alla concentrazione e all'affinamento, sul modello della vena argentea di Tacito, Seneca e Sallustio¹. Contro a ciò, tradizionalmente, militavano le ragioni di quanti facevano appello alla dottrina dell'arpinate (Cic. *Brutus* 50: «Brevitas autem laus est interdum in aliqua parte dicendi, in universa eloquentia laudem non habet», ripreso da Quint. XII x 63-65), dove pareva sancito il prestigio dell'eloquenza copiosa e fluente: toccò a Erasmo per primo, sulle soglie del secolo XVI, di tentare il riscatto del *genus atticus* («breviter et circumcise dicere»: per cui Macr. *Sat.* V I 4-7), rilevando a più riprese le risorse espressive e le peculiarità dell'*arguta brevilloquencia*. L'*encomium laconismi*, abbozzato nelle *Declamatiunculae* e negli *Adagia*, era quindi svolto da Juan Luis Vives con l'intento di ricavarne il pro-

totipo per il rinnovamento della letteratura filosofica: «Est alia oratio brevis, quae edita opera magnas sententias in pauca verba confert, et tanque infarcit ac constipat, qualia sunt quae a Graecis nominantur Apophthegmata, responsa philosophorum et prudentium vivorum et dicta illa laconica. [...] Parcendum synonymis, verbis utendum maxime propriis, sive ea naturalia sint seu translata, usurpanda pro multis pauca, quae apte vim eius declarent quod volumus»². A simili, preliminari considerazioni s'ancorava, su scala europea, il tentativo di sondare inediti registri nella prosa latina e volgare, a cui fornirono tempestivo sostegno, avanti che s'affermasse l'esempio di Giusto Lipsio, le opere di alcuni grammatici: il *De verborum electione* del professore parigino Jacques-Louis d'Estrebay (1481-1550 ca.), le *Epistolae laconicae* del teologo Gilbert Cousin (1506-1572) e le *Praeceptiones de verborum et rerum copia* del gesuita fiammingo Simon Vereepte (1522-1598)³.

La fortuna della nuova maniera, in età tardorinascimentale e barocca, costituisce l'oggetto della ricerca di Linda Bisello, la quale, già autrice di una preziosa ricognizione bibliografica, ne sonda la vasta gamma di applicazioni tematiche e stilistiche, fra acutezza, ingegnosità e concettismo, quale manifestazione non occasionale del genio dell'epoca⁴: sicché giustamente, nella premessa in testa al volume (*Una tradizione sapienziale per aforismi*, pp. VII-XIX), si propone il campionario delle virtù della scrittura aforistica, che conviene leggere tenendo sullo sfondo la mappa della cultura seicentesca tracciata da Andrea Battistini. Se da un canto, infatti, si sancisce che «il Barocco è la testimonianza di una profonda crisi antropologica che produsse [...] la messa in discussione di un sistema di saperi e di valori su cui si era retta per tanti secoli la cultura europea trovandovi la sua sicu-

² J.L. VIVES, *De ratione dicendi libri tres*, Lovanii, B. Gravius et R. Rescius, 1533, d8v-e1r.

³ H.F. FULLENWIDER, *Erasmus, Lipsius and the «stilus laconicus»*, «Res Publica Litterarum», 7 (1984), 61-72.

⁴ L. BISELLO, «Breviloquia»: rassegna di studi (1982-1997) sulla scrittura aforistica in età moderna, «Lettere italiane», 50 (1998), 97-131.

¹ A. BATTISTINI - E. RAIMONDI, *Le figure della retorica. Una storia letteraria italiana*, Torino 1990, 153-58.