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CLORINDA DONATO, *The Life and Legend of Catterina Vizzani. Sexual Identity, Science and Sensationalism in Eighteenth-Century Italy and England*, Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment, Liverpool University Press 2020, 347 pp.

Catterina Vizzani (Rome 1716-Siena 1743) was a young Roman woman who became famous, after her death, for living life as man. In her adolescence, she adopted male clothing and the male identity of Giovanni Bordoni: in this way, she became a male in spirit, deed and body. She lived the most complete physical change possible in the Eighteenth century.

In her identity as Bordoni, Catterina Vizzani worked for some years at the service of the noble Cavalier Francesco Maria Pucci in Tuscany. Bordoni became widely known for the love affairs with women and had the reputation of a seducer. In 1743, Bordoni decided to escape to Rome with the niece of the vicar of Ripafratta, in order to celebrate their marriage. The couple was intercepted

along the way, and Bordoni was mortally wounded. On the deathbed, Bordoni confessed to the prioress Maria Colomba Costalda the real identity as a woman, asking to be buried in female clothing. The famous anatomist and surgeon Giovanni Bianchi (Rimini 1693-1775) examined the body and wrote a medical novella; the rewritten English version was by John Cleland (Kingston upon Thames 1709-London 1789).

This volume considers Bianchi's 1744 Italian account of Vizzani/Bordoni, published for the first time together with a modern English translation, making available to an English-speaking audience the scientific exploration conducted by the Italian physician. Also Cleland's 1751 "embellished" version of the story is reproduced here, considering the divergent narration with Bianchi's text.

Analyzing these two stories, the author Clorinda Donato considers the motivation of Bianchi and Cleland to narrate the life of Vizzani/Bordoni in the European context of the Eighteenth century, with a special attention on scientific research, social

practice and cultural norms: «Championing the emergence of the individual subject, Giovanni Bianchi elucidates, first through Catterina Vizzani's life story, lived and narrated in both its male and female presentations (i.e. as both Catterina Vizzani and Giovanni Bordoni), and then through their death and autopsy, the autonomy of both persona and body to elude, even in death, any clear-cut determination about the nature of Catterina. John Cleland, instead, turns the Catterina Vizzani story into an object lesson of depravity and vice, denying the subject any agency at all by subordinating this particularly ambiguous subject to the rules of propriety and the strict codes of gendered behaviour, and its consequences in Britain» (pag. 18).

Clorinda Donato is professor of French and Italian at California State University, Long Beach, where she holds the George L. Graziadio Chair for Italian Studies and directs the Clorinda Donato Center for Global Romance Languages and Translation Studies. She is member of the American Association of Teachers of Italian. She is an eighteenth-century scholar who researches knowledge transfer through translation and genre adaptation in encyclopedic compilations. She also works on gender in medical and literary accounts, as evident in the comparative evaluation of the medical aspects in the texts by Bianchi and Cle-

land: «One of the most striking features of Bianchi's narrative is the mise en scène of the autopsy performed on Catterina's corpse at the end of the novella. Not only has Bianchi dug deep in the far-reaching annals of autopsy and dissection history on the Italian peninsula, particularly in northern Italy, but, through this rewriting, he has succeeded in reiterating the importance of autopsy and *seeing* in anatomical and medical work, parting ways once and for all with any vestiges of Aristotelian and text-based studies of the human body. Bianchi's autopsy of Vizzani's body thoroughly dismisses any consideration whatsoever of transcendence, anchoring the reader in the reality of the body, at once Catterina's and Giovanni's. It is at this juncture that Bianchi's and Cleland's texts part ways. Cleland could not and would not read the medical portion of the text through the prism of medical science, in part, due to his own lack of training and the widely divergent stakes in the discipline of medical science that each man, Bianchi and Cleland, held. For Cleland, the autopsy of Catterina allows for an even greater emphasis on strange, depraved Italian practices. He thus conflates the medical with the sexual according to the codes constituting the gaze that the British trained on the Italians» (pp. 35-36).

The adventurous story of Catterina Vizzani is very interesting also for the scholars of theater history. First of all, for the protagonist: there is

a woman of humble origins who cleverly built a male character and used it in everyday life. In this way, she was able to have an individual freedom that otherwise would not have been possible in such historical period. Secondly, because we could see a reminiscence of Vizzani/Bordoni in Beatrice Rasponi, a chief character of the famous comedy *The Servant of Two Masters* (*Il servitore di due padroni*) by Carlo Goldoni. As is well known, the play opens with the arrival in Venice of Beatrice Rasponi disguised as a man and under a false identity. She says that her name is Fedrigo Rasponi (her died brother) and wants to marry Clarice, Pantalone's daughter. In the end, after a thousand ups and downs, the deception of Beatrice/Federigo is discovered and her courage is praised. We do not know if Goldoni had heard of Catterina Vizzani, or if he had read Bianchi's text. The interesting volume by Clorinda Donato also opens to this possibility of research and interpretation.

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