Booknotes / Notes de lectures

K.J.P. Lowe. *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. xvi, 437.

Lowe analyzes three unpublished documents: the chronicle of Santa Maria delle Vergini (Le Vergini), composed or compiled in 1523 by Augustinian canonesses in Venice; the chronicle of the Benedictine Santa Maria Annunziata (Le Murate) composed in 1598 by Suora Giustina Niccolini in Florence; and a chronicle written in 1607 by Suor Orsola Formicini about the Clarissan convent of Santi Cosma e Damiano (San Cosimato) in Rome. A concise history of both nuns' chronicles as a genre and convents as physical and social spaces grounds Lowe's study of the three texts. The connections among these chronicles are examined in detail in the last half of the book, with emphasis on ceremonial life, cultural creativity and production, and art in the convent. Forty-two illustrations enhance our understanding of convent life at the time. Contributing to the scholarship of the past decade that foregrounds nuns' writings about themselves, the book achieves its aim of demonstrating the agency and creativity of these women.

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Anthony F. D'Elia. *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005. Pp. viii, 262.

The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy begins with the helpful reminder that although the renewal of the institution of marriage is often associated with the Reformations, Italian humanists were already promoting the advantages of marriage by the 1420s. D'Elia's 137-page study is followed by an impressive 40-page finding list for wedding orations in the Italian Renaissance. The humanist revival of the classical tradition of the epithalamium, in Latin, serves as primary

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evidence for his demonstration of the convergence of Protestant perspectives with the Italian humanist tradition. A summary of thought on marriage from Antiquity through the Middle Ages provides solid context for the explanation of the revival of the form. Thanks to his focus on the elite culture of fifteenth-century Italian courts, D'Elia is able skillfully to combine a study of the rhetoric of wedding orations with analysis of power politics among families and the role of women in society.

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David Norton. *A Textual History of the King James Bible*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xi, 387.

David Norton has given us an astonishingly detailed textual history of the King James Bible, which the nineteenth-century historian Henry Hallam termed "the perfection of our English language." Just how it came to be so revered is not an easy path to follow, and Norton takes us through the twists and turns with a vigour not commonly found in bibliographic studies. Organised in three parts, with a series of nine appendices amounting to almost 200 pages of staggering detail on everything from printers' errors to substantive changes, Norton's narrative nonetheless manages to explain, with clarity and energy, the complex work of the original translating teams and the instabilities of early printing. His first part frames the laying down of the basic text of the King James, including a history of its printing from the original printer Robert Barker (who, despite what should have been a lucrative royal monopoly on the printing of this bible, died in debtor's prison) through subsequent printers at Cambridge up to the establishment of a relatively fixed text in the late eighteenth century (with a sparse treatment of nineteenth-century developments). The second part treats the comparable history of the twentieth-century *New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*, which Norton helped to edit (a role which confers both authority and verve to his discussion of editorial questions). The third part presents the compiled bibliographic data, the bulk (and most useful part) of which is the eighth appendix, which lists variant readings from the first edition (1611) compared with the *New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*. As a bibliographical study, this work is well able to stand on its own, yet makes an ideal supplement to the author's 1993 two-volume study of *A History of the Bible as Literature*.

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