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Religious Reform in Sixteenth-Century Italy

Brian Richardson. *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xiv + 317. ISBN 978-0-521-88847-9. £53.00.

Abigail Brundin. *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. Pp. xvi + 218. ISBN 978-0-7546-4049-3. £65.00.

Forms of Faith in Sixteenth-Century Italy. Edited by Abigail Brundin and Matthew Treherne. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009. Pp. xiv + 260. ISBN 978-0-7546-6555-7. £60.00.

Anne Overell. *Italian Reform and the English Reformations, c.1535-c.1585*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. Pp. xiv + 250. ISBN 978-0-7546-5579-4. £65.00.

The idea of a ‘network’ formed and strengthened by the exchange of ideas in one medium or another is familiar to most historians, as is the notion that new media can alter these networks profoundly and produce new hierarchies of knowledge. The movement from manuscript to print in early-modern Europe has become a paradigmatic case of such shifts in communication and ideas thanks to Elizabeth L. Eisenstein’s seminal work *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* first published in 1979.¹ Eisenstein argued that the relatively free and abundant circulation of books made possible by the introduction of moveable type opened the world of ideas to a broader literate audience and facilitated discussions over large distances by means of the standardisation of texts and the elaboration their paratextual elements. Many of Eisenstein’s arguments, which stimulated much interesting work, have been challenged and altered by new methodological and conceptual tools. For example, historians and literary scholars have explored the significance of orality and the persistence of manuscript culture in the centuries after Gutenberg. The ‘social history of knowledge’ has built on the insights of social scientists in order to situate texts in social space and show how the classification, control, and dissemination of ideas is always contingent and contested.² Scholars have also devoted increasing attention to books and manuscripts as material objects and have shown how their origins and fortunes can help to answer broad historical and literary questions.³ All of the works under review here engage with these approaches in order to outline the formation and circulation of ideas of faith and reform during the sixteenth century. Most of the evidence on which this work is based is drawn from the exceedingly rich manuscript, printed, and artistic resources of Italy. The careful uncovering of networks of Italian reformers undertaken by the scholars whose work is under review therefore has important methodological and historical lessons for anyone working on the history of

¹ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

² Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Polity: Oxford, 2000).

³ For the ‘material turn’ note, for example, the activities of the Centre for Material Texts based in Cambridge: <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/cmt/>

the European Reformations, as well great significance for those working on the history of Italy during the sixteenth century.

Brian Richardson's superb new study of 'manuscript culture' in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries considers some of the effects of the introduction of printing on the Italian peninsula after c.1460. However, while Richardson accepts that printing offered an effective new format for the dissemination of texts his book provides a characteristically clear and accessible account of why some Italians continued to regard scribal circulation as preferable to the medium of print. The participants in this 'manuscript culture' – the authors themselves as well as the transmitters and recipients of manuscripts – appreciated the relatively restricted circulation of material inherent in the medium. Scribal publication confirmed the exclusivity of any given group and it encouraged particularly close or limited interaction between authors and readers as manuscripts passed from hand to hand and were copied out by readers or their scribes. This culture was by no means limited to manuscripts and Richardson argues that there was a triangulation of manuscript, print, and oral transmission with 'migration' from one medium to another occurring with some frequency. It is worth recalling here that Elizabeth Eisenstein's concern with the relationship between technology and historical change, and especially with the effects of communications changes on early-modern Europe began when she heard a presidential address to the American Historical Association in the early 1960s in which the disappearance of a supposed "common culture of Bible reading" as a result of "run-away technology" was lamented.⁴ Of course, the spread of the new technology of printing and the consequent dissemination of scriptural materials have both been linked closely to the Reformation in northern Europe. There has also been a great deal of work on the spread of reform and heretical ideas in Italy and on the activities of the Inquisition and Index in moving to suppress and control publication of suspect views, including the vernacular translations of scripture considered so important to Protestantism.⁵ As Richardson underlines, scribal publication was a relatively safe way of offering clandestine works to a sympathetic readership. As an 'informal' means of communication which could be less easy to control and censor than print the manuscript offered relatively greater freedom of expression, flexibility of form, and convenience. As a result, the manuscript was an important vehicle both for anticlerical attacks and the more considered plans of religious reformers. In the first respect, the notices attached to the ancient statue set up by a cardinal in Rome in 1501 and nicknamed 'Pasquino' often included defamatory verses about members of the church hierarchy. These were avidly copied and collected by Italians, and some of the milder versions migrated into print form. However, because of such popularity and relatively widespread diffusion the authorities were keen to suppress these pasquinades. In 1564 the pope proclaimed a ban on such 'libelli famosi' and in 1570 one libeller of Pope Paul IV and his family was hanged (pp. 119-20). In many Italian towns and cities handwritten attacks on friars were posted in public places. One found in Bologna in the 1580s depicting two friars and beginning with the startling line 'This is the king of sodomites' led to a trial in the city (p. 125).

In respect of religious reform, scribal publication served to cement the bonds within groups of men and women such as the 'spirituali'. The *spirituali* were a loose

⁴ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. ix (quoting Carl Bridenbaugh).

⁵ For example, *Church, Censorship and Culture in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Gigliola Fragnito, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

grouping of men and women who were concerned with finding assurance of salvation and with reinvigorating lay and clerical piety within Catholic society. The search for assurance by figures like Gasparo Contarini and Reginald Pole took a soteriological and even mystical bent, and it also accommodated itself to Catholic institutional structures with varying degrees of success. The *Beneficio di Cristo*, which expressed a Christocentric and sola fideist piety partially derived from the work of Juan de Valdés and Jean Calvin, has been considered one of the most important texts of Italian reform and it first circulated in manuscript form among a network of friends and acquaintances, including Contarini and Pole, before it was published in Venice in 1543 in an enormous edition of perhaps 10,000 copies. Both scribal and printed editions were so effectively suppressed by the Church that only one copy of each edition remains extant although as Richardson and other scholars (considered below) amply demonstrate that its influence was great at almost every social level. For Richardson, the elite destination of the *Beneficio* in its first phase of scribal diffusion is suggested by the ‘refined nature’ (p. 180) of the surviving manuscript version. The flowing and stylish humanist cursive hand of this manuscript stands in sharp contrast with the ‘workaday typography’ of the Venetian printed edition aimed at a much broader readership. Finally, as the case of the *Beneficio* again shows, scribal publication permitted, or perhaps even encouraged the assembly and juxtaposition of different texts. The manuscript version not only incorporated the words of Calvin in its main text but was copied alongside Gasparo Contarini’s 1541 letter on justification which arose from the colloquy of Regensburg and the attempt to find some conciliation with Lutherans and with works by Jacopo Sadoletto and Valdés himself. In this way, the manuscript could act as an echo chamber of ideas, a relatively free space congenial to the irenicist bent of the reformers, in a way that the printed version, standing alone, could not.

One of the major forms of manuscript culture explored by Richardson is the transmission of poetry. Manuscript was an ideal vehicle for individual sonnets since it was much cheaper and more convenient in comparison with print. Scribal publication of a single sonnet or a whole series of verses was also more flexible in that it gave the poet the opportunity to restrict intended readership to as few or as many as he or she wished. This exclusivity, although always open to abuse and migration into print, flattered the poet and his or her readership and underlined the refined and exclusive nature of their literary pursuits. Discretion and refinement were especially appreciated by female poets who could not enter the public realm of the print medium without raising questions of honour and decorum. Abigail Brundin’s important new study of the poet Vittoria Colonna – the first and perhaps most influential model of a spiritual poet in the sixteenth century – clearly shows how Colonna resisted the marketing of her image as a pious widow or even secular nun by means of print but embraced her role as poet by means of scribal publication, notably with two gift manuscripts of her works presented to Marguerite d’Angoulême, Queen of Navarre, and to the artist, sculptor, and poet Michelangelo. However, in a form of migration suggested by Richardson, not only were her works published in a number of unauthorized editions after 1538 they were, during her lifetime, the subject of a commentary and lectures at the prestigious, if religiously suspect, Florentine Academy.

Building on the insights of Roland Greene and others Brundin shows that while imitation of the Petrarchan sonnet might seem to be a rather restrictive and unproductive literary form, in fact the post-Petrarchan sonnet could be a vehicle for an intense and highly creative exploration of individual personal piety. By means of a

careful and detailed analysis of Colonna's poetic and prose works,⁶ Brundin suggests that Colonna absorbed some of the neo-Platonic elements of Petrarchan verse both from source and through Petrarchan imitators like Jacopo Sannazaro whom she encountered on the island of Ischia (at the northern end of the Gulf of Naples) where she lived after her marriage. Brundin argues that neo-Platonism provided a link between Petrarchism and the 'evangelism' of the *spirituali* since it emphasized the progress of salvation, the role of the will, and the ascent of man towards the divine. Therefore, Colonna's spiritual sonnets offer an account of the writer's slow and anguished progress towards full knowledge of God, but they are also inflected with an Augustinian anti-intellectualism and sense of human powerlessness. Colonna reflected on the nature of faith, works, and merit in the life of the Christian, and in her writings she embraced a markedly evangelical strategy of accepting that Christ's sacrifice on the cross provided an elect few with merit enough to satisfy their sins and that justification by faith alone was possible. These feelings seem to have been nurtured, if not initiated, by her contact with Juan de Valdés and his followers in Naples and were consonant with the sola fideism of the *Beneficio di Christo* that she read in manuscript form. Like the *Beneficio* Colonna's sonnets and her prose works offer a communal and spiritual experience. In these terms all of the faithful are embraced by Christ who is described as he dies on the cross bleeding and with his arms open to offer aid to everyone who moves towards them. The gift of salvation freely given by Christ is also embodied by the gift of the manuscripts of her sonnets that Colonna made to Marguerite of Navarre and Michelangelo. By this act she imitated Christ in giving freely and without expectation of any equal gift from the recipient. In this courtly and conventional way, Brundin argues, Colonna once again sought both to work within the limits of decorum and to assert her spirituality to religiously sympathetic friends of high-status and remarkable talent. The Marian imagery of her selection of sonnets for Marguerite was suitable for a gift passing between two women and Brundin reminds us of Mary's dual role as the humble disciple of Christ during his lifetime and the powerful mediatrix for humankind after her death and assumption into Heaven. Thus, the image of the Pietà which Michelangelo produced for Colonna as a gift depicts Mary as a strong figure lifting her arms to Heaven above the body of her son 'in an ambiguous gesture of intermingled suffering and celebration' (p. 139).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Brundin's study of Colonna is her reflection on the influence of the spiritual sonnets and the broader context of Italian evangelism after c.1540. In conventional histories of the reform movements the 1540s generally stand as the decade during which evangelical hopes faded as key reformers like Gasparo Contarini died and others, like the Capuchin preacher Bernardino Ochino (much admired by Colonna) fled into exile to avoid awkward questions from the Roman Inquisition under the direction of Gian Pietro Carafa (later elected Paul IV). The indexes, inquisitions, and investigations of the latter part of the sixteenth century provide a sombre background of religious anxiety. Colonna's work was affected by this new mood and editions of her work issued during this period pushed the 'safer' amorous sonnets to the foreground and any more spiritual commentary was suppressed or censored. However, Brundin challenges the conventional chronology of evangelical decline by drawing attention to the reformed activities of the writer Olimpia Morata and sympathiser Renée de France during the 1550s, and to the spread

⁶ Note also Vittoria Colonna, *Sonnets for Michelangelo*, ed. and trans. Abigail Brundin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

of evangelical letters in printed vernacular collections during much of latter half of the sixteenth century. Brundin also underlines the possibility of a subtle spirituality for the ‘silent evangelical’ offered by the work of Colonna and her Petrarchist imitators whose poetry appeared in multiple editions from the 1560s onwards.

The revision of traditional chronologies and assumptions by means of close analysis of texts and images which characteristic of Brundin’s monograph is also in evidence in the collection of essays she and Matthew Treherne have edited. These essays were the product of a conference held in Leeds in 2007. The contributors generally set out to redress the balance of assessment of the cultural life of sixteenth-century Italy away from one of ‘mental stagnation’ towards a more positive and nuanced view.⁷ In this respect they succeed very well. In his contribution Antonio Corsaro considers the trend for discrete collections of Petrarchan spiritual verse after the model of Vittoria Colonna and the rising demand for such collections from the 1560s onwards. Corsaro charts the varying fortunes of these collections in manuscript and the vagaries of the new publishing landscape as devotional and religious works began to proliferate. His essay is a useful reminder that not only doctrinal content but also literary taste and the demands of the market could affect the fortunes of spiritual poetry in Italy. In the succeeding two chapters Abigail Brundin and Chrysa Damianaki provide positive accounts of religious tolerance and cultural life in Medicean Florence during the same period. Brundin focuses on the Florentine Academy and argues that freedom of discussion of heterodox views in the vernacular here and cultural energies elsewhere in the city benefited from the Medici duke’s ‘stubborn resistance’ (p. 68) to Rome.⁸ In a similar fashion, Damianaki presents a ducal Florence which was remarkably open to reform ideas and she makes the arresting claim that ‘[t]he greatest art work of the Protestant Reformation in the Florence of Cosimo I’ (p. 77) was Jacopo Pontormo’s fresco in the Medicean church of San Lorenzo. She suggests that the content of this fresco cycle -- Christocentric, and concerned with human sin and the possibility of justification by faith – was influenced by Valdesian ideas probably transmitted via Benedetto Varchi, a prominent member of the Florentine Academy. Her argument, which must overcome a number of problems including of the loss of the works in question, the unimpeachable religious orthodoxy of Cosimo de’ Medici, and Giorgio Vasari’s failure to impugn Pontormo, is not entirely convincing but certainly makes an interesting contribution to recent debates about the role of reform in Italian art.⁹ Tom Nicholls’s essay, in which he addresses the relationship between religious and

⁷ I should declare my own interest here: I participated in the conference and contributed an essay to the volume under review. The view quoted is that of G. R. Elton, *Reformation Europe, 1517-1559*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 134, cited by Abigail Brundin at p. 76 n. 64.

⁸ Interestingly, Cosimo’s policy of ghettoising the Jews of Florence after 1570 has also been interpreted as demonstrating Medicean independence from Rome: Stefanie B. Siegmund, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence: The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2006).

⁹ For example, Massimo Firpo, *Gli affreschi di Pontormo a San Lorenzo. Eresia, politica e cultura nella Firenze di Cosimo I* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997); and idem, *Artisti, gioiellieri, eretici: Il mondo di Lorenzo Lotto tra Riforma e Controriforma* (Rome: Laterza, 2001). See also Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).

mythological artistic production in Venice, is a much more persuasive contribution. Moving from the tragic key of the artist Titian's violent and emotive *poesie* to the satirical and 'debunking' (p. 131) mythologies of Jacopo Tintoretto, and finally considering the carnal and classical productions of Paolo Veronese he provides an illuminating depiction of the interaction between sacred and profane styles and forms in Venetian art and suggests how competition and tradition could drive each artist. Nicholls grounds his arguments in a thorough knowledge of the social and political history of sixteenth-century Venice, as well as in a masterful understanding of the city's artistic life. Some of his suppositions about the works considered in his essay may well be confirmed or challenged as Venetian historians uncover new evidence and articulate new arguments in relation to religion and social orders in the city and its empire. For example, his suggestion that the sceptical distance of the 'anti-*poesie*' of Tintoretto might be understood as a consequence of being commissioned by the non-noble *cittadini* who lacked access to "elite iconic circuits" (p. 131, quoting Carlo Ginzburg) may well be fruitfully set along side Raymond Waddington's essay in the same volume, Blake de Maria's recent discussion of Titian's unusual *Ecce Homo* (1543) for the *cittadino* d'Anna family, as well as in the context of revised assessments of the lifestyle and prominence of the *cittadini* in Venice.¹⁰ All of these works suggest a large degree of porosity in the traditional social boundaries of the city, and they also show how closely allied to 'elite iconic circuits' were the cultural concerns of the *cittadini*.

The competitiveness of Venetian artists keen to demonstrate their excellence in offering depictions of 'delightful horror' (p. 150) is the subject of Harald Hendrix's essay. Here, as in the subsequent essay by Raymond Waddington, the relationship between the Venetian artist Titian and the controversial poet and pornographer Pietro Aretino who lived in the city from 1527 onwards is very fruitfully explored. Hendrix moves from a consideration of Titian's emotive depictions of violence to a discussion of the possible sources for Aretino's highly wrought prose in his *Humanità di Christo* of 1535. Hendrix points up the apparent paradox of Aretino's choice of a difficult prose style in a work intended to convey simple scriptural truths to a broad readership. Hendrix tentatively shows how one fifth-century Byzantine homiletic model may have offered a precedent for Aretino and thereby reminds us of the need, especially when considering Venice, to look east as well as north when considering the origins of certain forms of faith. The sources of reform also lay very close to home. As Raymond Waddington makes clear, Aretino was closely connected with some of the *spirituali* by c.1535 and he was also in correspondence with Vittoria Colonna and Bernardino Ochino. He then shows how Aretino's work of the 1530s and 1540s might be understood as that of a 'public Nicodemite' (p. 174) before carefully situating his friend Titian within networks that included heretics or other Nicodemites. In this way, Waddington once more complicates the traditional chronology of Italian reform that posits a definite shift towards intolerance and conformity from around 1540. Indeed, a laudatory dedication to Henry VIII prefaces the second book of Aretino's letters published in Venice in 1542. Waddington essay is forcefully argued and invokes a wide range of texts and images, including Titian's *Ecce Homo* painting and Pontormo's frescoes in Florence, in some illuminating and stimulating ways.

Iain Fenlon's essay on music and reform questions the centrality of the Council of Trent's decrees on music in any appreciation of musical production and

¹⁰ Blake de Maria, *Becoming Venetian: Immigrants and the Arts in Early Modern Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

performance in Italy during the latter sixteenth century. Like many of the other contributors to this volume, Fenlon complicates the ‘Tridentine typology’ by emphasising the continued influence of Savonarolan musical traditions as translated from Florence to mid-century Rome by Filippo Neri. Noel O’Regan also suggests how there was some continuity in religious musical production in Rome before and after Trent. He prefers to see musical change in Rome as a ‘gradual and organic process’ (p. 232) rather than an abrupt response to Tridentine decrees emphasising the desirability of music free from secular taint and scored to allow the faithful to hear the words of the liturgy clearly. O’Regan relates this continuity to the power of existing Roman institutions (highlighting lay confraternal productions and the customary *sacre rappresentazioni*). He also underlines the fact that the perception of an innovative Tridentine sacred music in Rome has owed much to a scholarly focus on figures like Giovanni Pierluigi Palestrina and Vincenzo Ruffo at the expense of other composers. He also reminds us that much of the music associated with the oratories has been lost and may not have conformed to Tridentine norms, which were themselves loosely defined. Although Fenlon’s essay does explore the Savonarolan musical tradition, both his essay and that by O’Regan might have placed discussions about the ‘reform’ of music more helpfully in the broader context of late medieval debates about musical elaboration and simplicity.

Finally, Matthew Treherne explores the poet Torquato Tasso’s ‘subtle orthodoxy’ (p. 233) in his study of the invocation of liturgy in his late work, especially *Il mondo creato* (1594). Treherne, like Fenlon and O’Regan, complicates notions of a ‘Counter-Reformation’ conformity in practice and doctrine that stifled sincere religious belief and spirituality. Treherne’s Tasso struggles to express his self and his time *sub specie aeternitatis* using liturgy as ‘a theologically charged mode of discourse’ (p. 253). This essay usefully undermines some lazy assumptions about the complete disappearance within Italy of vernacular versions of Scripture and suggests once again how the supposed gap between reform south and north of the Alps might have been bridged. In closing his essay and the volume Treherne comments that his own findings and those of many of the contributors reveal the ways in which culture could resist church authority, but he also suggests that orthodoxy could ‘take on forms that are subtle, rich, and worthy of attention’ (ibid.). These essays move between resistance and orthodoxy without claiming to provide a clear map of exactly where the boundary lay between them. The lack of a distinct calibration of orthodoxy may alarm some readers who fear that this has the potential to set up a confusing Babel of voices and viewpoints. However, this danger is largely avoided and these essays offer an impression of lively cultural production in Italy during the years when the shadow of the Counter Reformation was once supposed to have fallen on the Renaissance and Reform. It is clear that writers and artists continued to draw on earlier traditions and texts that were only temporarily or unsuccessfully rendered inaccessible by the Index or Inquisition. Comparison may be made here with Brundin’s Colonna whose Christocentricism and mystical piety draws on St Buonaventure and St Catherine of Siena. In addition, outside of Milan it seems as if the decrees of Trent were only gradually or partially accepted and implemented by secular authorities. Moreover, until the election of Paul IV in 1555 the *spirituali* were still in positions of influence, and there was still some fluidity in terms of heresy and orthodoxy, at least at an elite level. It is true that the forms of faith of the greater part of Italian society outside of the golden circles of Venice, Florence, and Rome are perhaps rather neglected in this volume. O’Regan speculates about ordinary people unaffected by Tridentine fears about secular tunes infiltrating sacred music. Brundin, Corsaro, and Treherne

underline the scope of vernacular literature and its potentially large audience. Waddington's heretics and Nicodemites include jewellers and lawyers. However, it is to be hoped that the reconstruction of the wider circulation of heterodox ideas, which has largely been based on inquisitorial evidence and published texts will now benefit from fuller consideration of scribal publication and cheap or ephemeral print, as well as from a reevaluation of the conceptual boundaries that have governed some previous studies. Even if it does not often address the role of workers and artisans directly in this process nevertheless this interesting and superbly edited volume of essays effectively summarizes much previous research and points the way towards future studies.¹¹

The scope of non-elite involvement in reform and the fluidity of religious identity have of course been two key themes in the writing of northern European Reformation history during the last few decades. In her new book Anne Overell seeks to show how the Italian *spirituali* came into contact with the world of English reform during its most crucial decades. 'Europe's early exiles' (p. 210), the Italians who found themselves at odds with the Catholic church from around 1530, possessed an heroic aura for many English gentry and nobles. Overell introduces a generation of humanistically inclined Englishmen who found the 'magnetism' of northern Italy, and especially the University of Padua and neighbouring Venice, irresistible. She outlines how their studies of law and other subjects in Italy were often accompanied by reflections on religion. This questioning spirit was encouraged by humanist scepticism, by German and Swiss reformed ideas moving across the Alps, by the sermons of itinerant preachers including Bernardino Ochino, and perhaps above all by contact with the Italian *spirituali*. Although Overell, like most other scholars already reviewed here, prudently avoids trying to settle hard and fast boundaries for different reform-minded groups and stresses the fluidity and ambiguity of the situation in Italy during c.1530-c.1560 she does identify the central place of justification by faith alone (or almost alone) in the meditations of the *spirituali*. She also highlights the leading role of Reginald Pole an Englishman increasingly at odds with his cousin King Henry VIII and drawn towards finding a path to reform within the Roman Catholic church. As Overell pithily remarks of his break with Henry in 1536 and his elevation to the cardinalate later the same year: 'Pole's choice involved holding in tension three positions: he decided *against* Henry VIII's reformation, *for* the Pope, but also *for* reform in Italy' (p. 28).

A severe shock for the *spirituali* in Italy and to any early-modern 'strategy of tension' was the departure of both Bernardino Ochino and Peter Martire Vermigli into Swiss exile in August 1542 leaving their erstwhile supporters, including Gasparo Contarini (who died in the same month) and Vittoria Colonna, looking highly suspect in the eyes of many less sympathetic observers. Overell picks up the story of Ochino's life with his arrival in London in 1547 escaping imperial danger on the continent with English financial aid. In England Ochino found an Edwardian regime keen to establish its reforming credentials on the European stage after the nightmare of Henrician rule. Overell shows how 'Ochino fever' (p. 47) broke out in England as his sermons were translated (by Elizabeth Tudor among other distinguished scholars), circulated and published, and his fortunes promoted by Archbishop Cranmer. These sermons contained elements drawn from the *Beneficio di Christo*, and Overell

¹¹ For example, Rosa Salzberg, *Printshop to Piazza: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming in 2013).

provides the first detailed account of that work's reception in England in the form of a *de luxe* presentation copy of the translation by Edward Courtenay, then imprisoned in the Tower of London and hoping to gain his liberty. This translation was calculated to appeal to King Edward VI and to Cranmer, whose own writings on justification by faith were being published at the same time.

As many Italians discovered, reliance on royal patronage in sixteenth-century England could be a highly dangerous strategy and Ochino soon found himself wrong-footed in the transition from the protectorship of Somerset to that of Warwick. Even Vermigli, who played a key role in supporting Cranmer's reforming activities by disputing and writing on the Eucharist and participating in work on the Ecclesiastical Laws, was isolated in Oxford and at Court. On the death of Edward he left with a number of other Italian exiles and with many Englishmen once close to the Italians and now suspect of heresy. This new generation of exiles found refuge in Venice and other cities in northern Italy. This separation of person from home was rather like a 'golden axe,'¹² and while the exiles ostensibly enjoyed carnivals, visited spas, or studied at the University of Padua there is some uneasiness in their careful neutrality. The exiles played a waiting game, avoiding other heretics and leaving to their compatriots in Zurich or Strasbourg dangerous discussion of theories of resistance to tyrannical rule. The whole murky world of the English exile in Italy is distilled in the tale of Edward Courtenay, first English translator of the *Beneficio* who played the zealous Catholic but was implicated in French intrigues against Queen Mary I, aroused Spanish suspicions, and eventually died in very mysterious circumstances in Venice.

As Overell notes many of the exiles soon returned to England and adopted Nicodemite positions as Marian rule became entrenched and the tide of Habsburg power in Europe waxed. The 'greatest Nicodemite in Europe' (p. 144) in the hostile view of Pier Paolo Vergerio was Reginald Pole. Pole's importance for Italian reform and his spiritual inclinations are fairly well established now (and are discussed in all of the other works reviewed here) but his career in Marian England is a matter of much current debate. Overell moves far beyond Vergerian hyperbole to present a Pole who was temperamentally evasive in key matters like justification by faith but also tempered by his experiences as a *spirituale* in Italy, and perhaps even willing to show some tolerance to heretics. Pole's project to reconstruct the English church along lines which would have pleased friends like Gasparo Contarini who had valued pastoral care, education, and charity was still-born but here it receives greater attention than the older image of Pole the persecutor. Ironically, Overell concludes, the Pauline and Erasmian evangelism of the *spirituali* would probably have appealed to Queen Mary's successor Elizabeth I more than the Calvinist theology that the Italian exiles in Zurich and elsewhere had imbibed during their exile in the 1550s. A number of Italian evangelicals and their supporters, notably Cranmer, had died during Mary's reign and those that survived, like Vermigli and Ochino, found no welcome in Elizabethan England. However, Overell shows that their ideas lived on in the *Beneficio di Cristo* and the libels of 'Pasquino' (mentioned above), and in their own works which were all translated and republished in England in the later sixteenth and seventeenth

¹² 'There is no world without Verona walls / But purgatory, torture, hell itself. / Hence banishèd is banishèd from the world, / And world's exile is death. Then 'banishèd' / Is death mistermèd. Calling death 'banishèd' / Thou cuttest my head off with a golden axe, / And smil'st upon the stroke that murders me'. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, act 3, scene 3, lines 17-23.

centuries. The readers of such texts, she argues on the basis of paratextual evidence, warmed to their anti-papal themes, mined them for advice on predestination, or even found in them a moderation that offered one way of ‘ventilating the theological hothouse’ (p. 197) at home.

One of the Italian works most frequently reprinted in England (and in Scotland as late as 1815) was the tale of Francesco Spiera, a lawyer who was investigated for his reformist sympathies by the Venetian inquisition in 1547-48, recanted his beliefs, and died with the conviction that he was damned because he had not held fast to his faith. The story served to warn of the dangers of Nicodemism and it then passed into ballad form as a warning of divine retribution, and also into polite literature as a prompt to reflections on death. The tale must also have reinforced English horror of the Inquisition and in some ways that negative assessment has conditioned British and American readings of reform in Italy until fairly recently. As these new publications demonstrate there is now a much better sense of the variety and the shifting contours of reform thought and practice in sixteenth-century Italy and a more positive and nuanced sense of the place of reform in the European world of religion and faith. If many of the scholars writing here do not undertake to define ‘reform’ very closely and prefer to throw into doubt chronologies and conceptions which have governed much writing on the subject for many years they would seem in this way to stand in close relation to trends in recent work on the northern Reformations. They have avoided, prudently perhaps, the vexed question of providing a label for the whole period of reform in Italy but in identifying and exploring a range of salient concerns the books under review leave me with the encouraging impression of a coherent new landscape to explore rather than with the discouraging sense of a scarred and ancient battlefield littered with the bodies of defunct historical arguments and ideologies.¹³

¹³ On labels see John W. O’Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 2000). Simon Ditchfield’s forthcoming study of global Catholicism will doubtless open up yet more vistas and enticing prospects for research in this area.