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Stella, Clara. Lodovico Domenichi e le Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne (1559)

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[See table of contents](#)

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Stella, Clara.

Lodovico Domenichi e le Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne (1559).

Women and Gender in Italy (1500–1900) / Donne e gender in Italia (1500–1900) 3. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2022. Pp. 287. ISBN 978-2-406-12662-1 (paperback) €29.

One of the most important texts in the canon of women's writings is Lodovico Domenichi's *Rime diverse d'alcune nobilissime et virtuosissime donne* (Various poems by some most noble and most virtuous women), published by Vincenzo Busdraghi in Lucca in 1559. This is the first omnibus collection of women's poetry in all of Europe and, as such, deserves a lot more attention than it has heretofore received. The fifty-three women featured in this volume are all but one (Veronica Gambara) noble women and all but one (Marguerite de Navarre) from Italy. There is a clear predominance of Tuscan women and a noticeable lack of women from south of Naples, but otherwise the collection reveals that women poets were everywhere in sixteenth-century Italy. Alongside the expected surfeit of sonnets there are a number of *canzoni*, madrigals, octave sequences, and even a *glosa*, clear evidence of the women's technical skills. Though most of the poems talk about love, there are also many that are spiritual/devotional, political, or epistolary, a reflection of the various interests that inspired their authors.

Clara Stella puts this important anthology through the proverbial sieve in a way that no scholar has done before. Her first chapter starts with a detailed examination of the two people most involved with its production—the editor Ludovico Domenichi (21–31) and the publisher Vincenzo Busdraghi (32–36). She also situates the volume within the wider sphere of poetry collections that were being published at the time. While Domenichi will be familiar to many Italianists working on the sixteenth century, the same cannot be said for Busdraghi, an ambivalent figure with reformist views that got him into trouble with the Inquisition (as was also the case with Domenichi). Stella then analyzes their two dedicatory letters: from Domenichi to Giannotto Castiglioni, private secretary to Pope Pius IV, and from Busdraghi to Gerardo Spada, a local political and cultural figure (37–40). Dedicating a collection of women's poetry to a man might seem strange, even in the mid-sixteenth century, so in his dedicatory letter to Castiglioni, Domenichi offers his reasons and then mentions some of

the deserving women to whom he could have dedicated his work—a way of apologizing for his choice but also a way to praise a number of worthy women patrons, all members of that “small provincial nobility in close touch with academic circles” that Domenichi was trying to reach (43). Stella provides brief biographies of these possible dedicatees and suggests that by mentioning them Domenichi was in fact recognizing and publicizing their literary talents (41–43). She then considers the various ways in which Domenichi might have been able to gather the poems that went into his collection (43–46).

The second chapter looks at Domenichi’s participation in the *querelle* (including his appearance as an “interlocutor” in Giuseppe Betussi’s dialogue *Raverta*) and the place/role of women in his works (47–81). The next chapter focuses on three key contributors to the anthology: Vittoria Colonna, Veronica Gambara, and Gaspara Stampa (83–106). By calling them the three *corone*, Stella clearly alludes to the three male *corone* of the Italian canon—Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, an indication of the three women’s reputation in their time and their place in the canon. Chapter 4, the longest in the volume, groups some of the other women geographically—Siena, Florence, Pistoia, Bologna, Monferrato and Liguria, Modena, Naples, and Ischia—and presents short but highly informative biographies and analyses for each of them (107–62). Chapter 5 examines the metrical structures of the poems, grouping them by genres: sonnets, *canzoni*, madrigals, lyrical-narrative poetry (163–75). The sixth and last chapter can be subdivided into two distinct parts: the first presents the themes and structures of the poems, starting with those directed at a specific person and then those with a religious, amorous, or political purpose (177–86); the second examines the “mini-canzonieri” in the collection, in particular those of Ippolita Mirtilla, Isabella di Morra, Olimpia Malipiero, and Eleonora de la Ravoire Falletti (187–206). Each of these six chapters advances a number of fascinating insights into the women and the poetry in the collection, but each one also ends rather abruptly leaving the reader hanging for want of some concluding remarks.

There is, however, a good recapitulatory conclusion to the entire book (207–14). As Stella mentions, her work has increased our knowledge and understanding of the poems, their editor, publisher, and authors, the context and the purpose(s) of such a publication. She agrees with one of the first modern scholars to look at the collection critically (Marie-François Piéjus) that the work should be read in the context of Domenichi’s developing political views and his

covert reformist religious views. In the history of literature, the collection serves as a useful source for our better understanding of the reception and influence of the poetry of the three female *corone* (Colonna, Gambara, Stampa) on the women poets that followed them. Culturally, it reveals the level of *formazione* (education, literacy, etc.) that the fifty-three women possessed and their ability to adopt and adapt to the lyrical models they had inherited.

The volume ends with several appendices that will be very useful to future scholars, including a sequential numbering of all 313 poems, tables showing where some of the poems were previously published, a detailed bibliographical description of the edition, a very extensive bibliography, and an index of names.

With this deeply researched and carefully detailed study of Domenichi's groundbreaking collection, Clara Stella offers a treasure trove of information and insights that are sure to be invaluable for scholars of sixteenth-century Italian women poets.

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