

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Este, Isabella d'. Selected Letters, ed. and trans. Deanna Shemek

Benedetta Lamanna

Volume 41, numéro 1, hiver 2018

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086044ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v41i1.29536>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Lamanna, B. (2018). Compte rendu de [Este, Isabella d'. Selected Letters, ed. and trans. Deanna Shemek]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 41(1), 194–196. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v41i1.29536>

convincingly to the early Calvin than to the Genevan Calvin of the *Institutes*. Essary gives us only a peek at sixteenth-century handling of the *ratio/affectus* question (one that extends far beyond biblical exegesis), a question addressed also by Melancthon, for instance, who is mentioned only incidentally. Until more investigation has been done along the lines suggested by Essary, the comparisons he finds between Erasmus and Calvin on the matter of Pauline eloquence may justly be considered a curiosity, not a genuine comparison. At the same time, we must keep in mind that Essary's main purpose in this excellent book is not to set Calvin or Erasmus scholars straight, but to contribute to a larger interdisciplinary project devoted to the history of thinking about emotion. In that context, this book may be seen as helping to free us from the constraints of bad seventeenth-century psychology and rhetorical theory (Hobbes, Lamy) that involve us in the very polarities that continue to bedevil not only recent treatments of exegetical and theological discussions, but an unfortunate amount of intellectual history more broadly, as well.

I note, finally, a number of typographical slips: words left out on pp. 12 and 13; a missing acute accent in the Greek on p. 118; the Latin for note 122 on p. 126. Also, misprints at 224n137; 225n146; 225n1; 231n46; 233n118; and 233n65; the last five lines of Erasmus are not in the translation on p. 114. The large number of Latin texts supplied in the notes makes for a copy editor's nightmare.

THOMAS M. CONLEY

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Este, Isabella d'.

***Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Deanna Shemek.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 54 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 516. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2017. Pp. xv, 691. ISBN 978-0-86698-572-7 (paperback) US\$64.95.

Providing the first translation into any language of a writer's epistolary correspondence is no small feat, especially when that writer is the remarkably prolific Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), by whom we have more than sixteen thousand manuscript letters remaining. In her thoughtfully compiled volume

of Isabella's letters, Deanna Shemek attests not only to Isabella's sophisticated rhetorical abilities as a correspondent capable of conversing on a wide range of topics but also to Isabella's qualities as a devoted wife, a loving mother, and a shrewd political leader.

Beginning with Isabella's early letters (1479–99), Shemek offers insight into a princess in formation. Numbering two hundred in total, the translations that Shemek provides find the young Isabella precociously reporting to her father about being unjustly spanked, requesting her future husband Marchese Francesco II Gonzaga of Mantua to write to her often, and conscientiously advising clergymen about a prodigal, violent husband and a woman being abused by her husband's enemies. Frivolous letters, in which Isabella dictates shopping lists and requests emeralds and other precious stones, appear alongside more sobering letters, most notably correspondence revealing the odious realities of the European slave trade. Isabella unflinchingly orders a black servant girl in the same letter where she requests bolts of taffeta and other sartorial goods that she desires. In providing such a complex portrait of Isabella, Shemek avoids the common pitfall in which early modern women writers are idealized to an extent that praise of their writing is patronizing.

The second section of Isabella's letters (1500–09) portrays Isabella as deeply entrenched in both the pleasures of the domestic high life and hard-edged political management. Between letters that describe happy family events, such as the birth and baptism of a long-awaited male heir, Federico—enthusiastically relating, for example, Federico's first words to her husband—are meticulous, discerning letters in which Isabella reports to her family members on the wars of Italy. Letters also recount Isabella's meeting with the representative of the French ambassador, her delivery of weapons to the Duke of Ferrara, and assurance of Mantuan loyalty to the duchess of Urbino—as Isabella skilfully takes over duties from her absent husband in allying with the French and Venetians against the Sforza of Milan. Shemek's translations are thoughtfully executed, providing us with a voice that is authentic and personal.

Tracing Isabella's correspondence from Francesco Gonzaga's release from Venetian captivity through to his death is the third, and most striking, category of Isabella's letters (1510–19). In this section, we read of Isabella's vehement efforts to release her husband and her masterful abilities in keeping the Mantuan state in good financial standing during her husband's eleven-month imprisonment. In the face of political threats, various intrigues, and

power grabs, Isabella reveals her political aptitude as she successfully upholds Gonzaga's control of Mantua. Shemek also translates a remarkable letter in which Isabella refuses to send her son Federico to Venice in exchange for her husband's release. In this section, Shemek successfully navigates some of Isabella's more complicated letters to present the reader with a rich but not overwhelming view into her duties as state administrator.

The concluding section of Shemek's brilliant text once more successfully balances Isabella's public and private duties. Correspondence reveals Isabella's shrewd war efforts, in which she tracks the movements of domestic and foreign forces through her intricate information networks. In addition to active promotion of the political and economic interests of children, we find in this section a lighter side of Isabella in which she recounts the planting of artichokes in her garden and sends her brother Alfonso a fish recipe. Shemek's text closes with a pull-out map of the Este family tree and a glossary of Isabella's correspondents, rounding out a much-anticipated translation of Italy's most productive female letter writer.

BENEDETTA LAMANNA

University of Toronto

Estill, Laura, Diane K. Jakacki, and Michael Ullyout, eds.

Early Modern Studies after the Digital Turn.

New Technologies in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 6. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe: ACMRS, 2016. Pp. vii, 378. ISBN 978-0-86698-557-4 (paperback) US\$69.95.

Like the other volumes in the New Technologies series, this one also presents new digital approaches to scholarly research. As such, it has two specific purposes: first, to highlight new research methodologies used in various digital projects, and second, to encourage readers to imagine and pursue new questions.

The various articles in the collection describe the digital resources their authors have created and are using for their research. They point out the possibilities a digital approach has offered them and the results that can be achieved by using such resources. Together, they help us to contextualize