Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

Brownlee, Victoria and Laura Gallagher, eds. Biblical Women in Early Modern Literary Culture 1550–1700

Anne Russell

Volume 39, Number 2, Spring 2016

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086556ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26866

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)
2293-7374 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Russell, A. (2016). Review of [Brownlee, Victoria and Laura Gallagher, eds. Biblical Women in Early Modern Literary Culture 1550–1700]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, *39*(2), 187–190. https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i2.26866

chorus, arguing that the second tragedy is the work of a more mature and original playwright.

Mathilde Lamy-Houdry sketches out the conflict between epic poetry and tragedy in Jodelle's play through the lens of heroism. Aeneas is an epic hero who has found himself bewildered in the world of tragedy, Dido's universe. While Aeneas is confronted with a tragic dilemma—abandon the woman he loves or fulfil his epic mission—he does not hesitate the way the tragic hero would. He knows the choice he has to make: between his fear of Dido's suicide and his fear of divine vengeance, the latter operates more powerfully and determines his ultimate course of action. While as a tragic hero Dido is dominated by her passions and succumbs to them, Aeneas is able to move beyond the realm of emotions to base his decision on reason alone. This is a fine and varied collection of essays that anyone interested in Jodelle's second tragedy will no doubt find highly useful.

ANNE G. GRAHAM
Memorial University

Brownlee, Victoria and Laura Gallagher, eds.
Biblical Women in Early Modern Literary Culture 1550–1700.
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. Pp. xii, 252. ISBN 978-0-7190-9155-1 (hardcover) £70.

This ambitious and scholarly collection of essays addresses the complex, often contradictory, and sometimes strikingly counterintuitive ways that biblical women characters were analyzed, interpreted, and appropriated in early modern discourses. The volume includes multiple framing and contextual chapters. In addition to an "Introduction" outlining the significant roles biblical women characters played in early modern culture, Victoria Brownlee and Laura Gallagher also contribute two "Overview" chapters introducing the parts of the volume dealing with Old Testament and New Testament figures respectively. These overviews will be useful for readers who do not have much knowledge of the Bible or of early modern religious writing. The "Afterword" by Dympna Callaghan sums up some of the patterns in the collection as a whole,

emphasizing the extent to which narratives of biblical women permeated early modern culture.

The section on Old Testament women fittingly begins with an essay on Eve, the archetypal figure for women in early modern culture, denigrated for her role in committing the original sin yet also conventionally deployed as a model for women by accepting Adam's masculine rule. Elizabeth Hodgson argues that in *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum* Emilia Lanyer associates Eve with her garden, and surveys this link in texts as varied as Esther Sowernam's pamphlet defense of women and the poetry of John Evelyn and Abraham Cowley. The essay concludes with a brief discussion of Eve's relationship with the Garden in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, concluding that she becomes "a version of the garden itself" (54). The essay does not fully explore the complexities of Lanyer's and Milton's representations of Eve's rebellions against Adam and his authority, but the patterns of Eve's associations with gardens are nicely observed.

The next cluster of essays draws from a diverse array of theological works that reference biblical women for political and moral purposes. Adrian Streete focuses on Lutheran and Calvinist texts by John Ponet, John Knox, and Christopher Goodman which deploy female rulers as different as Deborah and Jezebel in the service of an argument for Christian liberty. For example, Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* decries women's rule in the early modern secular realm (directing particular venom against Mary, Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I), while praising Deborah for her strong conscience and spiritual strength. Streete concludes that "misogynist" texts paradoxically use powerful women to invoke a radical conception of liberty of conscience for both male and female subjects. Alison Thorne also demonstrates the significance of biblical women for early modern politics. Esther's protection of the Jews from Haman's plots was interpreted as a prefiguration of Queen Elizabeth protecting Protestants, while Haman could represent "Jesuitical malice" in the 1680s or a figure of Guy Fawkes after 1605. Danielle Clarke analyzes short verses from the Book of Proverbs that were used in sermons and conduct books to inculcate proper female piety, while Michele Osherow demonstrates how confusing and ambiguous female behaviour could be interpreted for moral purposes. Zipporah, who symbolically emasculated her husband Moses by circumcising their son in front of him, is praised for her role in helping to save the Israelites, but is increasingly criticized as a perverse

wife. By contrast, moralists preferred less angry women who directly attacked the enemies of Israel rather than "its heroes and husbands" (80).

The section on New Testament women begins with Beatrice Groves's discussion of early modern readings of the Roman siege of Jerusalem as a prefiguration of the crucifixion, which she argues was particularly potent in times of plague in London. Josephus's first-century account of Miriam's cannibalization of her child, and the episode in the Old Testament Book of Lamentations of the women who killed their children during the siege, were significant influences on discussions of the plague such as Nashe's *Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem*. Nashe represents the maternal killings as acts to save the children from starvation, thus anticipating Christ's sacrifice, while at the same time presenting "Miriam (the mother-turned-killer) as a terrifying analogue to God's inability to defend his children from his own anger" (156).

The Virgin Mary is the focus of two essays comparing her roles in Protestant and Catholic texts and rituals. Thomas Rist argues that, after the Reformation, Marian imagery was adapted and reconfigured in both Catholic and Protestant discourses. Laura Gallagher considers the Stabat Mater's influence on Mary's representation, as Protestants transformed Mary's tears into a kind of stoicism, while more Catholic-inflected texts emphasized the "performativity" of grief as a way of moving the reader to imitate her sorrow in service of a larger religious purpose.

A figure in stark contrast to Mary, the Whore of Babylon is a significant feature of Protestant texts after the Reformation. Victoria Brownlee's analysis of Duessa in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and the Whore in Dekker's play *The Whore of Babylon* concludes that Protestantism's claims to emphasize biblical literalism were deeply compromised by the pervasive and powerful use of allegory.

In a change of pace, Lisa Hopkins weaves together details of early modern pilgrim routes with legends of the lives of Mary Magdalene and St. Helena of Britain (mother of the Emperor Constantine) to inform a discussion of Helena's pilgrimage in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well.* These models show that "even low-born women can contribute to the building of a community, and a dynasty" (209).

As a group, these essays demonstrate the multiple and often contradictory ways that biblical characters were explicated with reference to a wide range of preoccupations. And as many of the essays demonstrate, post-Reformation

Protestant and Catholic writers felt compelled to developed new strategies of interpretation while still maintaining some traditional modes of analysis.

ANNE RUSSELL
Wilfrid Laurier University

de Ribadeneira, Pedro.
***The Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Claude Pavur.**
Jesuit Primary Sources in English Translation 28. Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2014. Pp. xxxi, 483. ISBN 978-1-880810-83-2 (paperback) $34.95.

This is the first complete English-language translation of Ribadeneira's life of Ignatius Loyola; the translator worked from the critical Latin edition established by Candido de Dalmases in 1965 for the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*. In his translator's notes, Claude Pavur acknowledges that he has not reproduced Dalmases's scholarly apparatus in full; on the other hand, he has introduced certain features of his own for this edition, most importantly a unified paragraph numbering scheme that is consistent with schemes used in other documents of the Society of Jesus, like the English language edition of the Jesuit *Constitutions*. While scholars wishing to use the text with more advanced students will still need to send them to the Latin edition, the lightening of the apparatus makes for greater readability when using the text in non-specialist settings.

Pavur's introduction is short and very helpful for the non-specialist, highlighting the text's usefulness as a historical and biographical resource, and giving the general lines of Ignatius's life and the beginnings of the Society of Jesus, as well as some details of Ribadeneira's own life and career. The perspective of the introduction is strictly historical, with passing references to the literary quality of the text.

Ribadeneira's account of the life of Ignatius Loyola unfolds in five parts, the first four of which are in strictly historical sequence, with the fifth and final part offering a summary portrait of Ignatius's virtues and the graces he received. The story the author tells is complex. In addition to providing a coherent narrative that is as factual as possible, relying on eyewitness accounts and extensive documentation from across the Society of Jesus of his day, Ribadeneira links