

REVIEWS

“The Wealth of Wives”: A Fifteenth-Century Marriage Manual.

Francesco Barbaro.

Ed. and trans. Margaret L. King. *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 42; Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 485.* Toronto: Iter Press; Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2015. xiv + 146 pp. \$31.95.

A full English translation of Francesco Barbaro’s *De Re Uxoriam* (1416) is long overdue. Its popularity in the early modern period, as well as the fact that it is innately interesting, renders it essential reading for scholars of humanism, of Renaissance Venice, and of early modern elites, women, and families. King offers a fluid English version of Barbaro’s elegant Latin, and her introduction masterfully situates the text in its intellectual, social, and economic contexts.

At a time when humanism was still a new and controversial intellectual approach, *De Re Uxoriam* demonstrated that ancient history could be deployed for contemporary ends. (King’s footnotes trace the ways in which Barbaro drew on ancient sources and document his impressive knowledge of Greek works, which were only just becoming accessible to Italian scholars.) More particularly, *De Re Uxoriam* promoted the values and priorities of the patriarchs of Renaissance Venice and Florence. But Barbaro’s text is far more than a manifesto of oligarchy, as this edition shows. *De Re Uxoriam* begins by discussing what marriage is. Although Barbaro refers to Christian definitions of marriage, he draws primarily from ancient anecdotes, especially those of Plutarch. In part 1, Barbaro gives advice about choosing a wife, emphasizing the importance of a woman’s character as opposed to her more tangible assets. While not denying the desirability of wealth and beauty, Barbaro urges the prospective husband to prioritize virtue and a mutuality of interests. Nobility is advantageous because it inspires children to lofty goals, yet a man should look for a wife from his own class: “For what could be more pleasant, what more comfortable, what more easy, than to take as a wife a woman equal to oneself?” (89). Barbaro was certainly not advocating equitable marriage as it is understood today. Part 2 begins by insisting on the necessity of obedience in wives and goes on to discuss their obligations to be loving, modest, silent, and moderate in dress, food, drink, and sexual relations. Barbaro gives wives substantial authority in managing their households and in caring for babies and young children, but he makes clear that boys, at least, will soon pass to the care of tutors and fathers.

Witt and Kohl’s translation of part 2 of the text (“On Wifely Duties”) has helped introduce generations of students to a broadly defined civic humanism. However, in this reviewer’s experience, twenty-first-century students find “On Wifely Duties” off-putting and complain about Barbaro’s misogyny. Reading the text in its entirety will

complicate this response; so too will King's nuanced and thoughtful introduction. After a succinct account of humanism and of Barbaro's biography, King explains the social and economic setting for the work. Drawing especially on the scholarship of Stanley Chojnacki, she delineates the constraints on and privileges of Venetian noblewomen, and the critical role they played in Venetian society. This background provides a strong foundation for King's argument that, even as he shared the prejudices of his age, Barbaro appreciated and emphasized the agency of women within marriage.

Under King's leadership, *The Other Voice* series has transformed our knowledge of and ability to study early modern women, presenting a rich array of primary sources that, in many cases, were not only untranslated but unedited. Francesco Barbaro is not so readily identifiable as an "other" voice. However, this volume highlights a point that, in the current polarized political environment, is all too easy to forget. Change happens slowly and is not linear. Those humanists who may sound to us like mouthpieces of misogyny also "opened the door to a reevaluation of the nature and capacity of women" (King and Rabil, "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Introduction to the Series," in *Warnings to the Kings and Advice on Restoring Spain* [2007], xvi). In *The Wealth of Wives*, King reminds us, as she has throughout her career, that while ideas need to be considered in their precise sociopolitical contexts, they can also take on lives of their own. This edition and translation deftly demonstrate that the combination of intellectual and social history is greater than the sum of their parts.

Elizabeth M. McCahill, *University of Massachusetts Boston*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2019.126

Vernacular Translators in Quattrocento Italy: Scribal Culture, Authority, and Agency. Andrea Rizzi.

Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies 26. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017. x + 234 pp. €75.

Rizzi's inspiring monograph offers a very timely and much-needed review of the significance of translation in Quattrocento Italy, highlighting, on the one hand, the extent to which the vernacular effectively contributed to the dissemination of the cultural values upheld by the humanist paradigm, while, on the other, challenging views that characterize humanism as linguistically exclusive and culturally insular. The volume's declared and ambitious objective is a "redefinition of the contours of humanism as it is predominantly understood" (33), firmly placing translation, particularly from Latin into the vernacular, at the center of this reassessment, as a fundamental aspect of humanists' cultural agency.

Focusing on paratextual materials found in manuscripts of translations produced in Italy between 1392 and 1480, in which translators assertively discuss their work, the volume tries to map humanists' active and consistent engagement with vernacular