

A Poetry Precise and Free: Selected Madrigals of Guarini.

Nicholas R. Jones, ed. and trans.

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“I was not born a poet,” wrote the Ferrarese poet and diplomat Battista Guarini (1538–1612) in 1582 (*Lettere del Signor Cavaliere Battista Guarini*, ed. Agostino Michele [1600], 97). Guarini was forty-three years old at the time, describing to a friend his struggle to transform himself from a mature, dispassionate man into a foolish young lover for the sake of composing poetry. Little could Guarini have anticipated how influential and widespread his verses would become in the decades that followed. His poetry’s appeal shows not only in the numerous editions of his *Rime* (1598) and pastoral tragicomedy *Il pastor fido* (1589) that appeared in his lifetime, but also in the nearly two thousand musical settings of his verses by hundreds of composers across Europe from this same period. Yet, despite many translations of *Il pastor fido* after its publication and of individual poems in scholarly articles and music editions in recent years, a large-scale English translation of Guarini’s *Rime* has long been lacking. Nicholas R. Jones’s *A Poetry Precise and Free* takes a significant step forward in bringing these works to the English-speaking world with a volume of 150 Guarini madrigals presented in both Italian and English.

The book opens with a preface devoted to the poem “Mentre vaga angioletta” and its ties to courtly musical practices of late Cinquecento Italy. This leads to an instructive introduction to the Petrarchan lyric, Guarini’s madrigals, and the intimate connection between the poet’s work and the vocal madrigal of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The ten principal chapters arrange Guarini’s poems by topic—“Cupid’s Mischief,” “Love and Indifference,” “Love’s Theatrics,” and so forth—with chapter introductions that place the poet’s work within broader literary spheres alongside Petrarch, Shakespeare, Spenser, Catullus, Donne, and other (primarily English) poets.

What Jones offers in the book are not straightforward, quasi-literal translations, but interpretative rereadings—“poetic translations,” as Jones calls them—that render the essence of the poem in modern, “idiomatic English” (xii). This process often involves ridding the poem of pronouns and pastoral names, substituting modern metaphors and images for archaic ones, and condensing Guarini’s sometimes convoluted rhetoric into its pithiest core. Thus, Guarini’s lines, “O donna troppo cruda, e troppo bella, / da voi vien la mia stella” (thirteen words, eighteen syllables), become, in Jones’s translation, “Cruel and beautiful / my fatal star” (six words, nine syllables [58]). As Jones explains, “My goal has been to produce a set of readable, understandable poems in contemporary English” (21). The translations, then, bypass a more precise approach in favor of “other goals, such as brevity, clarity, and distinctiveness of voice” (21). Jones also preserves the visual shape of the poem—number of lines and the general distinction of long/short verse—though without any regular rhyme scheme or scansion.

The purist and the pedant might balk at Jones’s liberal treatment of Guarini’s verse, but the translations prove compelling in their relationship to the originals. Importantly,

illuminating this relationship between poem and translation is a central focus of the book. Thus, after each poem and translation, Jones provides a paragraph or two of descriptive notes explaining his interpretative and editorial decisions, as well as the poem's engagement with the poetic, linguistic, and social conventions of its time. These notes show Jones's deep understanding not only of the poetry, but also of the poetic traditions, courtly environment, and musical practices that surrounded it. Indeed, Jones's attention to the musical dimension of Guarini's verse, and to the centrality of music at the Este court in Ferrara (where Guarini served), is a distinctive and crucial asset of this book.

A Poetry Precise and Free is not a scholarly edition—there are no critical notes, and at times even proper citations are lacking—nor would its translations be appropriate for concert or liner notes, where more literal translations serve better. One also stumbles upon the occasional, minor inaccuracy—such as transforming Guarini's *baleno* (flash) into *balena* (whale) (29), and assigning Monteverdi's *Anima mia, perdona* to his fifth book of madrigals (1605) rather than to the fourth (1603) (110–11). But Jones's treatments of the verse read naturally in English, rather than as stilted emulations of sixteenth-century Italian, and perhaps most importantly, they convey the spirit of the poems to present-day readers. The translations are, indeed, poetic, and they offer a fresh perspective on the centuries-old yet perennial expressions of Guarini's madrigals.

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Le virtù di Griselda: Storia di una storia. Raffaele Morabito.

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Raffaele Morabito's valuable monograph, consisting of eight chapters and an appendix with notes on iconography, recalls themes treated by the author in previous studies and makes a substantial contribution to the study of the novella of *Griselda*, one of the most studied novellas from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (10.10). In chapter 1, Morabito focuses on the extraordinary success of the novel and its several rehashes and rewritings in various narrative and theatrical genres, as well as in popular tradition and in European literature translated into other languages. In chapter 2, “Le fonti e il corpus” (The sources and the corpus), recalling different critical interpretations, Morabito argues for the original interweaving of sources in Boccaccio's novel. By reworking elements from learned and popular traditions, Boccaccio builds a new story that has achieved broad circulation as an autonomous text with respect to the larger work to which it belongs.

In chapter 3, “Un ambiguo cominciamento: Boccaccio” (An ambiguous beginning: Boccaccio), the author highlights the ambiguous aspects of the novella, the exemplarity