Abigail Sarah Brundin. *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation.*
Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008. xii + 218 pp. $99.95. ISBN: 978–0–7546–4049–3.

If Pietro Bembo is the father of Italian lyric in his century, Vittoria Colonna is the mother. Bembo boosted her fame by publishing their sonnet exchange in the 1535 edition of his *Rime*, but Colonna had long since moved in a cultural network whose members married poetry to piety decades before the Council of Trent. Bare facts of her biography float in *manuali scolastici* — her marriage to Francesco Ferrante D'Avalos, her widowhood after his death from battle wounds, her poetry of mourning, her friendship with Michelangelo, her late verse of religious rapture — but this identification has been pinned to her ghost like a conference name badge on a scholar's blouse. What Abigail Brundin accomplishes in her richly documented study is a loving labor of resuscitation, bringing back the intellectual woman. Set in

a context of religious currents akin to Calvinism ("reform," "evangelism," "Italian Reformation") and centered on close readings of Colonna's sonnets, this book presents itself as a pioneer monograph in English on an important Renaissance personality.

An introduction links Petrarchism to reformed spirituality, positing Neoplatonic thought as a "missing link" between the two. Chapter 1 filters Colonna's life (1492/94–1547) to fasten on those events that contributed to her "self-fashioning" as an evangelical voice. (Brundin refers readers to her complementary edition of Colonna's *Sonnets for Michelangelo* [2005].) Published thirteen times while she was alive and another nine before the end of the Cinquecento, Colonna was the first female writer to receive a commentary before her death. Earlier editors, whenever they could lay hands on new poems, put them conspicuously in the opening pages; those *rime spirituali*, which occupied the Marquise of Pescara as she grew older, thus preceded the more youthful poems for her husband. Lodovico Dolce's influential 1552 edition reverses this arrangement, aligning Colonna's *canzoniere* with a Petrarchan ideal that progresses from worldly to religious concerns.

Chapter 2 argues for the "indigenous, humanistic roots" of evangelical thought in Italy, going back to Valla (*De libero arbitrio*) and Sannazaro (*De partu Virginis*, *Lamentatio de morte Christi*), and reconstructs Colonna's plausible path toward belief in salvation by faith alone (*sola fide*). The author, who patiently sorts out the content of the reformist "product," *Beneficio di Cristo* (1542/43), also profiles men in Colonna's community: Juan de Valdés, Bernardino Ochino, Pietro Carnesecchi, and Reginald Pole's Viterbo circle. Chapters 3 and 4 describe respectively the *canzonieri* Colonna prepared as gifts for Michelangelo and Marguerite de Navarre, the former with an "insistence on Christ's body as the locus for wonder and adoration," the second through sonnets that "celebrate the strength and autonomy of the Virgin as an independent and powerful force." Chapter 5, "Marian Prose Works," continues the latter line. The Virgin's love of her son becomes an "emancipatory" model for women as agents of religious reform insofar as it preaches salvific union with Christ. Brundin's translations, for the most part scrupulously accurate, can slip: "Mentre che quanto dentro avea concetto / Dei misteri di Dio ne facea degno / La vergin Luca, oprava egli ogni ingegno," is rendered as "While his understanding of the / mysteries of God conferred nobility upon Luke's virgin, / he mustered all possible skill." In the Italian, Mary makes Luke, not the Virgin, worthy ("degno").

This book taps the poetry for reformist themes, generally side-stepping its other literary ancestry, for which there does already exist help in a tradition from Rinaldo Corso (1543, 1558) to Alan Bullock (1982). Sometimes the present commentary's feminism trumps philology. To explain why Vittoria flatters Queen Marguerite with hope to be spiritually "reborn" through her, Brundin occludes scripture — "You must be born again" (John 3:7) — taking the phrase as a Marian metaphor of "giving birth," which she finds "apt" in "a discussion of women's need to unite."

Brundin has taken daunting masses of material — Colonna's opus, Catholic Reformation culture — and wrestled them into disciplined, roughly chronological order. Excellent articulation and elegant transitions help us navigate, but the style is

repetitive with doublets ("reflects and responds to," "reinforce and re-emphasize"), and buzz words recur ("poetic project," "lyric enterprise"). Understandable as a younger scholar's deference to authority, some lexical choices are critically perplexing. Should we insist on "self-fashioning" for an aristocrat notoriously shy — even in her name-badge biography — of the print medium? Two chapters wind down the volume, on "Colonna's Readers" (e.g., Ariosto) and on "The Fate of the *Canzoniere Spirituale*," focused on Laura Battiferra as heiress to the matriarch. Speaking not just as a Battiferriana, I find this open end with its invitation to further research as appealing as the goal Brundin set for herself — and successfully meets — that is, to restore Colonna to her rightful pedestal.

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