

Samuel Richardson. *Lettere su Clarissa. Scrittura privata e romanzo nell'“Epistolario” di Samuel Richardson*, ed. and trans. Donatella Montini. Viterbo: Sette Città, 2009. 300pp. 16€. ISBN 978-88-7853-143-7.

This book is the first selection of Samuel Richardson's *Letters* to be published in Italian and comes at a moment when renewed Italian interest in *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, novels well known in translation since the eighteenth century, is being demonstrated by the appearance of monographs on one or the other every two or three years over the last three decades. This is not so, however, with Richardson's many letters, only two of which had been published previously (to Lady Elchin, 22 September 1755, and to Mrs Donellan, 22 February 1752) in an anthology of translations of British eighteenth-century theories about the novel.

Donatella Montini presents a group of 31 letters drawn partly from Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Samuel Richardson's Correspondence* (London: Richard Phillips, 1804) and partly from John Carroll's *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), which she has checked in some cases against the manuscripts at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and translated into Italian in a carefully annotated edition. As stated in the title, these are letters chosen from the many discussing *Clarissa* over the period 1744–57, some sent by Richardson while composing the first parts of the first edition and others in the following years while working on the other parts and on the second and third editions. This group includes all the most important letters concerning the problems he addressed and solved while engaged in “making a new Species of Writing,” as he put it in a well-known phrase repeated in two of the letters found here.

Montini also presents a few other relevant items, such as the eulogy on correspondence (to Sophia Westcomb, 1746), the biographical letter containing information about his father, his own relationship to letter writing and what occasioned his writing of *Pamela* (to Johannes Stinstra, 2 June 1753), and the letter on his everyday life as an old man, feeling slighted by young ladies with totally different hours from his for sleep and conversation (to Hester Mulso, 15 August 1755). Finally, there is the letter of 19 November 1757 to Lady Bradshaigh, where he speaks of having bound copies of their correspondence and hints at the possibility of publishing them.

Translating what she describes as “this often convoluted and jerky non-fictional prose, so focused on itself as to suggest that the writer is addressing himself first and foremost” must have been hard for Montini, not least because of her decision to “maintain the long sentence construction and discursive emphasis” while at the same time

“taking decisions so as to aid the modern reader and domesticating the text above all as regards punctuation marks” (52). The overall result is a success despite some occasional slips, which are, however, inevitable in all translations. What is involved in this case is not so much content as lexical accuracy. Examples include the translation of “Early Risers” as *mattutine* instead of *mattiniere* (83), “Regret” as *rimpianto* instead of *rammarico* (“yet Seven Volumes are, to my Regret, made of it,” [75]), and “Diffidence of one’s own Abilities” as “*timidezza nei confronti delle proprie abilità*” instead of “*insicurezza nei confronti delle proprie capacità*” (95).

Montini’s accompanying notes constitute a very good guide for the scholarly reader, containing information on the correspondents, the debate on epistolary writing, narrative tempo, and other works by Richardson or by the other authors mentioned.

The 48 pages of Montini’s introduction, which tackle a whole series of questions regarding the nature of the familiar letter and what it meant for Richardson, constitute a fine piece of scholarship. She begins by discussing the meaning and aspects of the epistolary “contract” and its eighteenth-century relation to conversation, quoting also from letters not present in this selection, and then expands on the great increase in letter writing during the eighteenth century with a whole variety of aims and contents, from philosophical letters to letters conveying scientific or political information, letters on matters of practical knowledge such as agriculture and botany, travel letters, letters on daily occurrences and, of course, familiar letters. In order to show the epistemologically hybrid character of the letter, being at the same time an epitome of the private sphere and a means for the public exchange of information and knowledge, Montini does not confine herself to Richardson’s *Correspondence* but also quotes from the letters of Samuel Johnson and Alexander Pope.

At this point, Montini sets what she calls the phenomenon of the epistolarization of culture in the context of the evolution of the English language, described by Carey McIntosh as becoming “more polite, more gentrified, and more written,” and emphasizes the vanishing of traditional orality in the eighteenth century and the increase in written communication.

The introduction is, however, focused primarily on the subject matter of Richardson’s letters with extensive quotations from many not included in this collection: to Aaron Hill and his daughters, Hester Mulso, Ann Dees, Lady Bradshaigh, George Cheyne, Lady Echlin, Stephen Duck, William Warburton, James Leake, Thomas Edwards, Mrs Richardson, and others. As to Richardson’s project of publishing his correspondence, Montini quotes not only from the above-mentioned letter to Lady Bradshaigh but also from one to

Thomas Edwards (2 January 1755) in which he speaks of selecting and revising his letters.

Montini also provides information about the corpus of Richardson's correspondence and where the manuscripts are to be found with a brief discussion of the existing editions, from Anna Laetitia Barbauld's to the monumental ongoing publication of all Richardson's extant letters commenced at the beginning of 1990 by Peter Sabor and Tom Keymer for Cambridge University Press.

This first Italian annotated edition of a selection of Richardson's letters is a work of sound scholarship, and the introduction proves rewarding for students and specialists alike.

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Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan. *Les Deux cousins: Histoire véritable*, éd. Vittorio Fortunati. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007. 184pp. 40€. ISBN 978-7453-1548-9.

En 1790, Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan fit paraître à Paris un conte oriental. Dans la ville de Chiraz, capitale de la Perse, le petit-fils d'un mufti reçoit en naissant de funestes présents. Nanti par une méchante fée de qualités supérieures (génie, grand cœur et franchise), il apprendra à ses dépens ce qu'il peut en coûter d'être trop bien né. Grâce aux soins de Vittorio Fortunati, on possède aujourd'hui une première réédition de cette « histoire véritable », où être élevé dans le sérail condamne à l'injustice et à la persécution.

Gabriel Sénac de Meilhan ne fut ni calife ni vizir, mais il connut très bien, en revanche, la cour de Versailles. Fils du premier médecin de Louis xv, il fut parmi les plus prompts représentants de la noblesse à faire leurs malles une fois que fut votée l'abolition des privilèges. Avant que *L'Émigré*, son œuvre maîtresse, ne relatât le long exil des « victimes errantes de la Révolution » (*L'Émigré*, éd. M. Delon [Paris: Gallimard, 2004], 31), l'homme de lettres livra, avec *Les Deux cousins*, le récit des mésaventures d'un jeune Aladin jeté par des revers de fortune sur les routes de Damas et de Bagdad. Au terme d'un périple aux allures tantôt sentimentales, tantôt utopiques, le héros rentre au bercail, où un nouveau tour de la fée qui l'avait jadis dangereusement doté lui fournit l'occasion de faire valoir son mérite et ses talents.