Vittoria Colonna, *Sonnets for Michelangelo. A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Abigail Brundin. *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. xxxi, 197 pp., 2 ill. ISBN 0-226-11391-4 (cloth), 0-226-11392-2 (paper).

This bilingual edition of 103 sonnets by Vittoria Colonna arranged into a collection by the author herself as a gift to Michelangelo Buonarroti (in c.1540) should be of great interest to scholars and students alike not only because of the eminence of its author and recipient, but also because of the profound insight it offers into both the “female voice” in Italian Renaissance poetry and religious thought in mid-sixteenth-century Italy.

The text of the poems and Abigail Brundin’s contribution by way of her introductory essay, translation, and explanatory notes give us an opportunity to examine more closely the cultural world of an eminent figure in Italian letters, her profound spirituality, and the religious climate of Italy at a time when a religious renovation along “Lutheran” lines was still envisioned as a possibility (albeit it, a personal one) for reform-minded Catholics on the peninsula. Thus, in her introduction to the collection Brundin rightly engages with reform spirituality in Italy in the 1530-40s. She argues in favour of a Vittoria Colonna firmly rooted within Roman Catholicism, even on the thorny question of *sola fide* which, as Brundin rightly points out, had a long tradition in Catholic thought reaching back not only to Augustine, but to Scripture itself—a tradition that, incidentally, in Vittoria’s time had not yet been declared heretical by the Council of Trent. Brundin similarly focuses on the importance of the *Beneficio di Cristo*, first published in 1542 or ’43, but circulating in manuscript before that time and certainly part of the discussions among a number of individuals participating in the *ecclesia viterbiensis*, that is, in Cardinal Reginald Pole’s gatherings in Viterbo in the early 1540s. In this context, Colonna’s collection of poetry is intimately connected with the Italian reform movement and with some of the major figures and texts from that movement.

Colonna personally selected these poems as a gift to Michelangelo, to whom she had been introduced in Rome in 1536 or ’38 by Tommaso de’ Cavalieri (26), the young Roman nobleman whose physical beauty so fascinated and attracted Michelangelo. The two struck a strong friendship and maintained it not only through personal contact, but also, when Colonna moved away to Viterbo and then to Ischia, through epistolary and poetic exchanges. The effects of this new friendship on Michelangelo’s works and on his spiritual life were profound. Not only did he refocus his creative energies more determinately in a more spiritual direction, but he also finally left behind the Savonarolan tendencies of his youth (evident in his early sonnets on papal Rome or on death) and his fascination with Renaissance Neoplatonism (so evident in his sonnets to Cavalcanti). Colonna’s collection, which Michelangelo prized so highly as not to allow it out of his sight (32-33), is thus an obligatory stop for scholarship on Michelangelo, as well, for it helps us to understand better the change of direction, or perhaps, the more determined choice of direction that we see in Michelangelo’s works after his encounter

with the Marchesa di Pescara.

As the translator herself points out, Vittoria Colonna's poetry is "spare". In other words, her verses are so tightly wrought that it is difficult to translate them well. This, incidentally, is the same problem we encounter with Michelangelo's poetry, which has often been compared to his sculptural works—rough, unfinished, powerful, etc. In light of this characteristic and of a student's need to understand fully, Brundin has wisely chosen not to attempt a poetic rendition. Instead, she provides the reader with a good literal translation of the poems keeping, as much as possible, the verse structure. While on the whole Brundin does this very well, there are also plenty of occasions when I am not at all convinced that the translation is correct, let alone acceptable. While I would not hesitate to recommend this translation to my undergraduate students, I would advise graduate students and colleagues to double-check with the original Italian before citing it verbatim.

One of the most common "errors" (I put the term in inverted commas because other readers might well not consider this to be an error) is a tendency to change the subject of a sentence. A number of sonnets can be adduced as examples, but I will use just one as my case in point: sonnet 9, composed to celebrate the festivity of the Birth of Mary (8 Sept). The first tercet, in which Colonna sings the praises of the Virgin Mary as intercessor for us with God, reads:

So ch'ella prega te per noi, ma, o pio
Signor, prega tu lei che preghi in modo
Ch'io senta oprar in me sua vital forza (p. 62).

Brundin translates the tercet as

I know that she prays to you on our behalf, but,
Holy Father, pray to her that through her prayers
her vital energy may fill my being (p. 63).

My first concern with this translation is that the last verse drastically changes the thought direction of the original and thereby completely loses sight of the "I" active voice in "ch'io senta" ("that I might feel"); Colonna asks that she "might feel" within herself the strength of Mary's life-giving spirit. What Brundin has given us is quite a different effect—Colonna asking to "be filled" with Mary's life-giving spirit. This is not quite the same, especially if (as this volume and the series seek to prove) we are trying to identify female agency in the sixteenth-century.

This same tercet illustrates another recurring "error": the superficially correct but inherently incorrect rendition of a word or phrase. In the context of the poem, the title "pio Signor" refers, obviously, to God; the translation, however, translates it as "Holy Father"—a title generally given to the pope, not to the divinity—and thus this phrase can potentially misdirect the reader. On the evidence of the translation, someone might well argue that Colonna is asking the *pope* to pray to the Virgin Mary to pray to God for us ... While you and I know exactly what Colonna meant, I do not think it serves our undergraduate students well to confuse them with incorrect titles: God is "Our Father" while the pope is the "Holy Father." "Merciful Lord" would have been a much better (and literal) translation in this case. On a more gen-

eral note, the rendition of these verses loses the original “mannerist” circularity of the image—the supplicant asks God to intercede with the Virgin Mary to intercede with Him on the supplicant’s behalf. This loss of circularity is unfortunate because the web of words and images Colonna uses is not only an indication of her “mannerist” style, but also of her stylistic connection with Michelangelo’s own poetry (and here I cannot help but think of Michelangelo’s famous verse “Tu sa’ ch’i’ so, signor mie, che tu sai” in his sonnet G.60). What is very interesting about Colonna’s style is that, while remaining a Petrarchist, she is also moving forward towards a more “mannerist” and, perhaps, more “mystical” poetic voice.

In the second tercet, the translation of sonnet 9 illustrates another recurring error: the mis-placing of words. The last verse, “questa umana scorza / Serva a lo spirito, e sol lo spirito a Dio” is rendered as “this mortal shell / will serve my spirit alone, and my spirit only God.” Aside from the “umana” rendered as “mortal” rather than “human” and the loss of the subjunctive mood, the greater problem I see in this translation is that the word “solo” in this compound sentence is placed after the comma and the conjunction that separate and connect the two sentences. Because of this, “solo” could not possibly apply grammatically to “lo spirito” in the first half of the compound sentence; structurally it belongs to the second half and so, grammatically, it is either an adjective that modifies the second “lo spirito” or an adverb that modifies either the implied verb “serve” (serves) or the adverbial phrase “a Dio”. My reading of the verse would drop the “alone” and say: “this human shell / might serve my spirit, and my spirit only God” (which makes more logical sense to me); though I admit that other readers might prefer “might serve my spirit, and only my spirit God.”

This type of close analysis and “dibattito serrato” with the translation might well be applied to other sonnets, but this is not the venue for it. What is more important here is to point out that, on the whole, Brundin’s translation is a fine contribution to scholarship, as are also her well argued introduction and her very informative notes to the text. This volume thus contributes significantly to scholarship on Italian Renaissance poetry and to the growing peal of “other voices” rising from early modern Italy.

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Sins of the Flesh. Responding to Sexual Disease in Early Modern Europe, ed. Kevin Siena. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005. 292 pp. ISBN 0-7727-2209-0 \$24.50

The historical study of venereal disease has gained considerable momentum in the last twenty years as scholars have capitalized on new theoretical approaches, better communication across fields, and the growing popular interest on the subject. As Kevin Siena perceptively argues in *Sins of the Flesh*, scholarship on the early modern scourge of the Pox has profited immensely as this venereal disease emerged as