

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



**Malvasia, Diodata. Writings of the Sisters of San Luca and Their  
Miraculous Madonna. Ed. and trans. Danielle Callegari and  
Shannon McHugh**

Elizabeth Louise Bernhardt

Volume 39, Number 3, Summer 2016

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086528ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i3.27737>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Bernhardt, E. (2016). Review of [Malvasia, Diodata. Writings of the Sisters of San Luca and Their Miraculous Madonna. Ed. and trans. Danielle Callegari and Shannon McHugh]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 39(3), 190–193. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v39i3.27737>

© 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, 2016

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/>

**é**rudit

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/>

Medieval Padua,” examines patronage of saints’ days during the 1370s, in an effort to understand the significance of these saints to both civic and ecclesiastical rituals. Other contributors in this section include Trevor Dean, Meredith J. Gill, Robin Simon, Louise Bourdua, John Richards, and John E. Law.

This is a volume from which both specialists and generalists can benefit. For the former there are articles that focus on particular areas of interest to scholars of late medieval Venice and the Veneto. For non-specialists, it offers a tantalizing overview of the current state of study on this topic, as well as an appreciation for a scholar who spent half a century working in its archives and trying to make sense of its political, social, and cultural life. The volume includes a touching and revealing memorial by his friend and colleague Reinhold Mueller, as well as a complete bibliography of Kohl’s works. The reader also gets the impression that this is the kind of book that Kohl himself might have enjoyed: one that is rich and diverse in its methodological approaches and engagingly presented.

MARK CRANE  
Nipissing University

**Malvasia, Diodata.**

*Writings of the Sisters of San Luca and Their Miraculous Madonna.* Ed. and trans. Danielle Callegari and Shannon McHugh.

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 38. Toronto: Iter Academic Press / Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2015. Pp. xiv, 142. ISBN 978-0-8669-8534-5 (paperback) US\$31.95.

Thanks to the teamwork of two scholars from NYU, Danielle Callegari and Shannon McHugh, this contribution to our understanding of early modern women’s lives focuses on the study of Diodata Malvasia (ca. 1532–post 1617), a scholarly Bolognese Dominican nun and *gentildonna* of the convent of San Mattia. After uncovering an unknown manuscript at Bologna’s Archiginnasio, the editors contextualize and translate it together with a previously known work by Malvasia for this thirty-eighth edition of the Toronto series *The Other Voice* (and the ninety-eighth edition of the series overall).

The editors refer to Malvasia as the author of a history of the Madonna di San Luca (*The Arrival*, 1617), but with the newly discovered manuscript they

also reveal that she and her religious sisters actively defended and promoted the interests of their convent after restrictions were dictated to them from Rome following the Council of Trent (1563). We know what the sisters accomplished thanks to Malvasia's original, hybrid chronicle, a mix of narrative prose interspersed with transcriptions of many letters from the nuns' literary battle—one mostly fought on behalf of the famous icon (*The Brief Discourse*, 1575). The editors' introduction plus these two texts in translation (and some poems in an appendix) make up this book.

Acting as the first major enforcer of reforms, fellow Bolognese Pope Gregory XIII Boncompagni (r. 1572–85) sent a meticulous inspector to identify aberrations and attempt to implement Tridentine regulations. In the pope's hometown, Ascanio Marchesini, called "Monsignor Visitor," was sent to investigate every nook and cranny of San Mattia and its smaller sister hospice, San Luca, on the Monte della Guardia, where for five hundred years these nuns had been watching over Bologna's most famous icon. In November 1573, after his inspections at San Mattia, Monsignor Visitor's complaints related to a semi-public garden space and the need to wall up a certain door; at San Luca he found informality in living spaces as well as too much potential contact with pilgrim visitors. He therefore ordered the latter convent closed and the surrender of its famous painting, allegedly created by the hand of Saint Luke and miraculously brought to Bologna from Santa Sofia in Constantinople in the twelfth century.

After having received what they considered unjust treatment, these Bolognese nuns began a long, fierce, epistolary campaign full of pathos yet calculated in a focused, practical, and intelligent manner in an attempt to uphold their status quo and especially to maintain guardianship of their icon, around which these nuns' lives revolved. The nuns modestly yet boldly wrote as a team to numerous secular and religious authorities in Bologna and Rome, most of whom were related to particular nuns in the convent. These nuns even wrote directly to Gregory XIII, who happened to have two sisters buried within San Mattia and three nieces living there at the time. These religious women, who considered themselves educated and intelligent *gentildonne* on par with the same ruling-class males to whom they wrote, went so far as to proclaim that they felt "fit to rule a republic, not to mention a convent of nuns." In the end, their calculated schemes, persuasions, and team writing won their case, as the

satellite convent of San Luca did not close and the famous Madonna remained in their possession.

The second manuscript of the volume, equally engaging for different reasons, is a selection of chapters translated from Malvasia's longer version of the history of the icon, printed forty-two years after *The Brief Discourse*. Readers should consider the implications of an active nun, well aware of the political players and workings of Bologna and the papal court, employing continual references to a great variety of classical and religious texts (often identified and explained thanks to the authors' careful notations), and printing a book in cosmopolitan Venice—all while in her mid-eighties. Overall, it is fascinating to imagine just how educated, practical, and well-connected to the outside world these nun-*gentildonne* truly were despite both their gender and their ongoing fixed location *in clausura*.

Dedicated to Bolognese Cardinal Alessandro Ludovisi (later Pope Gregory XV, r. 1621–23), the chapters of *The Arrival and the Miraculous Workings of the Glorious Image of the Virgin Mary Painted by Saint Luke, through the Year 1616* contain much research and interpretation, including how the painting was brought to Bologna by a hermit; how Saint Luke painted the Virgin after her death; how the Monte della Guardia got its name; who built the convent of San Luca; and how painterly thieves stole the icon and replaced it with a forged copy (and how the original was returned). Although perhaps five other Bolognese males had previously written editions of the history of this Madonna, Malvasia might be described as the near-perfect author of her history: not only was she the leading writer of the convent that had possessed the icon for centuries; she had also spent the best part of seven decades living around it, thinking about it, caring for it, and was thus able to include, through personal experience, specifics of the nuns' direct links with the Madonna, and to explain how convent life for seventy-six sisters in residence really did revolve around the icon.

With so much ecclesiastical art in Rome, with funds and connections available to purchase or commission art from any artist, it would be fascinating to know more about why the pope wanted to possess his hometown icon so badly, and what he planned to do with it. These were Bolognese times, with Bolognese courts and popes in Rome. Ultimately, a certain respect for Bolognese relations had perhaps helped keep that icon intact—and maybe this common familiar civic identity enabled the nuns to act on such intense terms with fellow Bolognese. This book is a valuable contribution to our growing understanding

of the uniqueness of Bolognese culture, and especially of Bolognese women, who, with every such additional scholarly publication, are emerging ever more clearly as a special group of educated and active contributors to the fields of art, music, literature, politics and religion.

ELIZABETH LOUISE BERNHARDT  
University of California, Rome Study Center

**McCue Gill, Amyrose and Sarah Rolfe Prodan, eds.**

*Friendship and Sociability in Premodern Europe: Contexts, Concepts, and Expressions.*

Essays and Studies 33. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2014. Pp. 318 + 4 ill. ISBN 978-907727-2170-4 (paperback) \$39.95.

Friendship is a relatively new and fast-growing field of study in scholarship on early modern Europe. It is also, as this edited volume makes abundantly clear, a very important one. *Friendship and Sociability in Premodern Europe: Contexts, Concepts, and Expressions* grew out of the similarly entitled conference “Friendship in Premodern Europe (1300–1700),” which took place in October 2011 at Victoria University’s Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto. The volume offers a useful cross-section of contemporary friendship studies: the ten essays collected here are the work of an international group of scholars, from young to established, and trained in a variety of disciplines. The volume explores the multiform ways that friendship functioned as a tool, concept, and ideal—shaping group relations in the premodern period. In so doing, it positions itself at the leading edge of scholarship on amity and makes an impressive and important contribution to this exciting new field.

*Friendship and Sociability* begins with a well-crafted overview of the volume, including a rationale for its structure, a summary of the ten individual contributions, and an assessment of their collective position in contemporary scholarship. The ten essays are divided into three sections. In the first, on the theme of individual friendship, Adriana Benzaquén analyzes John Locke’s complex and evolving relationship with politician Edward Clarke; Malina Stefanovska explores the staging of friendship in the memoir of a French nobleman warrior, Louis de Pontis; and Francesco Ciabattini studies Dante’s contrasting friendships with poet Guido Cavalcanti and his own beloved Beatrice.