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Joann DellaNeve, *Unlikely Exemplars: Reading and Writing beyond the Italian Canon in French Renaissance Poetry*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009. 328 pp. Notes, bibliography. \$57.50. U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-87413-055-3.

Review by Ann Rosalind Jones, Smith College

In *Unlikely Exemplars*, JoAnn DellaNeve, the author of a previous study of sixteenth-century lyric, *Song and Counter-Song: Scève's 'Délie' and Petrarch's 'Rime'* (French Forum, 1983), returns to the long-standing issue of imitation, the re-use of work of earlier writers by later ones, which was considered an admirable feature of Renaissance poetry, rather than plagiarism, or only rarely so, until the seventeenth century. DellaNeve analyzes imitation in the Pléiade poets' use of Italian sources by looking closely at the lyrics of Mellin de Saint-Gelais, Joachim du Bellay, Pierre de Ronsard, and a pair of poets she calls "lesser lights" in the title of her eighth chapter, Jean-Antoine de Baïf and Olivier de Magny. Her purpose is to show how the French poets drew upon the anthologies of Italian poems assembled throughout the sixteenth century by editors working for the Venetian publisher Gabriele Giolito. Giolito, beginning with *Rime diverse di molti eccellentissimi auttori nuovamente raccolte, Libro primo*, brought out seven collections of multi-authored poems between 1545 and 1549, most of them expanded and republished a second time. DellaNeve has combed these anthologies carefully and also paid attention to those published by rivals of the Giolito firm, such as Giovanni Ruscelli and the Manutius clan.

Predictably, the central focus in these anthologies was Petrarch. His poems, presented repeatedly in earlier and contemporary editions of the *Canzoniere*, were models for most of Giolito's poets. Even those who remained anonymous clearly belonged among the performers of the post-Petrarchan discourse that dominated European love poetry from the fifteenth through the seventeenth century. DellaNeve studies Ronsard's copy of one of the anthologies in order to analyze which poems he marked for later consideration, and her comments on Italian collections of Petrarchan conceits, commonplace books and rhyming dictionaries contribute substantially to her picture of the poetic props assembled to facilitate imitation.

DellaNeve characterizes the use value that the canonized French poets gave to the hundreds of texts in these anthologies as "fragmentary exemplarity"—the imitation not of entire poems but of lines or conceits that could be framed with different material in a new sonnet. She identifies recommendations for this kind of selective borrowing in the many pre-Pléiade discussions of imitation in Renaissance *artes poeticae*, including those of Petrarch himself in his letters, Erasmus, and Poliziano, whose understandings of *imitatio* were themselves drawn from such ancient writers as Cicero and Quintilian. DellaNeve identifies three familiar metaphors that govern these discussions: first, the trope of the bee collecting nectar from many flowers to make honey; second, the simile of the poet picking flowers to weave into a wreath; third, the formula of digestion, of gathering up and eating the remains of a banquet. One way this third kind of imitation was conceptualized put the emphasis on the crumbs of such a banquet as tidbits from lesser-known writers—not the giants of oratory or poetry, who could overwhelm the young writer, but the minor writers who remained on the outer rim rather than in the deepest recesses of the mind reserved for the famous writers of the past—Virgil, in Petrarch's case. This line of

thought is central to DellaNeva's focus on what she calls "minor model imitation"—the apprenticeship of a young poet either to the early, less elevated genres used by a famous model or to minor writers whose strengths would be more accessible to the beginner.

DellaNeva's method of tracing the French poets' use of Giolito sources is, as one might expect, a close reading of poems in relation to their Italian sources. Increasingly toward the end of the book, she identifies complicated kinds of imitation: one Italian poet is following an anthology source himself; a French poet has based part of a poem on that source; a succeeding French poet's "imitation with a difference" operates at a second or third remove, playing off a succession of Italian and French poets' revisions of the anthology original. However, two general patterns emerging from these analyses present a challenge to her argument for merely partial imitation: formal repetition throughout an entire sonnet, as when Mellin de Saint-Gellais follows the correlative form, increasingly elaborated in the anthologies, using the *vers rapportés* of a sonnet by Pietro Barignano throughout an entire sonnet of his own; and such close repetition of the thematic content of a predecessor's entire sonnet that it is better called translation than imitation, as in Du Bellay's version of a sonnet by Sansovino with only minute variations.

In addition, DellaNeva's microscopic comparisons of Italian sources and French variants (she looks at approximately 125 poems) are cumulatively so detailed as to challenge any but the most devoted reader, partly because she organizes her four longest chapters around individual poets rather than general tendencies in French-Italian intertextuality. She does call attention to some interesting larger patterns: the French poets' relocation of place names and names of rivers in accordance with their own geography; their complex splicing of two or three source poems into a new sonnet; their double appeal to audiences, first to readers thinking they were seeing fresh new poems by a compatriot (though would any Frenchman able to read a *canzoniere* be likely to read so naively?), second to connoisseurs appreciating the gymnastics of double and triple imitation across the Italian/French divide and back again.

The weakness of DellaNeva's book is her uncritical adherence to a concept of the uncanonized writer as lesser, second-tier, merely imitative, minor because inept. Her attitude toward the anthologies is that they contain the work of second-rate poets whose obscurity must be proof of their inadequacy. Such dismissals are based on un-theorized, scattershot assessments, and they diminish the writing of the Frenchmen who used them. When DellaNeva quotes from Du Bellay's *Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoys*, she comments on passages in which he clearly defines his criteria for poetry worth imitating: *copia, varietas*, naturalness, the use of a style and genre appropriate to the poet's skill. She also appreciates the inclusiveness of the Greek anthology, continually expanded from 60 BCE to the eleventh century, to whose readers "it would have seemed natural . . . for a lyric anthology to be expansive and generous in its editorial practices rather than exhibiting the restricting, 'canon-ratifying' nature that modern readers have often come to respect" (p. 101).

But DellaNeva herself has no such explicit criteria or generosity. The Italian source poems, meriting only the "minor model imitation" on which she argues that the French poets based their stronger, canon-worthy work, are "third- or fourth-rate at best," repetitious, unremarkable and uneven; they risked falling into "total oblivion" without the Pléiade poets to rescue them. Of what, however, does the inadequacy of Giolito's poets consist? He included Ariosto, Bembo, Annibal Caro, the spectacularly skillful Venetian Domenico Venier, and Giovanni Gesualdo, the editor of Petrarch. By the early sixteenth century, thanks partly to Bembo himself, the Italian canon was dominated by Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch. But the relentless canonization of the Tuscan trio was far from blinding Italian editors and readers to serious lyric poets whose popularity, precisely, is attested by the multiplicity and republication of the anthologies on which DellaNeva bases her study. Two anthologies published during the Giolito era consisted

solely of texts by women poets, including Vittoria Colonna, Gaspara Stampa and Chiara Matraini, all of whom have recently been edited, translated and recognized as powerful writers who radically revised the Petrarchan tradition. Similarly, it is highly likely that some of Giolito's anonymous poems will eventually be identified as the work of well-known writers who had reasons of one kind or another to prefer not being named.

Another way to define the problem is that DellaNeva's literary history is frozen in time. The fact that many of the Italian poets printed in Giolito's anthologies are rarely read in the twenty-first century is no proof of their lack of appeal in the sixteenth. Canons change: assessments are revised, criteria become outdated. In fact, the critique of canon-formation has been central to literary studies since the mid-seventies. DellaNeva's demonstration that Renaissance theories of composition recommended the use of models less demanding than the major figures of the local tradition could be persuasive without her off-hand characterization of Giolito's poets as writers of "silly love songs"—an allusion that reminds us that the canonization of Paul McCartney's oeuvre is proceeding apace in our time.

Readers will learn a great deal from *Unlikely Exemplars* about Renaissance theories of poetic composition, publishing, and the manipulation of Italian sources by French writers of the sixteenth century. But they may also learn that insightful analysis of such processes need not depend on the ahistorical dismissal of what we might more productively recognize as pre- or re-canonized writers.

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