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Introducción al pensamiento de Vico by Piego Piovani

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tion that male poets used to impress upon the women they courted that they were "dying" from love. This was part of the game of courtship: Before marriage the bride was supposed to be remote and to hold the power of life or death over her lover. Stampa has reversed this situation—with the added difference that what she felt was real and not an artificial or poetic attitude. (145-46)

Real and not artificial or poetic? How amazing is such a belief in the authenticity of female expression!

This opinion seems indebted to Natalia Costa-Zalessow's description of Gaspara Stampa in her *Scrittrici italiane dal XIII al XX secolo* (Ravenna: Longo, 1982), a book that the editors acknowledge as one of their main sources for the biographical information. While excising Costa-Zalessow's moderate statements about Stampa's erotic life, the editors have retained her view that

Il solito petrarchismo del Cinquecento assume un tono nuovo sotto la penna di Gaspara, in quanto ci troviamo davanti a un sentimento sentito con vera passione. Le sue variazioni sull'effetto dell'amore non sono mai eruditi concetti e pure esercitazioni letterarie. (86-87)

Since feminist literary criticism privileges the study of the figure of Woman, Other par excellence in Western culture, it exhorts us in the best of instances to refine our readings of difference and of all discourses that have been marginalized. To continue this struggle for a more informed notion of the construction of the canon is a commendable task. We must also resist the flattering belief that any methodology—feminism included—can maintain a privileged relationship to demystification; the supporters of feminism must above all struggle against the reification of interpretation. An anthology such as *The Defiant Muse* is a crucial effort in this struggle to affirm the complexity of the Italian literary canon, and

by extension, of all literary traditions; but the mere publication of women's words and works will never suffice as the affirmation of the feminist enterprise. Women historically may not have had the same privileged relationship to writing as men have had; under present historical circumstances, which have permitted women a forum, women cannot relinquish the power of reading, which is indeed, the power of literature.

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Introducción al pensamiento de Vico

By Pietro Piovani

Traducción de O. Astorga,

J.R. Errera, C.I. Pavan

Caracas: Ediciones de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1987

This book is a collection of eight Vico studies, written mostly in 1968, which the great Italian philosopher Pietro Piovani (1922-1980) had prepared for publication in Spanish. These studies can be said to represent Piovani's interpretation of Vico, who was without a doubt one of his preferred authors. In fact, beginning with his 1953 study *Vico nella filosofia di Rosmini*, down to his posthumously published *Oggettivazione etica e essenzialismo* (1981), he constantly referred to Vico, at times implicitly. Piovani left behind new materials he had gathered for a book "ex prophesso" he planned to dedicate to the Neapolitan philosopher, with the announced title *The New Philosophy of Vico*.

According to Piovani, the importance of Vico resides in his idea of the historicity of reason. Not new to the modern period, this theme is of paramount importance to Humanism: from Petrarch to Montaigne, knowledge is required to furnish less universal claims and a deeper awareness of the inner freedom of man. After Humanism, this requirement is reinforced by the crisis, in the traditional *ratio*, of absolute knowledge. The end of the *logos* coincides with the crisis of classical and medieval cosmology based on the Aristotelian fusion of physics and metaphysics. Aided by the new mathematical and experimental natural sciences, as well as by what was later to be called, in tune with Vico, human sciences, this process is consolidated by the rise of the new political, legalistic, and philological sciences, each claiming its own autonomy. These new disciplines are concerned with the problem of existence and the definition of forms of knowledge capable of dealing with the "new measuring and the newly measured."

Vico is right at the center of this process because, more than anyone else between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, he is the one who defined the canon of this new knowledge, which is grounded in a historicized, and not a metaphysical, *ratio*. For Piovani, Vico is a new and revolutionary philosopher precisely insofar as he is a *late* Humanist and can therefore rethink the originality of Humanist Platonism even against the neo-metaphysics of the natural sciences. Vico's metaphysics is no longer concerned with eternal and immutables; rather, it is a metaphysics of a "human kind" which rehabilitates Cicero's and Grotius' *consensus omnium* as the horizon for the encounter of wills motivated by practical necessity, and which in turn makes possible the exchange of knowledge among beings. As a result, Vico's ideas are "human ideas," but not in the sense of an epis-

temological process; rather, they embody a living process or, as Piovani writes, "ideas are man's idealization derived from his efforts through history. Therefore knowledge [*conoscenza*] is not a datum, but an active *con-scire*, and *abstraction* is a long and slow conquest of man." As a result, the never-abandoned Plato is read in more historicized and definitely not in anti-Platonic terms, in an attempt to have the inner eyes of the mind perceive the corporeality of history beyond the immediacy of the body. And it is within this broad theoretical framework that, according to Piovani, one should grasp Vico's *inventio rationis* as the result of that *logos-lex*, or that *noos-nomos* which informed the notion of a "civic universal" in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. With Vico, however, this universal is fleshed out of its metaphysical attributes, for it no longer makes any claims to being eternal and unchanging. Here takes root the as yet hardly explored Vichian notion according to which it is not in the academies, but "in the public squares of Athens that the principles of metaphysics, logic and morals were born." Principles which, in more modern terms, Vico calls "political philosophy," as opposed to that "monastic philosophy" which is still very much with us in our declining century. Yet against this retrograde philosophy Vico's thought stands strong guard, as Piovani's interpretation demonstrates. Piovani, in fact, made crucial contributions to the critical unraveling of several knots in the "problema Vico," both through the hermeneutic slant of this Spanish volume and through the research which he promoted by means of the Centro di Studi Vichiani del C.N.R. and its periodical, the *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani*.

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[Trans. by Graziella Sidoli]