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Chiara Matraini. *Selected Poetry and Prose: A Bilingual Edition.* Edited and Translated by Elaine Maclachlan. Introduction by Giovanna Rabitti. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe Series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. 232 pp. $24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-51085-9.

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A Tuscan Woman Writer of Prose and Poetry

Chiara Matraini (1515-1604) represents an exception in the panorama of early modern Italian women writers. As Giovanna Rabitti points out at the end of her introduction, extensive critical work has been published in Italy, and her *Rime e lettere* (first printed edition, 1555) are available in a 1989 critical edition; thus she "has received the deserved attention of Italian literary critics" (p. 32). Yet she is largely unknown in North America, due to the lack of available translations. *Selected Poetry and Prose* represents the first volume "entirely dedicated to her work," and it will soon (July 2009) be followed by Susan Haskin's edition and translation of Matraini's *Brief Discourse on the Life and Praise of the Most Blessed Virgin and Mother of the Son of God* (1590) in the same University of Chicago Press series (p. 32).[1] In the case of Italian women writers more generally, however, the situation is the obverse: there are translations in English, but no critical edition in the original Italian, and scholars still have to rely on sixteenth- or seventeenth-century printings for various cultural and economic reasons.

The quality of Elaine Maclachlan's translations as well as Rabitti's thorough introduction will undoubtedly spark the attention of students and scholars that Matraini's work richly deserves. This is indeed a comprehensive and extensive anthology that profits from the collaboration of the scholar who has done the most research on Matraini's life and writings (Rabitti) and of a translator who, in turn, knows her subject matter exhaustively (Maclachlan). Furthermore, Natalia Costa-Zalessow, who translated Rabitti's introduction, deserves special commendation for rendering in idiomatic English the long-winded sentences that are a hallmark of academic writing in Italian.

Rabitti's thirty-two-page introduction (followed by a four-page bibliography) places Matraini in her historical and cultural context in a manner that is both very accessible (see, for example, the concise definition of "*canzoniere*" [pp. 11-12], or the cogent clarification of the role of reappropriation of other writers' lines in early modernity [pp. 28-29]) and sophisticated (as attested by the analysis of the changing content and function of prose passages in her poetry collection [pp. 18-19]). A few points deserve especially careful attention. In a footnote, Rabitti makes an important point, one that should not be overlooked: the Italian critic Carlo Dionisotti "believed this [large poetic output by women in Italy] to be only a Renaissance phenomenon without continuity, which is not correct" (2n1). Dionisotti indeed insisted on the Catholic Counter-Reformation as a breaking point in this burgeoning tradition, for it imposed stricter codes of conduct on women writers, their supporters, and publishers. In 2000, Virginia Cox noted that women continued to write and publish after the Council of Trent and well into the seventeenth century; and she has expanded on this point in her 2008 monograph *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400-1650.*[2] Thus the issue that Rabitti brings up is front and center in current research and criticism, and her readers are well served by this mention, however cursory.

Further, Rabitti underscores the many facets of novelty present in Matraini's *canzoniere*: it is not divided in the two canonical parts, *in vita* and *in morte*; it includes "sonnets addressed to men of letters whose friendship she eagerly cultivated"; it utilizes words derived from Dante; it does not shun autobiographical references; and it takes the poetic work of another woman writer, Vittoria Colonna, as her model (p. 23). If Colonna was a point of departure for Matraini in her poetry writing, there were also many differences, as Rabitti points out. Two elements are especially noteworthy. First, for Matraini, Colonna was as eminent an example as Dante, Petrarch, or Pietro Bembo, attesting to the Marchioness of

Pescara's fame and influence. Second, we have an early example of a woman writer following another woman's literary example, as Rinaldina Russell convincingly asserts in the case of Margherita Sarrocchi's 1623 epic *Scanderbeide* and Lucrezia Marinella's *L'Enrico, overo Bisanzio acquistato* of 1635.[3]

Most important, Rabitti argues that "the three editions [of Matraini's *Rime e lettere*] of 1555, 1595, and 1597 are three versions reflecting the different stages of the author's literary career" (p. 17). Thus it is possible to do with Matraini's writing what we cannot do with most authors of *canzoniere*, whose works survive in one version only, or are strictly codified in one *lectio* that is canonized and universally accepted: that is, we can follow Matraini's goals for her collection, her textual modifications, and any changes to her self-presentation through her verse.

Maclachlan's selection follows this criterion. For both the 1555 (dubbed Book A) and 1597 (dubbed Book C) editions, she states, "out of every five poems in order, I have chosen two or three which both respect her choice and portray her style of writing and the substance of her work" (p. 38; a paraphrase of this statement is included in the introduction to the latter edition, p. 133). Thus it is possible to compare the two printings, with respect to both structure and textual emendations.

One of the poems where differences emerge more clearly is A82-C45, a *canzone* whose structure is derived from Bembo's composition "written for the death of his brother Carlo," and whose content is "adapt[ed] to [Matraini's] own situation, that is, to the death of her beloved and her own sorrow" (p. 23). Having both versions available (A82 is on pp. 84-95, and C45 is on pp. 170-177) allows us to examine what parts were left out of the final version (precisely, the second, fourth, seventh, eighth, and ninth stanzas) and to evaluate changes in vocabulary. Line 18 in A82 reads "di rivedersi in Cielo a miglior vita" (to see each other in Heaven in a better life) (pp. 84-85); the same in C45 is "di rivederti in Cielo a meglior vita" (to see you in Heaven in a better life) (pp. 170-171). The simple modification of a pronoun (from the reciprocal -*si* to the direct object -*ti*) indicates a profound shift in meaning, because, if in 1555 Matraini suggested that her next encounter with her beloved would occur in heaven, in 1597, he was in heaven, but her presence there was no longer certain. It is a testament to the precision of Maclachlan's translation that these elements always find their way into the English text.

Indeed, generally speaking, Maclachlan strives to reproduce the structure (as well as the meaning) of the Italian in her translations. This allows a reader who might not be fluent in Italian to search the original and find in it the source for English expressions. One, certainly minor, drawback to this approach is an occasional unyielding sentence, such as lines 7 and 8 in sonnet A43: "tanto martir ne l'anima rinfresca / quel forte laccio che mi stringe e annoda" becomes the heavier "so great is the martyrdom which that strong knot / which tightens and binds me restores in my soul" (pp. 62, 63). If there are instances of such heft, they are few and far between, as Maclachlan's translations excel at following the structure of the original while rendering it in idiomatic English; I especially admired her work on sonnet A6.

One more feature of this anthology that deserves praise is a twenty-one-page appendix of "Derivative Lines in Matraini's Poetry," compiled by Maclachlan with the help of electronic editions of Petrarch's *Rime* (from www.liberliber.it) and Bembo's *canzone* 142 (from www.classicitaliani.it; both are excellent Web sites that make available reputable editions of many canonical texts in Italian). It is helpful for both students and researchers to be acquainted with useful Web sites; and it is vital, especially for undergraduates, to become aware that electronic sources represent important aides (but only aides, nevertheless) in reconstructing the background and cultural *milieu* against and in which men and women wrote in the past.

In sum, this welcome addition to The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe series upholds the standards to which its coeditors have accustomed readers; this volume, alongside Matraini's forthcoming *Brief Discourse on the Life and Praise of the Most Blessed Virgin and Mother of the Son of God*, makes Matraini's works more readily available for use in our classes and in our research, and acquaints English speakers with a forceful poetic voice.

Notes

[1]. Vittoria Colonna, Chiara Matraini, and Lucrezia Marinella, *Who Is Mary? Three Early Modern Women on the Idea of the Virgin Mary*, ed. and trans. Susan Haskins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[2]. Virginia Cox, "Fiction 1560-1650," in *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*, ed. Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 52-64.

[3]. Rinaldina Russell, "Margherita Sarrocchi and the Writing of the Scanderbeide," in *Scanderbeide: The Heroic Deeds of George Scanderbeg, King of Epirus*, ed. and trans. Rinaldina Russell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 40-41.

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