

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Lagioia, Vincenzo, Maria Pia Paoli, and Rossella Rinaldi, eds. *La fama delle donne. Pratiche femminili e società tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*

Elena Brizio

Volume 44, Number 3, Summer 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1085856ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38030>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Brizio, E. (2021). Review of [Lagioia, Vincenzo, Maria Pia Paoli, and Rossella Rinaldi, eds. *La fama delle donne. Pratiche femminili e società tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(3), 301–303. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38030>

and emotions, or what he calls “[t]he passion-action antinomy” (101), in relation to grammar as a structural vehicle for conveying and communicating this antinomy. The final chapter, which is devoted to an analysis of Jonson’s comedies, examines the effect of a Jonsonian application of theories of humour on behaviours, actions, and “embodied practices” (112). The book ends with a short and crisply written conclusion on Michel de Montaigne’s ideas of pedagogy and affect—his philosophical and aesthetic experiment that went beyond any one of his contemporaries’.

Among the many virtues of this book, the structure of endnotes deserves attention; their long narrative form reveals the care with which they have been prepared to complement and expand the main argument. Not only are the long, descriptive notes immensely helpful in getting a new and insightful perspective, or valuable because they reveal another incisive close reading; but as the example of 136n5 shows, they also treat the reader with an expansive and crucial elaboration of how the main topic—grammar—is approached in this book: conceptually, contextually, historically, and via criticism.

GORAN STANIVUKOVIC

Saint Mary’s University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38029>

Lagioia, Vincenzo, Maria Pia Paoli, and Rossella Rinaldi, eds.

La fama delle donne. Pratiche femminili e società tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna.

I libri di Viella 378. Rome: Viella, 2020. Pp. 352. ISBN 978-8-8331-3492-5 (paperback) €32.

This volume on the reputation of women brings together some of the papers from a conference held in Bologna in 2019. The women under examination are not those who followed the precepts and rules imposed by their society, family, or religion, but those who did not align themselves—for a variety of reasons—with contemporary expectations and so had to be controlled, regulated, and potentially punished for their divergence from the norms.

For the most part, the women in this volume are prostitutes, witches, adulteresses, and unwed mothers. They are the representatives of that segment

of the population that society, the law, the church, and the city deemed had to be controlled in order to manage and regulate behaviours that were viewed as unacceptable but often unavoidable. A woman was defined by her reputation, *fama*, good or bad. But what is reputation? Through a detailed illustration of holy texts, sermons, statutes, and legal texts, but mainly court records, the various contributors to this volume offer examples of good/bad reputations that conform to the times and reflect the characteristic misogyny of the period that often rendered women the objects of rumour, gossip, and opinions based on someone else's comments.

How did women defend themselves from the risk of *mala fama* (a bad reputation)? One way was to conform to society's expectations and basically become invisible. The women presented in this fascinating volume are not, however, invisible: they are visible by choice, by need, by someone else's slander. Their attempts to manage their reputations and, if not make them good, at least make them more positive, followed different strategies. Prostitutes, for example, could remedy, in part, their *mala fama* by voluntarily entering purposely designated foundations for "converted women" that would provide them with a different social status somehow supported by social and political authorities. Marriage, or the payment of the dowry, would allow unwed mothers to improve their social status, as well as grant them legal and "religious" acceptance.

The volume is divided into two parts. The first, "Tra fama e infamia: riflessioni storiografiche" (Between fame and infamy: historiographical reflections), offers the historical as well as social, legal, and interpretive background in which women with a "bad" reputation lived and worked. The second, "Tracce di vita: testimonianze" (Traces of life: evidence), presents multiple case studies in which it is possible to see the connections, but also the divergences, between theory and practice. The chronological span of the volume is quite long, reaching the eighteenth century, while the essays presented in French and Spanish (and about both French and Spanish women) are a useful update on realities that are scarcely known.

In the first part, the main protagonists are prostitutes and witches. It is particularly interesting to see how these women were represented in art, where in some cases they are depicted as enchanting mermaids or, worse, as the biblical snake from Genesis, to provide a negative series of connotations that runs "woman-snake-devil" (143) and consciously erases the image of the ancient Mother Goddess. In this case, the best example is the witch: for her,

the building of the reputation is a collective act of the community where she lives, and where—at a certain moment—the fragile balance, once accepted and tolerated, breaks down. Early modern treatises on witches highlight a crazed investigation for signs and marks left by the devil on women whom the Inquisition will describe as “old, bent and deformed by age and destitution, depending on others’ charity” (189). The male gaze focuses on lust, a symbol of original sin, and, by consequence, on the female body, used and sold by prostitutes, or the place where to look for devil’s marks on witches.

In the second part, case studies show different kinds of women: spies, adulteresses (who not only leave their husbands but also take with them the goods they considered their own), reformed prostitutes who try to get back goods that were stolen from them, a *dogaresa* (the wife of the Venetian doge) accused of being a bit too “visible” according to the rules of the time, and, last but not least, raped young women—i.e., a different kind of humanity from the women featured earlier, but no less in need, by social standards, of rules and control. The last essay shows how, at the dawn of the eighteenth century, women’s desires and efforts to choose their husband themselves very slowly began to make inroads into social norms and expectations.

ELENA BRIZIO

Georgetown University Villa Le Balze

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i3.38030>

Mackay, Christopher S.

“An Unusual Inquisition”: Translated Documents from Heinricus Institoris’s Witch Hunts of Ravensburg and Innsbruck.

Studies in Central European Histories 67. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. 300. ISBN 978-90-04-42378-7 (hardcover) €105.

In the years immediately prior to the 1486 publication of the *Malleus maleficarum*, its main author—the Dominican inquisitor Heinricus Institoris—had been actively involved in witch trials in Ravensburg and Innsbruck. In this follow-up to his highly praised translation of the *Malleus*, Christopher Mackay has provided English versions of the records of the proceedings in these two jurisdictions for the first time. While original-language editions of some of