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Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe by Christine Meek

Review by: Allison Levy

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ideas from More's other writings, scripture, the Church Fathers, and recent biographers that help the reader explore the religious and political thoughts of the day.

The only weakness in this volume is found in the "modernizing" of the Rogers text. One is left to ask a simple question: if modernization of the English has taken place, why is there a need for a glossary? Modernizing the language into twenty-first-century standards would broaden the appeal of the text while still being true to More. Admittedly, this is a minor flaw that will not prevent More enthusiasts from enjoying the work. In the end, de Silva has done an admirable job. He has presented a More who is faithful unto death, not so much to the Catholic Church and the papacy, but rather to himself and to his own perceptions of Christ.

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Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe. Ed. Christine Meek. Dublin: Four Courts, 2000. 230 pp. \$55. ISBN 1851824235.

The ten essays in this volume, which were originally presented at a conference held in Trinity College Dublin in 1998, take as a common starting point a passage from Jacob Burckhardt's seminal work of 1860, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. His infamous assertion that "women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men," is indeed worthy of criticism. Already in 1977 Joan Kelly, engaging directly with the out-of-step claim Burckhardt had made about the virtual equating of women and men, asked "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Kelly's groundbreaking essay sparked a provocative debate both on the status of women within Renaissance culture and on feminist interpretations of that history.

Stepping forward, the essays presented in this volume offer some of the most recent contributions *and* challenges to those engagements. That is to say, the authors follow in the methodological footsteps of Kelly; and yet, rather than reiterate her denouncement of Burckhardt and "enter into sterile debates about parity," they, instead, "are concerned with what particular women or groups of women did or how they saw themselves or were seen by others." The essays are concerned with women's experiences from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries not only in Italy but, refreshingly, also in Ireland, Holland, and France. Similarly appreciated is the interdisciplinary approach of the volume with contributions from art historians, historians, and literary scholars. Most promising is the number of contributions by young scholars, whose excitement and enthusiasm for this project sets them off on the right foot.

Catherine Lawless's essay is concerned with the cult of St. Anne, a patron saint of Florence, and the problem of her surprisingly infrequent representation in late medieval and Renaissance Florence. Lawless relies on literary and visual records, as well as on socioeconomic studies of widowhood, to explain the discrepancy between Italian and the more numerous Northern European portrayals of St. Anne. In her essay, Christine Meek examines magic and witchcraft in Lucca during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Relying on a number of previously unpublished documents, Meek presents a series of cases involving a unique practitioner-client relationship. She argues that a wide variety of persons—male or female, simple or educated, high or low social status—might have recourse to magic as a means of achieving their desires. Especially welcome is her examination of marginalized women, such as servants and slaves.

Moving away from the situation in medieval Italy, the next three essays in the collection provide valuable information on powerful women in Ireland. Bernadette Williams,

also taking as her focus the topic of sorcery, offers fresh insight into the well-known 1324 witchcraft trial of Alice Kyteler, contextualizing the case within both Irish and witchcraft prosecution history. Williams reads Kyteler as an early entrepreneur, a successful business-woman, whose strategic choices made during widowhood (she had at least four husbands), resulted in a marked accumulation of wealth and influence. Elizabeth McKenna takes as her focus the understudied topic of female patronage in late medieval Ireland. Relying upon original documents and surviving artifacts, she is able to present the reader with a new look at Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women's roles as patrons of the visual arts. These women, most often acting in conjunction with husbands or sons, but also acting independently, were involved in an active patronage system, commissioning works for churches and religious institutions and, less commonly, for secular buildings. Mary O'Dowd offers a critical examination of the legal discrepancies of widows in early modern Ireland. Ideally, protected under English law, Irish women were able to gain control of dower rights upon their widowhood. However, the law could be modified, and often was, according to evolving political and religious conditions in Ireland. For example, widows whose husbands were convicted of rebellion or whose husbands were Catholic, were denied dower rights, resulting in an uncertain or ambiguous social and legal position for widows, as well as, O'Dowd suggests, undermining patriarchal principles.

Sacha Fegan's essay is concerned with representations of prostitutes in seventeenth-century Dutch painting. She considers the various attitudes of Dutch society toward prostitution by drawing upon legal and literary records, contemporary accounts, and the paintings themselves. Within the visual records under consideration, she variously reads the depictions as moralistic, straightforward, or even ambiguous. Beyond an examination of subject matter, she also offers valuable insight into the placement of such pictures and their intended audience. Francesca Medioli studies the unequal enforcement of *clausura*, or the enclosure of nuns. She calls attention to the introduction of the decree by Pope Boniface VIII at the end of the thirteenth century and its application after the Council of Trent, suggesting that this decision was made by a small group of male theologians for gender-specific reasons. For example, Medioli argues that this hasty measure reflects the contemporary opinion that women were weak and in need of enclosure; male religious, by contrast, were not subject to these restrictions.

The last three essays focus on women's experiences in seventeenth-century France. Carol Baxter examines the attitudes toward the body by a group of French nuns at the convent of Port-Royal. Members of the community observed strict enclosure, endured punishment, wore rough clothing, practiced abstinence and moderate fasting, and accepted chronic illness and even death. Baxter suggests that their daily experiences, and especially their attitudes toward the body, were liberating rather than constraining. Susanne Reid's essay explores the role of women as mothers in seventeenth-century France by examining both literary and social examples of motherhood. Her essay traces what she sees as the politicization of motherhood at that time, with recurring moral themes of containment and confinement. In the last essay of the volume, Derval Conroy discusses two plays of the second half of the seventeenth century, both of which take as their subject female sovereignty. In each drama, the female characters are presented as virtuous and courageous rulers while the male characters are portrayed as weak and cruel. Conroy reads this treatment as ambiguous however, insofar as these dramas end with either defeat or death for the female rulers. She reads this ambiguity, in turn, as empowering to the female rulers, who, nonetheless, die nobly.

All of the essays in this interdisciplinary collection offer fresh insight into the ways in which we read women's various experiences from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. It is a provocative volume, covering such diverse geographies as Italy, France, Holland, and Ireland. *Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* is, indeed, a step in the right direction.

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The Italian Reformation of the Sixteenth Century and the Diffusion of Renaissance Culture: A Bibliography of the Secondary Literature (ca. 1750–1997).

Comp. John Tedeschi and James M. Lattis; intro. by Massimo Firpo. Modena:

Franco Cosimo Panini, 2000. lxiii + 1047 pp. Lit. 300 ISBN 8876869786.

For the past thirty-five years, practically everyone embarking on a study of "heresy" and Inquisition in Italy has consulted early and often with John Tedeschi. As acknowledgments in their books and articles attest, he has generously furnished guidance that at the very least facilitated their research and in many cases, including mine, made it possible for them to pursue scholarly careers. Those who have visited him at his workplace (first the Newberry Library; then, until his retirement, the Department of Special Collections, University of Wisconsin–Madison) or his farm in southwestern Wisconsin have been able both to pick his brain and to inspect his ever-expanding bibliographical files, comprising references to virtually everything published on these subjects since the mid-eighteenth century.

Now Tedeschi's famous bibliography has formally entered the public domain. As the title of this massive volume indicates, he has always concerned himself not only with the Reformation on the Italian peninsula but also with the cultural work that Italian exiles *religionis causa* conducted north of the Alps. Through their efforts, texts on numerous subjects in various genres—among them many which could not safely be discussed, let alone published, in Counter-Reformation Italy—became an integral part of the European cultural heritage. These include *editiones principes* of works by Italians (Dante's *De monarchia* and Paolo Sarpi's *History of the Council of Trent*, for example) and Latin editions of writings by Italians and northerners (Francesco Guicciardini's *History of Italy*, Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the writings of Guillaume Budé, and John Cheke's treatise on Greek pronunciation, among others). Thanks to Giacomo Castelvetro, Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* and Giovanni Battista Guarini's *Il pastor fido* appeared for the first time in England. By preparing translations, furthermore, Italian exiles expanded significantly the range of readership for such works as Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* and Georg Agricola's *De re metallica*.

With technical assistance from James M. Lattis, Tedeschi entered the contents of his note cards into the computer, organizing the 6,429 entries under seven broad headings: Sources (modern editions and anthologies of primary texts), Bibliography (library catalogues, descriptions of collections, historiographical surveys, review articles, and sketches of historians in the field), General Studies, Personages, Places, Theological and Intellectual Currents, and Special Topics (eight subdivisions, including printing, censorship and indexes of prohibited books, Inquisition, the *Beneficio di Cristo*, and Nicodemism). In each category and subcategory, entries are arranged alphabetically by authors' surnames. Cross-references permit users to navigate purposefully in this *mare magnum*; succinct annotations enable them to steer around items of little or no relevance to their research. Should they require a historiographical introduction to the terrain covered in the bibliography, they may choose to start by reading Massimo Firpo's long essay at the beginning.

A thought-experiment will demonstrate how very useful this bibliography is. Sup-