

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Niccolini, Sister Giustina. The Chronicle of Le Murate. Ed. and trans. Saundra Weddle

Judith C. Brown

Volume 34, numéro 4, automne 2011

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1106095ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v34i4.18671>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Brown, J. (2011). Compte rendu de [Niccolini, Sister Giustina. The Chronicle of Le Murate. Ed. and trans. Saundra Weddle]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 34(4), 167–169. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v34i4.18671>

Niccolini, Sister Giustina.

***The Chronicle of Le Murate*. Ed. and trans. Saundra Weddle.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series, 12. Toronto: Iter Inc. & Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2011. Pp. xi, 361. ISBN 978-0-7727-2108-2 (paperback) \$32.

Le Murate was the largest and best known convent of Renaissance Florence. Its size and importance were unimaginable in 1390 when two religious women immured themselves in a small house on one of the city's bridges to live a life of prayer. Their piety attracted followers, so much so that the community soon outgrew its precarious perch over the Arno, raising questions about the propriety and safety of these unsupervised women who depended on alms for their survival. In response to these concerns, in 1413 the community adopted the Benedictine rule and thirteen years later moved to a house where they came under the oversight of the nearby church of Sant'Ambrogio. Expanded repeatedly to accommodate a population that by mid-sixteenth century reached over 200 nuns, this became the convent's permanent location until the Napoleonic suppression of religious institutions.

Motivated by the desire to document the convent's success and to provide a heroic model of religious devotion for future generations, the abbess of Le Murate asked Sister Giustina Niccolini to write a chronicle. Completed in 1598, the resulting document tells the rich 200-year history of the convent, bringing us close to hearing the voices of the nuns themselves, albeit filtered by one of their own. The picture that emerges is one of secluded everyday lives devoted to the nuns' commitment to their religious vows and to their community—all expressed through daily rituals of prayer, work, and many acts of kindness.

But the story of Le Murate revealed by Sister Niccolini is also inextricably linked to developments outside the convent, for despite the immurement suggested by its name, the convent's walls were porous and events on each side affected the other. The gender and marriage system of Renaissance Florence, the political and economic history of the city, and developments in the Catholic Church all had an effect. The small entrance payments of the early years gave way to larger dowries, tracking at a reduced level the increase in secular dowries. Along with this shift came an aristocratization in the nuns' social background, which paralleled the aristocratization of Florentine society. The novices could now keep more luxury goods than before; and at a time when

new and larger palaces began to appear in the city's urban fabric, the families of these entrants could pay for the building of private cells and chapels that considerably expanded the size of the convent. Some of the new facilities were for distinguished visitors who came from time to time, such as the eight-year-old Catherine de' Medici, future queen of France, who was brought there in 1527 to escape the plague and remained for several years to avoid dangers posed by anti-Medicean forces during the last republic. Catherine lived in a cell that had been built for Caterina Sforza when she sought refuge there some decades earlier. Both women remembered the convent later through generous donations, as did other wealthy patrons, some of whom resided there temporarily or were relatives of Murate nuns. The convent was quite proud of its wealthy and illustrious connections, who are mentioned conspicuously throughout Sister Niccolini's account. Their relationship to the convent helped the nuns navigate difficult situations, and their gifts supplemented the income derived from the nuns' work, which consisted primarily of needlework, spinning gold threads for the Florentine silk industry, and copying manuscripts, all of which linked the convent to Florence as an economic and intellectual centre.

All of these developments and many more are recorded in the *Chronicle*. There were disasters of all sorts, from fires and floods that destroyed records which Sister Niccolini wished she could have as sources for her book, to wars that overwhelmed the convent with refugees. There were mid-level aggravations stemming from rivalries with other religious institutions and from the rigid rules of the Council of Trent. The latter elicited occasional tones of aggravation, though no open complaint, from the usually accommodating Sister Niccolini. There were happy events, such as the miraculous signs said to have occurred with the deaths of some nuns, and the unanimous elections, at least in Sister Niccolini's telling, of extremely capable and saintly abbesses in almost all the elections over the centuries. There were, in addition, the occasional odd developments, of which the most unusual and gender-bending one involved the story of Sister Eugenia Benedetta, who after being unjustly evicted from the convent led an adventurous life as a friar and a male pilgrim who founded a hospital in Jerusalem before returning decades later to Le Murate, where the nuns cared for her in her old age and recorded her story as a testimony of God's marvelous works.

Beautifully translated and admirably framed by an insightful introduction that provides the historical and bibliographic context for the *Chronicle*,

this book is a useful source of information for scholars in many fields as well as an invaluable addition to the primary sources available to students in courses on the Renaissance and early modern periods as well as on gender and religious history more generally.

JUDITH C. BROWN, *Wesleyan University*

Peletier du Mans, Jacques.

***Cœuvres complètes*, sous la direction d'Isabelle Pantin. Tome I, *L'art poétique d'Horace traduit en Vers François — L'Art poétique départi en deux Livres*. Édition critique par Michel Jourde, Jean-Charles Monferran et Jean Vignes, avec la collaboration d'Isabelle Pantin.**

« Textes littéraires de la Renaissance », 7. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011. 510 p. ISBN 9782745321824 (relié) 125 €

La publication de ces deux textes de doctrine poétique de Peletier comble une lacune importante de l'édition savante de textes de la Renaissance. On sait que l'un comme l'autre constitue une étape non négligeable de la pensée théorique : la version de l'*Épître aux Pisons* par laquelle Peletier fait en 1541 son entrée sur la scène éditoriale, avant d'en proposer une nouvelle édition largement amendée en 1545, est la première traduction française d'un texte essentiel pour le renouveau de la langue, de la poésie nationale : c'est peut-être le premier art poétique français ; son épître dédicatoire est tout entière orientée vers un renouveau rendu possible par l'intérêt de François I^{er} pour les Lettres. Son *Art poétique* constitue, quelque quinze ans plus tard (1555), une manière de première synthèse des expériences poétiques les plus modernes ; les *Opuscules* qui accompagnent sa publication, s'ils ne sont pas des exercices où se vérifieraient les principes que l'*Art poétique* énoncerait, n'en sont pas moins un contrepoint indispensable pour saisir combien la poésie, pour Peletier, ne saurait se laisser réduire à un ensemble de sèches codifications et / ou prescriptions. La réforme orthographique dont on sait qu'elle est une des préoccupations de Peletier est ici plus audacieuse que celle qui accompagne la publication de *L'Art poétique d'Horace*.