

## In Honor of St. Catherine on her feast day, 2009

Neri di Landoccio dei Pagliaresi was a melancholic poet who met Catarina in 1370 and became her first secretary, constantly accompanying her in all her travels. We have a letter where the saint accepts him as a son, on the condition that he conform himself to Jesus crucified. From that time, her letters to Neri are a complete pedagogy for the untrustful and fearfully worried in religious matters. Self-love must be eliminated because it, like a cloud, hinders seeing the way of truth, which is the abyss of God's love. The brevity of these writings, akin to flyers which are let to fall at intervals like precise doses for a melancholy disciple who needs constant prodding and not a lengthy and tedious instruction, is evidence of the careful nurturing of a wise mamma. What follows is part of the poet's praiseful "capitolo" of Catarina composed when she died in 1380, a mournful moan:<sup>1</sup>

O sposa eletta a lo beato scanno  
o nome che a nomar il cor mi scoppi  
o mio ristoro d'ogni grave danno.  
Dimmi, che farò io poi che s'è doppi  
e diversi dolori il tuo partire  
nel tribulato cor tanto rintoppi?  
Dimmi chi mi terrà dal mal finire  
dimmi chi guarderà me dagl'inganni  
dimmi chi guiderà me per salire?  
Chi mi consolerà più negli affani  
chi mi dirà ormai: tu non va' bene,  
chi mi lusingherà che non mi danni?

Oh bride chosen for the blessed height  
oh name which when named my heart bursts  
oh my recovery from all grave harm.  
Tell me, what shall I do when such double  
and diverse sorrows your departure  
to the troubled heart so much befall?  
Tell me who will keep me from a bad end  
tell me who shall guard me from deceits  
tell me who will guide me so that I come (back) up?  
Who will console me anymore in my worries  
who will now tell me: you're not doing so well,  
who will flatter me without causing me harm?

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<sup>1</sup> I write the saint's name as is found in her letters and not as in modern Italian (Caterina). This introduction (with slight changes) is based on that of Fr. Umberto Meattini, under whose care the saint's letters were compiled in the following edition: *Le lettere* (Milano: Edizioni Paoline, 1993<sup>5</sup>), 674-675; the extract of the poem is on 676, the translation is E.G. Chávez's.