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See table of contents

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Richardson, Brian.
Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy.
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xiv, 317. ISBN 978-0-521-88847-9 (hardcover) $85.

The introduction of the new technique of printing with moveable metal type in Italy around the 1460s did not mean the end of texts in manuscript form. Manuscript texts continued to be produced and circulate alongside, and sometimes in preference to, printed books. If in England this phenomenon has been studied for years, in Italy only specific texts or individual scribes have attracted the attention of researchers. In the current book, Brian Richardson seeks to fill this gap with a more comprehensive analysis of the production and diffusion throughout the Italian peninsula of all types of manuscripts, from sonnets and literary texts to chancery documents and religious works, during the Renaissance.

The first chapter, entitled "The contexts and characteristics of manuscript circulation", serves as an introduction in which Richardson first explains the reasons why handwritten texts survived and their advantages over the printed books, such as their immediacy, the freedom of their contents, their aesthetic value, their uniqueness, and their great capacity to create strong bonds between writer and reader. He then provides examples of different authors who were reluctant to have their works printed — writers such as Sperone Speroni, Luigi Tansillo, and even Niccolò Machiavelli —, and describes how manuscripts were passed on from reader to reader, copied, assembled into collections, or printed without the author's permission. Lastly, Richardson discusses the places where one could find manuscripts, such as literary academies and the libraries.

The second chapter, "Handwriting and the work of copyists", is dedicated to all the aspects of the profession of the scribe, from the type of scripts used in the Renaissance, which the author illustrates with reproductions, to a general profile of the amanuensis, their salary, and their relationship with the authors.

Chapter three on "The manuscript circulation of lyric and burlesque poetry" focuses on the circulation of occasional poems. Richardson begins his analysis with the case of the poets Annibale Caro and Torquato Tasso and he moves to a consideration of the general use of poetry exchanges, especially sonnets, among the poets as a "token of friendship" (p. 99). The last part of this chapter examines the pasquinades and burlesque or licentious poetry that

circulated or was "published" in manuscript form, such as Luigi Tansillo's *Il vendemmiatore*, and then considers the major collections of verse by a single or by various authors that were compiled as a gift copy by the readers themselves.

Chapter four looks at "The manuscript circulation of prose." The first part of this chapter focuses on historical and political texts such as Benedetto Varchi's history of Florence, while the second examines the circulation of prose texts touching on current religious debates and new doctrines, such as the writings of Juan de Valdés. For the latter, manuscript "publication" was often a way of avoiding difficulties with censors and the Church. The final part of this chapter considers prose works that engaged in literary polemics, such as the debate between Annibale Caro and Lodovico Castelvetro on a *canzone* in praise of the royal family of France composed by Caro around the middle of the sixteenth century.

Chapter five, "Authors and their readers: dedications and other paratexts", deals with the paratexts of manuscripts, such as prefatory letters addressed to the readers or to the dedicatees , invitations from authors to correct their work, their defence against any criticism in advance of the future publication of the texts.

The last chapter, "Orality, manuscript and the circulation of verse" looks at the relationship between handwritten texts and their use for oral performance, wheter recited or sung. Among the various examples provided by Richardson, there is the case of the young Torquato Tasso accused in Bologna of reciting some satirical verse from memory.

Richardson's effort to draw together such a vast amount of data is truly remarkable. The long lists of examples and the analysis provided offer the reader a rich storehouse of information about all sorts of manuscripts circulating in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with a number of vernacular and Latin documents beautifully translated into English, and with an exhaustive picture of the scribal production in the post-Gutenberg Italian Renaissance.

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