

Dava Sobel. *Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith and Love*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Pp. 368. Paper \$17.00.

In *Galileo's Daughter*, Dava Sobel not only offers an account of the professional accomplishments and works of Galileo, but also a glimpse into his personal life and familial dynamics. Using letters written by Galileo's daughter to him creates an intimate portrait of their relationship and the love they shared. Never intended for public viewing, the letters reveal his daughter's personal thoughts on topics ranging from the mundane, to new discoveries and scientific theories. Sobel, a prolific scientific writer whose work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Discover*, *Life*, and *The New Yorker*, also shows that Virginia supported her father and remained devoted to him until her untimely, heartbreaking death at age thirty-three.

It is at the University of Padua where Galileo met Marina Gamba, with whom he had two daughters and a son. For reasons not fully explained, Galileo did not marry his mistress, thereby rendering all of his children illegitimate. At the age of thirteen, Galileo sent his daughter Virginia and her younger sister Livia to live at the San Matteo Convent in Arcetri. The author reiterates the prevailing view among scholars that he probably did so because he saw few marriage opportunities for them due to their illegitimate status. This reason is debatable, the author points out, since it was possible to legitimize children as Galileo eventually did with his son Vincenzo. Additionally, it was the custom of the time to send young girls to convents for their education. Both sisters dedicated their lives to the Catholic Church and took their vows. Sobel's close reading of Virginia's letters thus also offers a revealing glimpse into the lives of medieval women and social culture. In addition, *Galileo's Daughter* will be of interest to those interested in Galileo's association with the Catholic Church. His daughter's letters show that he did not view the Church as his enemy, since he willingly gave his daughters over to the institution. He also continued to provide support to them and by association, the order in which they resided.

Sobel translated the surviving 124 letters written in Italian by Virginia between 1623 and 1634. Selections from the letters are included in the appendix of the book, allowing readers access to the sources while still following Sobel's interpretative narrative flow. Unfortunately there are no letters known to have survived from Galileo to his daughter. The author speculates that they were either buried or burned by the mother abbess upon Virginia's death, perhaps fearing to be accused of harboring the writings of a heretic.

Much has been written about the scientific work of Galileo, but very little has been published concerning his personal life, especially from a first-person perspective. These letters were known to exist by scholars, but were not previously published to this extent in conjunction with a biography. Sobel's translation and interpretation of Galileo's daughter's letters offers an interesting and humanizing portrait of the loving relationship he had with Virginia, who emerges as both nurturing and intelligent. Sobel combines Virginia's writings with well-known historical facts to describe a relationship that endured throughout their lifetime and well past their deaths, as they were buried in the same tomb.

John Fritz
