

Lucrezia Marinella. *De' gesti eroici e della vita meravigliosa della Serafica S. Caterina da Siena.*

Ed. Armando Maggi. Il portico. Biblioteca di lettere e arti 157. Ravenna: Longo editore, 2011. 238 pp. €25. ISBN: 978-88-8063-701-1.

This edition is a timely reminder of both the lacunae that exist in our knowledge of the seventeenth-century Venetian writer, Lucrezia Marinella, and the absolute dearth of modern editions of her religious works. It is significant that, although most research has been on her secular texts — particularly the polemical *Nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne*, first published in 1600 — the majority of her works are hagiographic. To my knowledge *De' gesti eroici* represents the first modern edition of any of her religious works. On these grounds this edition of Marinella's life of Saint Catherine (published in 1624) is to be welcomed.

Aside from the text of *De' gesti eroici*, the edition contains an introduction by Armando Maggi (“Lo sperimentalismo di Lucrezia Marinella”) and is bookended by three essays in English: Michael Subialka, “Heroic Sainthood: Marinella's Genealogy of the Medici Aristocracy and Saint Catherine's *Gesti eroici* as a Rewriting of the Gender of Virtue”; Elizabeth Fiedler, “The Mortified Body, the Beautiful Body: Lucrezia Marinella's *Life of St. Caterina* in the Context of Counter-Reformation Spirituality and Painting”; and Ryan Gogol, “The Literary Exchange between Lucrezia Marinella and Cristofano Bronzini.” These essays form a

substantial part of the book. Indeed, with the introduction they are longer than Marinella's *Life*.

The edition offers an abridged form of *De' gesti eroici*, having been cut down considerably from the original, which exceeds 300 pages. This in itself is not necessarily a negative, since the text can be repetitive at times. However there is no full discussion of the criteria by which the text has been abridged: the editor refers to a group of unnamed scholars, "colleghe esperte," who have been consulted about the excisions: "abbiamo deciso che fosse giusto offrire una selezione" (35). But was repetition the only criterion? One has to wonder about the omission of scenes of self-flagellation that comprise not a little of the text. A more extensive selection of such scenes would have rounded out more fully Marinella's depiction of St Catherine. Moreover, the way in which these cuts have been carried out gives some cause for concern. The original page numbers would have assisted interested scholars to more easily refer back to the original text and fill in the gaps for themselves. As it is, the missing text is summarized by an extremely brief account in italics, with no indication of how many pages have been excised. Further, there is no bibliographical description of the work, which is essential in an edition of this type.

The introduction and essays represent the most comprehensive examination of this hitherto neglected work and are to be integrated with the insightful commentary of Virginia Cox in her recently published *The Prodigious Muse* (2011, particularly 155–57). Maggi argues in his introductory essay that Marinella rewrites the spiritual experiences of the medieval saint according to seventeenth-century Baroque sensibilities, creating an "ibrido testuale" (10); a text composed of various genres, which reflects a desire to connect with the outside world through the possibility of patronage, and places an emphasis on Catherine's inner spirituality. The three essays that conclude the edition are concerned with the interaction between the text and society, especially patronage relations. Subialka explores the intricacies of the representation of Medici women, suggesting that Marinella's intention is to "re-envision the legitimacy of women as virtuous rulers and even heroes" (168). In this respect, Marinella's *Life* can be regarded as a radical departure from earlier biographies of Catherine through its adumbration of a "saintly politics" (189); one that is directly relevant to the Medici court governed by the co-regents Cristina di Lorena and Maria Maddalena d'Austria. Gogol's contribution, which complements Subialka's, describes the relationship between Marinella and Cristofano Bronzini as a central element in the production of the text. Although there is some overlapping of material in the essays discussed above, they are thematically coherent and contribute to our understanding of the textual innovations that Marinella introduced to the hagiography of Saint Catherine. Despite my previously mentioned reservations concerning the text of the *Life* itself, the edition represents an important step forward in Marinella studies by making this rare text more easily available and demonstrating that her religious works require as much study as her secular ones.

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