

## BOOK REVIEWS



Diodata Malvasia. *Writings on the Sisters of San Luca and Their Miraculous Madonna*. Edited and translated by Danielle Callegari and Shannon McHugh. *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series*, 38. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2015. Pp. 142. ISBN: 9780866985345.

The *Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*, a University of Toronto series, has provided another excellent edition and translation of two works by an early modern woman. Danielle Callegari and Shannon McHugh have translated and edited two works by the seventeenth-century Dominican nun Diodata Malvasia, a resident of the Bolognese convent of San Mattia. The first, *A Brief Discourse on What Occurred to the Most Reverend Sisters of the Joined Convents of San Mattia and San Luca from the Year 1573* (1575) outlines the struggle of Malvasia's convent to retain care of the well-known Madonna of San Luca, a religious icon located in a sanctuary just outside the city walls of Bologna. The second, *The Arrival and the Miraculous Workings of the Glorious Image of the Virgin Mary Painted by Saint Luke, through the Year 1616* (1617) is Malvasia's account of how and when this icon arrived in Bologna and came under the care of the nuns of San Mattia and San Luca. In addition, Callegari and McHugh have added in the appendix their translations of poems by Malvasia in the *Arrival* and two dedicatory letters by Malvasia and the nuns at San Mattia that were included in two, late sixteenth-century chronicles about the religious icon. Published and translated from the original Italian, these works reflect Malvasia's diverse writing styles and place her in "a tradition of religious women who . . . played a role in Italy's literary canon alongside Arcangela Tarabotti and nuns such as Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Bologna" (18).

Callegari and McHugh note that this is the first time the *Brief Discourse* has been printed and the first modern edition of *The Arrival*. This volume enables twenty-first-century scholars and students to examine how Malvasia utilizes her persuasive voice and unique rhetorical skills to advocate for herself, her nuns, and her convent as they struggled with the Post-Tridentine rules and regulations that attempted to alter their enclosure and guardianship of their precious icon. For scholars of the Post-Tridentine period in Italy, these works provide critical insight into the effects of the Council on one religious institution and how one group of nuns responded to these new regulations. Malvasia's challenging yet beautiful texts offer a unique perspective on how she and the other nuns used various strategies—rhetorical, literary, philosophical, historical, familial—to ensure that their convent survives the new rules and to legitimize their claim to care for the Marian icon that was so central to their work.

This edition begins with Callegari's and McHugh's lengthy yet detailed introduction. They outline the background of Malvasia and the convents of San Mattia and San Luca, the reforms of the Tridentine Church that affected religious institutions, the unique rhetorical structure and context of both works, and offer details about the effects of *The Arrival* when it was first printed in 1617 and its subsequent printings later in the seventeenth century. They have translated the *Brief Discourse* in its entirety and translated selections from *The Arrival*, primarily the first chapters, since the original text is rather long. The two texts together show Malvasia's skillful engagement with different rhetorical styles and her broad knowledge of biblical, classical, philosophical, literary, and theological texts. As the translators note throughout, Malvasia had a deep pride and confidence in her own ability to convey the history of the nunnery and the nuns' efforts to retain control of their convent and icon.

The *Brief Discourse* is a complex and hybrid work, with elements of prose and epistolary formats, and, according to Malvasia, serves to record what happened to the nuns during this trying period and to teach future generations of nuns their struggles and successes due, in large part, to their own efforts. After her brief introduction addressed to future nuns, Malvasia describes the 1573 visit of a bishop, Ascanio Marchesini, who was directed to examine the nuns and their nunnery for the Church. While generally pleased with the convent and the religious practices of the nuns, the Monsignor Visitor sees some problems and demands that a door in the church be walled up and that all the nuns of the smaller house of San Luca (the site of the icon) be moved to the larger convent, effectively preventing the nuns from caring for the icon. This visit, and the visitor's subsequent recommendations to his ecclesiastical superiors, thus begins the nuns' epistolary campaign to prevent these changes to their convents.

In between Malvasia's eloquent descriptions of the events that follow, she inserts her transcriptions of the letters passed between the nuns and the various religious figures to whom they turn for assistance. Writing to the pope, various cardinals, and other officials, the nuns utilized all of their religious and familial connections to beg, persuade, and demand that they keep the door open and retain care of their Madonna. This collection of letters is remarkable since Malvasia preserves the nuns' letters and their superiors' responses, which is tremendously useful for scholars wishing to learn more about the epistolary practices of women in the early modern period. How their male superiors respond to the nuns' demands gives scholars a unique window into the workings of the Post-Tridentine Church and, in some cases, how family ties continued to play a considerable role in the lives of the nuns and in Church politics.

*The Arrival*, the second work in this volume, is remarkably different in style and content than the *Brief Discourse* and, as the translators make clear, "demonstrate[s] with greater sophistication and ambition this awareness of what the power of the icon, and the nuns' relationship to it, could mean to their liberty" (18). Part history, part myth, and part theological and philosophical meditations on the Virgin Mary, the subject of the famous icon that was the source of the struggle, *The Arrival* reflects Malvasia's education and wide reading of ancient, biblical, theological, and historical texts. At times she reworks male-authored texts to create female-centered imagery that challenge gender ideas and support her descriptions of the icon of the Madonna. When Malvasia's prose becomes particularly difficult, such as her discussion of envy and avarice in chapter 5, Callegari's and McHugh's excellent and extensive notes explain Malvasia's references.

Callegari and McHugh have done an excellent job editing and translating Diodata Malvasia's texts. Their translation reads well, preserves Malvasia's distinct voice and rhetorical style, and maintains the unique structure of both works. These texts are a goldmine for students and scholars of gender and women's literary and epistolary traditions in early modern Italy, nuns and convents in Post-Tridentine Italy, and the effects of the Council of Trent on religious institutions. Callegari's and McHugh's edition contributes to the growing number of early modern texts by women that have been translated for English-speaking readers and is a welcome and much-needed addition to this series.

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