

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Datini, Margherita. Letters to Francesco Datini. Trans. Carolyn James and Antonio Pagliaro**

Duane J. Osheim

Volume 35, Number 4, Fall 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105730ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i4.19707>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Osheim, D. (2012). Review of [Datini, Margherita. Letters to Francesco Datini. Trans. Carolyn James and Antonio Pagliaro]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 35(4), 150–152. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i4.19707>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2013

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**Érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

wealth of information for anyone interested in the subject more generally, followed by Stella Achilleos's illuminating interpretation of Herrick's Anacreontics, and ending with Stacey Jocoy's helpful discussion of Herrick's collaboration with the musician Henry Lawes. This otherwise neat progression of chapters on genre is interrupted by Syrithe Pugh's account of Herrick's relation to his predecessors (notably Ovid) and his views on immorality, which would have served better as the last chapter—an honour reserved instead for Graham Parry, who, in being tasked with the lone chapter on *His Noble Numbers*, succeeds in the difficult work of making Herrick's devotional poems as attractive to readers as his better-known *Hesperides*. These chapters all make for an excellent survey of Herrick's work in the context of his contemporaries, particularly suitable as I have suggested for a graduate seminar; yet the greatest asset of this volume as a pedagogical tool is the Afterword by Achsah Guibbory, who not only reviews the previous chapters, as one might expect, but also questions their methodologies, providing a valuable rejoinder that is as pedagogically useful as it is apt to stimulate further studies of Herrick and his poetry. The dust jacket gets it right: Herrick's "poetry attracts contrasting readings" from Maus, Marcus, Creaser, and Guibbory, "who respectively employ the insights of queer theory, postmodernism, formalism, and historicism to debate the significance of Herrick's distinctive contribution to early modern poetry." The opportunity to debate these contributors' methods, as well as their arguments, in light of the facts documented in the other essays is what is uniquely valuable about this volume, reminding us as it does that community without consensus can still be convivial and rewarding.

TREVOR COOK, *Trent University*

**Datini, Margherita.**

*Letters to Francesco Datini.* Trans. Carolyn James and Antonio Pagliaro.

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 16. Toronto: Iter Inc. / Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012. Pp. xiv, 431. ISBN 978-0-7727-2116-8 (paperback) \$37.

This most recent addition to the series on women writers provides translations of 251 letters dictated or written by Margherita Datini, the wife of the famous

Merchant of Prato. They are part of the immense Datini Archive preserved in Prato, and reveal the daily interests of a well-to-do merchant wife.

Margherita was born into a distinguished Florentine family. The couple married in Avignon where Margherita's family was in exile and where Francesco was making his fortune. The correspondence began after they returned to Tuscany, and was made necessary by Francesco's almost constant movement for business reasons. The collection offers a researcher numerous opportunities to investigate letter writing, gender relations, the business milieu, and domestic economy. The letters also reveal much about Margherita and her husband. Margherita's responses make clear that Francesco wanted to be an active manager, even from a distance. Her unadorned style suggests that she generally followed his instructions. Yet throughout, she includes sharp and ironic asides that indicate a mind of her own. She often offers analyses of situations and advice on how they should be handled. On occasion she observes that if he were to follow her advice in contacting someone, he need not mention that she had suggested it. In one case she concludes, probably with tongue in cheek, that he need not listen to her at all "because I am a woman and a man shouldn't follow a woman's advice" (47). Yet she continues to offer it. As she says later, "I will tell you my opinion, ... so lobby as much as you can... . Don't let them imagine they can start celebrating Carnival" (89). As this indicates, Margherita had the sharp wit Tuscans love. Although she travelled to shrines, shared a common piety, and, like others, urged Francesco to take care of his soul, she also commented that were she as rich as he, "I would never fast, because at the moment there are so many good indulgences for those who can take advantage of them that you could sleepwalk into heaven" (57).

The letters are perhaps most revealing of the careful line Margherita walks as she acknowledges that Francesco should be in charge; yet in matters of buying, selling, dealing with tenants, neighbours, or merchants she had to make many decisions on her own. This is especially true on occasion when she has to deal with impoverished acquaintances or buyers whose political or social influence could offer advantages to the Datini. It has long been noted that life in late medieval Florence was built around patronage networks of friends, neighbours, and relatives. The letters make clear that Margherita was very sensitive and politically astute. The letters also offer opportunities to study the styles of letter writing, the art of dictating or of writing letters, and how these letters reflect daily speech.

The translators offer a short but interesting discussion of the fourteenth-century Tuscan in which Margherita wrote. They further discuss the difficult problems of rendering this Tuscan into a modern, readable English. The texts themselves are composed of long compound sentences that, if translated literally, would be confusing run-on sentences. The translators wisely have broken them up. They also have tried to maintain a modern translation that captures the informal, conversational tone of the original. There are times, however, when the translation seems too literal. When speaking of sheep, the text may literally say *castrato* or castrated sheep, where “wether” would seem closer to everyday English (77). Or similarly, the translators use “rubella” when “measles” may come closer to translating everyday speech, at least for North Americans (129). These are rather modest complaints in translations that otherwise seem clean and very well annotated. This collection of letters makes available to English readers an everyday side of female experience in late medieval and Renaissance Italy that is not easy to find.

DUANE J. OSHEIM, *University of Virginia*

**Grafton, Anthony.**

***The Culture of Correction in Renaissance Europe.***

The Panizzi Lectures, 2009. London: The British Library, 2011. Pp. xii, 244 + 59 ill. ISBN 978-0-7123-5845-3 (hardcover) \$45.

The British Library’s Panizzi Lectures debuted in 1985 with D. F. McKenzie’s influential meditation on the implications for meaning of the material form of books. The now familiar title of his lectures, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, paired a traditional analytical method with an advanced theoretical consideration and, in doing so, neatly captured McKenzie’s unique contribution to the field. The meaning of the latest published title in the series is less apparent, reflecting as it seems to do another area of expertise. McKenzie was at the time Professor of Textual Studies at Oxford University; Anthony Grafton is currently Professor of European History at Princeton University. Grafton’s title suggests an interest more in discipline and punishment than in books or textual criticism, and the image on the front might easily be confused with a teacher