



Lucrezia Marinella. *Exhortations to Women and to Others If They Please*. Translated and edited by Laura Benedetti. Toronto: Iter Inc., 2012. xi + 230 pp. \$21.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7727-2114-3.

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## Byars on Marinella

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe, a series now hosted by Iter and the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto, provides a service to scholars and students alike through its modern and lively editions in English of literature by European women from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These women were generally overlooked and often purposefully omitted from the traditional narrative of European history in favor of their male counterparts. This series has successfully reintroduced these women to the story in a most meaningful way. The editions are suitable for use in the classroom, allowing new generations a broader and more integrated view of European society. Moreover, through astute translation, careful editing, rich introductions, and robust footnotes, these editions provide research tools for scholars. Works previously unknown and scattered throughout libraries in Europe and North America are now widely available.

Lucrezia Marinella's *Exhortations to Women and to Others if They Please* is a splendid example of this first goal of the series: to make otherwise obscure material readily available. The publisher tells us that only three copies of this work have been found to date; a modern copy now resides in my office in Iowa and my students learned of it just last week. As to the second of the series' aims, to allow scholars a clearer picture of learned women, this volume makes an excellent, if uncomfortable, contribution.

Marinella is best known for *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, her salvo in what scholars call the "Querelle des Femmes" in the seventeenth century.[1] That book is also edited in this series, though it dates to the series' sojourn at the University of Chicago Press. A strong polemical treatise that firmly defends women, it is an excellent example of the genre published in response to recent misogynistic tracts.

In *Exhortations*, however, Marinella seems to recant completely, praising the complete domestication of women and suggesting in the strongest of terms that they avoid scholarly pursuits. According to her arguments, women ought to remain firmly in what I will anachronistically call the private sphere, leaving the world of politics and philosophy for men. Like many of her contemporaries, she uses the ideas of classic authors to make her arguments; the irony of using her exceptional education and keenly honed rhetorical skills to argue in opposition to women's education appears to be lost on her. She argues in favor of sequestration for women, places the greatest value on the skills women use while managing a home and raising children, and locates all female virtue in the domestic arts. It is a maddening and problematic work. More crucially, though, it provides fodder for a deeper understanding of Marinella as a woman and the life stages of contemporary women. Lucrezia Marinella is a complex character, as it turns out, who, like most intelligent creatures, held a spectrum of opinions throughout the course of her lifetime. *Exhortations* as a stand-alone piece would not necessarily make this clear were it not for the excellent work of its modern custodian.

Laura Benedetti, the translator and editor, does an excellent job of parsing Marinella's argument and locating her within the contemporary literary tradition. The introduction is short but extremely valuable, demonstrating a commanding knowledge of Marinella and her contemporary literary tradition. Even the most uninformed reader will be up to speed on the literary milieu of the seventeenth century and will be able to make sense of *Exhortations*. This work could seem like more of the same, with a woman taking the traditional line on women and education. After reading Benedetti's introduction, however, the work takes on a new dimension and its importance becomes clear. I am particularly impressed with the translation. It has an appropriately didactic tone; it

reads as it was intended, as the attempt of a woman in her golden years to bring her life experience and knowledge to bear to convince young women to live a life of domestic bliss. These are the words and the tone of a clever septuagenarian but they feel neither dated nor stilted.

In sum, this edition of Lucrezia Marinella's *Exhortations to Women and to Others if They Please*, is a welcome contribution to our scholarly world. The work, in itself, is interesting though hardly a must read. As this series has done such a good job of demonstrating, early modern women wrote quite a bit and much of it challenged, rather than reaffirmed, the status quo. But as Benedetti points out, it is just this sort of juxtaposition, between *Exhortations* and Marinella's own *Nobility*, between this and, say, Arcangela Tarabotti's *Paternal Tyranny*, that

makes *Exhortations* so valuable.[2] The excellent translation and the superior scholarly apparatus, as well, contribute to the volume's utility. Students, scholars of the period, and the reader curious about women, the household, aging, and many facets of domestic life will find use and joy in this volume.

#### Notes

[1]. Lucrezia Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellent of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[2]. Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

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