

STRONG VOICES, WEAK HISTORY

STRONG  
VOICES,  
*Weak History*



Early Women Writers & Canons  
in England, France,  
& Italy

PAMELA JOSEPH BENSON &  
VICTORIA KIRKHAM  
*Editors*

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## *Acknowledgments*

**T**his volume originated in the proceedings of an interdisciplinary conference co-organized by the editors and held at the University of Pennsylvania in March 2000 entitled “Strong Voices, Weak History? Medieval and Renaissance Women in Their National Literary Canons.” We are profoundly indebted to the participants, those in the audience, and all who made the occasion such a stimulating success.

Stuart Curran, director of the University of Pennsylvania Center for Italian Studies, provided fundamental assistance by lending us his most able assistant, Nicola Gentili; giving a major portion of the conference funding; and offering the encouragement of his enthusiasm. For additional financial support, we thank the Department of Romance Languages, the Women’s Studies Program, and the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, along with its associate dean for humanities, Rebecca Bushnell, who graciously inaugurated the conference. Liliane Weissberg, director of the Comparative Literature Program at Penn, donated useful preliminary advice, and she coordinated graduate student help during conference registration. A special word of thanks goes to Richard R. Weiner, dean of arts and sciences at Rhode Island College, and to John J. Salesses, vice president for academic affairs at the college, for their willingness to make the leap of faith that sent significant shared funding to a conference co-organized by one of their faculty members but held afar at another university in another state.

Our greatest practical debt for the conference that made this volume possible is to a silent third partner, Nicola Gentili. In his capacity as assistant to the director of the Center for Italian Studies at Penn, he was responsible for the countless logistical arrangements that made our three-day gathering flow so smoothly. We planned it as a workshop, allowing ample segments of time to discussion, almost all of which Dottor Gentile was able to capture on tape

with his traveling microphone. For a printout of those recorded discussions, 114 typescript pages, we are grateful to Pamela Benson's son, Thomas Benson, who arranged for and assisted with the work of transcribing. Preserving animated conversation that would otherwise have been ephemeral, the transcripts conveyed many insights that we have woven into our introduction to this volume, wherever possible with attributions to individual speakers.

The collected essays and the many fragments of dialogue that have passed from the transcripts into our introduction cannot adequately credit other friends in the community of scholars whose presence was essential in giving our conference its memorable identity. Mary Weitzel Gibbons, Sara S. Poor, and Diana Robin contributed thoughtfully to our dialogue by chairing sessions as respondents and discussion moderators. The participants in our final roundtable, "The Modern Creation of a New Canon," reported on projects of their own or other recent work that makes newly available texts and studies on medieval and early modern women writers. David Wallace described the volume he and Carolyn Dinshaw coedited in his presentation, "Designing Companiate Women, viz., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Albert Rabil Jr. announced that as of March 2000 the translation series he and Margaret King codirect for the University of Chicago Press, "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe," had grown to twenty-seven volumes in print and in production. Since then, as he informed us, another forty-one titles have been approved for publication, making a total of sixty volumes by women and eight by men, translated from Italian, French, Spanish, German, and Latin. Susanne Woods elucidated the theory behind the Brown University Women Writers Project's compilation of its huge database of texts, discussed the potential effect of this resource on canons, and made the audience aware that the project had joined with Oxford University Press to publish a few volumes. Dennis McAuliffe announced his hopes of creating an ambitious database, "A Bio-bibliographic Handbook of Italian Women Writers 1200-1600." Georgianna Ziegler delivered the closing words of the conference, carrying us into the new millennium with a magisterial compilation of Web sites, "Early-Modern Women Online."

The task of transforming the conference proceedings into a coherent volume was greatly assisted by the comments of William Kennedy and an anonymous reader who read the manuscript for the University of Michigan Press and by our editor, Collin Ganio. In the many conversations that went into the planning of the conference and the book, we each as coeditors experienced firsthand the riches yielded by the exchange of information about the differing cultures of medieval and Renaissance Europe. We hope that this volume will benefit others as our joint labor has benefitted us.

# Contents



<i>List of Illustrations</i>	ix
INTRODUCTION	I
WOMEN WRITERS AND THE CANON IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY	14
<i>The Case of Vittoria Colonna</i> Virginia Cox	
A FEMALE TRADITION?	32
<i>Women's Dialogue Writing in Sixteenth-Century France</i> Janet Levarie Smarr	
STRONG VOICES, WEAK MINDS?	58
<i>The Defenses of Eve by Isotta Nogarola and Christine de Pizan, Who Found Themselves in Simone de Beauvoir's Situation</i> Thelma S. Fenster	
THE CANON OF RELIGIOUS LIFE	78
<i>Maria Domitilla Galluzzi and the Rule of St. Clare of Assisi</i> E. Ann Matter	
CHRISTINE DE PIZAN	99
<i>Gender and the New Vernacular Canon</i> Kevin Brownlee	
WOMEN WRITERS IN RENAISSANCE ITALY	121
<i>Courtly Origins of New Literary Canons</i> Fabio Finotti	

THE STIGMA OF ITALY UNDONE <i>Aemilia Lanyer's Canonization of Lady Mary Sidney</i> Pamela Joseph Benson	146
SAPPHO ON THE ARNO <i>The Brief Fame of Laura Battiferra</i> Victoria Kirkham	176
THE PLACE OF FEMALE MYSTICISM IN THE ITALIAN LITERARY CANON Armando Maggi	199
THOMAS BENTLEY'S MONUMENT OF MATRONS <i>The Earliest Anthology of English Women's Texts</i> John N. King	216
THE COLLECTOR'S CABINET <i>Lodovico Domenichi's Gallery of Women</i> Deanna Shemek	239
RECOLLECTING THE RENAISSANCE <i>Luisa Bergalli's Componimenti Poetici (1726)</i> Stuart Curran	263
BAD PRESS <i>Modern Editors versus Early Modern Women Poets</i> <i>(Tullia d'Aragona, Gaspara Stampa, Veronica Franco)</i> Ann Rosalind Jones	287
FASCIST APPROPRIATIONS <i>The Case of Jolanda De Blasi's Le scrittrici italiane</i> Lina Insana	314
A WOMAN FOR ALL SEASONS <i>The Reinvention of Anne Askew</i> Elaine V. Beilin	341
<i>Contributors</i>	365
<i>Index</i>	369

## Illustrations

1. Title-page border, from Thomas Bentley,  
*The Monument of Matrons* (1582). 219
2. “The Second Lamp of Virginity,” from Thomas Bentley,  
*The Monument of Matrons* (1582). 220
3. “The Third Lamp of Virginity,” from Thomas Bentley,  
*The Monument of Matrons* (1582). 221
4. “The Apotheosis of Catherine Parr,” from Thomas Bentley,  
*The Monument of Matrons* (1582). 223
5. Alessandro Bonvicino (Il Moretto), oil on canvas, *Salome*.  
Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo, Brescia. 293
6. *Portrait of Collatino Collalto*, engraving (1737). 301
7. Supposed *Portrait of Gaspara Stampa*, engraving (1738). 302
8. Benedetto Caliari, oil on canvas, *The Founding of the*  
*Casa del Soccorso* (ca. 1597). Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. 306
9. *Portrait of Veronica Franco*, engraved frontispiece (ca. 1575). 307