

L'autore assente
L'anonimato nell'editoria italiana del Settecento

Lodovica Braidà
(Rome: Laterza, 2019)
[ISBN 9788858136188]

ANN THOMSON
European University Institute

This book by the distinguished Italian book historian Lodovica Braidà brings together a collection of studies which, as she indicates on p. VIII, analyse some significant cases of the adoption of anonymity by Italian eighteenth-century authors. However, the studies go beyond the sole question of anonymity as they look at the question of authorship from diverse angles; the central question is the construction of authorship in Italy in the eighteenth century, a period which saw important developments in the Italian book trade, particularly during the second half of the century. An interesting aspect of this investigation concerns the general lack of reflection on intellectual property in Italy at the time. These studies draw on the book history practiced both in Italy and elsewhere, together with comparisons with other countries, notably England and France, to bring out the complexity of the question. Often considered to be imposed by censorship, anonymity is here shown to be the result of a much more complicated range of elements including the type of work. The analysis is based on a sometimes detailed study of the publication process and the book market, including the function of false addresses, and is also intended to illustrate the long process which eventually led to the recognition of copyright. Thus the 'absent author' in the book's title is not only intended to refer to the absence of a name on the title page, but also the author's absence in the commercial decisions taken by the printers or booksellers.

After an Introduction which sets out the aims of the volume and indicates the variety of possible reasons for the choice of anonymity and its complex function, the first chapter investigates the ambiguity of the 'author function', to use Foucault's expression. It gives a fascinating overview of the situation in eighteenth-century Italy and the position of the author, including advice about publication, before moving on to discuss the complexity involved in the question of anonymity, which is often purely formal, as the name of the author was an open secret in certain circles. As Lodovica Braidà points out, anonymity can take different forms, including false names, as well as dedications or accompanying letters which can be understood by those in the know. Here she often draws on the correspondence of well-known writers and provides a

variety of different examples of publication, in Italy and elsewhere, to bring out the complexity of the position of the author in the process of book production and commercialisation. The example of Alfieri underscores the low status of authors and the difficulty they experienced in affirming their rights in the face of printers and booksellers.

The following chapters constitute case studies, the first one concerning travel accounts, a popular eighteenth-century genre. As Braida shows, travel accounts could differ considerably and represent a variety of formats, and their authors did not always pay attention to the same aspects of the countries visited; these differences could influence the choice of anonymity. The study of four different travellers who chose anonymity but whose identity is known (Algarotti, Bianconi, Caimo and Angiolini), together with the publication history of their accounts, enables her to bring out the diversity of cases. This chapter is followed by two studies of very different cases: Giuseppe Parini and Carlo Goldoni. Giuseppe Parini's poems *Il Mezzogiorno* and *Il Mattino*, published anonymously, were republished with a continuation, *La Sera*, by another poet and without his permission. The reconstruction of the complicated story of the different anonymous editions and the restitution of the true author is very different from the history, studied through the publication of three editions of his plays, of how Goldoni attempted to construct his status as author and to keep control of the transition from stage to page, with no question of anonymity. Here the use of his correspondence reveals the true story of his dispute with the original printer and the ensuing court case. It clearly shows how this episode as a stage, for the moment isolated, in the struggle for copyright. Despite the differences relating to anonymity, both cases illustrate, through a detailed study of different editions of their works, the complicated relationship between author and printers and the difficulty experienced by the authors when attempting to establish control over the circulation of their works.

The last chapter, devoted to the novel, generally seen as an inferior genre by 'men of letters' and as more suitable for women, looks at a different aspect of authorship. Novels were often published anonymously or presented as translated from the English or the French, often with false addresses. The study of the paratext often reveals a lot. This chapter is somewhat less original than the preceding ones as it discusses aspects which are better known, but it is usefully complements the others by dealing with this genre which became so important in the second half of the eighteenth century.

This book constitutes an important contribution to the history of authorship by showing how book history, and the detailed study of the preparation and circulation of different editions, throws light also on the construction of authorship and the struggle to establish the recognition of intellectual property. It is a pity, however, in view of the large amount of information provided in the footnotes, that it does not include a separate bibliography; this would have been useful both for the bibliographical information on the editions studied and the abundant secondary literature which is cited throughout the book.