

Brian Richardson. *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*.

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This book is a complement to the author's earlier *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470–1600*. In *Print Culture* the emphasis is on the new and crucial role editors played in the production of published works in the vernacular using their power to shape and package texts — medieval canonical authors such as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, as well as new classics, such as Ariosto's *Furioso* — to determine their reception. Florence and Venice, the most important centers of publishing in the Italian Renaissance, loom large in Richardson's earlier study.

In *Manuscript Culture* the focus shifts from textual editors to the actual producers of texts and to their users, who in turn may shape them further in the process of transcribing them (with or without their own idiosyncratic annotations) before passing them on to yet other readers who might alter them even more. And while Florence and Venice are certainly important centers for the production and consumption of manuscripts, in this volume the courts of Italy and the networks of readers in and around them take center stage. Ferrara, Milan, Mantua, Parma, Naples, and the papal court in Rome are leading centers of scribal culture, sites that produce an abundance of written and illuminated works from which Richardson appropriately takes many of his examples.

Richardson examines “the persistence of scribal culture in Renaissance Italy alongside, but at times in preference to, a culture based on print” (1). The advantages to handwritten texts even in a post-Gutenberg world were several: speed, flexibility

(they could be produced on demand), and the notion that a hand-produced document could carry special value and thus serve as a privileged means of communication. Building on the work of Harold Love, Richardson considers the modes of diffusion by which manuscripts circulated among authors and users and, following Armando Petrucci, he pays necessary attention to categories of handwriting and the various copyists who perfected them, whether professional scribes or not. The book's argument ranges widely over many kinds of writing but several stand out: lyric poetry, the literary genre most commonly transmitted by scribal diffusion; heterodox religious writings, which were often disseminated in handwritten form to avoid scrutiny; and, of course, epistolary correspondence. Richardson depends heavily on the prose of prolific letter writers like Pietro Bembo, Isabella d'Este, Aretino, Bernardo and Torquato Tasso, and Annibale Caro. The book concludes with an unexpected and striking chapter examining how performance relates to orality, handwriting, and the circulation of verse. And Isabella appropriately has the last word.

Manuscript Culture is an important contribution to the history of writing and the book in Renaissance Italy. In addition, its full literary historical information makes it a valuable resource for readers interested in learning how a given author's record of publication is shaped by the technologies of writing of the time. Some examples. As Ariosto was preparing the *Orlando Furioso* for its third printing in 1532, he sent handwritten copies of four comedies to Federico Gonzaga excusing himself in his cover letter for not having corrected them first and asking Federico to keep them out of circulation (11–12). Torquato Tasso disliked the labor of transcribing (90), which he found more burdensome than the act of composing (94). Building on his earlier explorations of Machiavelli's writing, Richardson provides much detail on how Machiavelli produced and disseminated his texts, only three of which were printed in his lifetime (18–19). Ficino's use of scribal and print publication receives attention. Of note is the manuscript Kristeller called the "file copy" of *Commentarium in Convivium* (MS Stroz. 98, BLF), which the philosopher shared with friends, who left their written traces on it (83–84). Among much else, Richardson discusses the impact and presence of scribal culture as relating to the importance of exchanging written poems, especially for women writing lyric poetry in the Cinquecento, including Gambara, Colonna, and Battiferri (103–05); the Spirituali (175–80); the evolution of Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortigiano* (217–18); Heinrich Issac's musical composition of Poliziano's threnody for Lorenzo's death (243–44).

Richardson refers to his method as that of a survey (240) but there is nothing superficial about it. This vast assemblage of examples is presented in a framework whose theoretical and historical sophistication will no doubt inspire many subsequent studies of the intersection of scribal and print culture in the Renaissance, in Italy, and beyond.

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