

Marie-Françoise Piéjus. *Visages et paroles de femmes dans la littérature italienne de la Renaissance*.

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A compilation of articles scanning roughly a thirty-year period of the author's research, this volume is neatly divided into two sections, the *visages* and the *paroles*. The first part, which accounts for roughly two-thirds of the entire book, concentrates on images of women appearing in male discourse that discusses women or addresses them either directly or indirectly. Piéjus illustrates, through her close reading and critical evaluation of her chosen texts, that while the image of the subordinate female was normative for some, for others it was the starting point for a renegotiation of female identity.

The last third of the work consists of five essays that focus on the voices of the women themselves, albeit with some male intervention. Here Piéjus puts the poetry and epistolary prose of some of the Renaissance's most recognized female literary talents under her magnifying glass to give her audience a taste of what happened when, thanks to a burgeoning printing business and the rising popularity of texts written in Italian, the female who is only talked about in the first part of the book is allowed to speak for herself. Piéjus cautions in her introduction that her intent is not to present a comprehensive study of either text type, nor to pretend that she has covered a majority of authors and their ensuing *visages* and *paroles*; but rather she lends a critical eye to the evaluation of some important moments in the historical development of the literary art of expressing that which is female and of female expression.

The point of departure for the image of the female, as envisioned by the authors examined in the first part of the work, is a vision of female imperfection deduced from Aristotle and remodeled by Thomist doctrine. This medieval stereotype reflected an imperfect, incomplete, subordinate object capable only of being acted upon by the all-powerful and all-knowing dominant male, a creature who because of her own nature was assigned an inferior role in life. That this image was challenged and altered during the Renaissance is well illustrated by the first article in the collection, which focuses on an episode, present since the 1516 edition of the *Orlando Furioso*, in which the paladins encounter the murderous females in canto 19. In Piéjus's reading, Ariosto forces his audience to question the excesses and anomalies of reality by juxtaposing two familiar narrative strains — the utopian narrative with the legend of the Amazons — in this adventure.

Piéjus then jumps from the Ariostean episode to another juxtaposition, this time between two works by the same author, Alessandro Piccolomini. The first article treats Piccolomini's *Orazione in lode della donna*, written for the Intronati, and the second considers *La Raffaella*. Piccolomini's works present two very different conceptions of the female despite their having been written in the same environment and at about the same time. Praising the women of Siena in the first and suggesting women mind their manners in the second, Piccolomini remains intentionally ambiguous. The following essay returns to the Intronati, specifically to the roles and arguments assigned to females, while the next compares the divergent paths of a modern Lucrece as represented in *Heptameron 23* by Margherita di Navarra and Matteo Bandello's *Novella 2.24*. The final juxtaposition appears as Boccaccio's Alatiel from *Decameron 2.7*, who is revisited and recast in Giraldo Cinzio's Sofronia in the *Ecatommitti 10.4*.

The last third of Piéjus's volume finally turns to the voices of the women themselves and the advent of their becoming visible in the literary world thanks, however, to the mediation of men. The first essay of this part is a little gem discussing *la création poétique au féminine*, which illustrates how the voiceless Petrarchan subject turns the tables and becomes the active, female voice and a speaker in her own right. The second essay treats Piccolomini yet again, this time his Padovan letter to the Infiammati on women's writing as social practice in Tuscany. The last two articles look at Lodovico Domenichi's anthology of female poets and the epistolary narrative collection born from private letters, such as those of Vittoria Colonna, that defined the genre.

In addition to the essays, there are several documents reproduced in the volume, including the text of Piccolomini's letter to the Infiammati and his *Orazione*, in addition to an index of writings on women published in Italy between 1471 and 1560. The collection is, therefore, an important source for those interested in the image and voice of Renaissance Italian women.

ELIZABETH H. D. MAZZOCCO
University of Massachusetts Amherst