

Olivia Sabuco de Nantes y Barrera. *Große Welt — kleine Welt — verkehrte Welt: Die philogyne Naturphilosophie der Renaissance-Denkerin Olivia Sabuco de Nantes y Barrera.*

Ed. Marlen Bidwell-Steiner. Innsbruck: StudienVerlag Ges.m.b.H., 2009. 217 pp. bibl. €32.90. ISBN: 978-3-7065-4713-0.

The past twenty-five years have seen an explosion of feminist writings on the history of women in philosophy and science. Critics have engaged in projects of rereading and revising the canon, but the problem of accessibility of the writings of early women philosophers still remains a problem. The 1587 treatise *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre* by Oliva Sabuco de Nantes y Barrera is a good case in point. Although this early modern Spanish philosophical text has garnered some attention from Spanish scholars in the last few years, it has remained obscure and relatively unknown to historians of science, medicine, philosophy, and literature. The book under review not only sheds light on Sabuco de Nantes's treatise but also offers readers a glimpse into the naturalistic philosophy of the Renaissance period. It is written in German and constitutes the first German translation of a substantial part of Sabuco's treatise (the two sections *La vera medicina y vera filosofía en dos diálogos*). This study is also the first in-depth analysis of Sabuco's philosophy that looks at her work from the angle of gender studies.

Fifty years before Descartes, Sabuco put forth a philosophy of human nature that held that humans were a microcosm of the universe. Positing a dualism that accounted for the interaction of body and mind, Sabuco argued that the brain controlled the body (and not the heart). This Renaissance Spanish thinker was one of the first philosophers to recognize the connections between emotions and physical health, offering a theory of the ability of reason and moral virtue to cause debilitation and disease through improper circulation of a nerve sap called *chilo*. Sabuco predicted the role of cerebrospinal fluid and the workings of the digestive system.

The first English translation of Sabuco's text, *New Philosophy of Human Nature*, by Mary Ellen Waithe, Maria Colomer Vintrolá, and C. Angel Zorita, only appeared in 2007, in the same year that Bidwell-Steiner's study was finished. While this critical edition does not offer a close reading of the text itself, Bidwell-Steiner provides a literary analysis of the rhetorical strategies and metaphors of the text. Sabuco's book, in fact, consists of seven interconnected dialogues. In these dialogues, Antonio, a "shepherd-philosopher," converses with a doctor, but despite his lack of medical studies, his position as a close observer of nature

renders him superior to the doctor. Following the cyclical movement of the primary text, Bidwell-Steiner organizes her analysis in three circles of interpretation. In a first interpretative move, she gives a detailed account of the crucial question of authorship, which has troubled the reception of Sabuco's treatise and has eclipsed detailed examinations of the text itself. Since the 1903 discovery of the will of Sabuco's father in which he claimed authorship to this book, critics have attributed authorship to the father. Bidwell-Steiner views this problem not as specific to this author but as part of a larger conceptual problem in the history of female writers in philosophy and science. While the second circle addresses gender relations in the text that, according to Bidwell-Steiner, make it a philogynist text, the third circle analyzes the metaphorical relations between femaleness and maleness that point to a materialistic concept of a world order that also constitutes gender order. In her analogy of microcosm and macrocosm and her frequent shifts between these two layers, Sabuco's text, the author holds, sketches a gynocentric cosmos that rests on three maternal metaphorical figures: *luna madre*, *pia madre*, and *natura madre / natura madrastra*. Addressing the various rhetorical maneuvers and the various chiasmic figures of speech, Bidwell-Steiner's textual analysis of the dense metaphorical layering of Sabuco's text makes a powerful case for taking more seriously this hitherto obscure figure in early modern science and philosophy.

This study therefore accomplishes two important tasks: it introduces a German readership to Sabuco de Nantes by offering a translation of the Spanish text and it manages to translate Sabuco's philosophy to a modern audience by providing the reader with detailed information on the broader historical context of European medical and philosophical culture in general, and in sixteenth-century Spain in particular. While German-speaking scholars in many fields will benefit from the accessibility of this translation and the close reading of Sabuco's work, readers not familiar with German will, however, have to wait for a translation of the insights provided by Bidwell-Steiner's analysis.

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