

of specific devotions, such as the Sacred Heart, and at the same time were an active agent in their propagation. Indulgences in turn were one of the key tools for encouraging these new devotions.

This emphasis on new sources and a serial approach comes together in the three articles that study the role of printed books in confraternities. Roberto Rusconi's "« Tesoro spirituale della compagnia » : I libri delle confraternite nell'Italia del '500," for example, analyzes the increase in the number of books printed by confraternities, but also the gradual evolution in their content over time, from simply reproducing statutes and regulations, to adding indulgences, and finally to including guidance for devotional practices.

There are still plenty of traditional aspects to these articles, which still mostly look at specific geographic areas, rely on typical local sources, and address common questions such as the role of confraternities in the city, or tensions with ecclesiastical authorities. But the editors conclude with the hope that the newer approaches explored in this collection can provide a valuable additional perspective on existing confraternal sources and studies.

Dylan Reid
Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies
University of Toronto

Nerbano, Mara. *Il teatro della devozione. Confraternite e spettacolo nell'Umbria medievale*. Perugia: Morlacchi Editore, 2006. xx, 412 pp., 48 illustrations. ISBN 88-6074-065-7. Euros 23.

This is a fundamental study for the history of theatre in Italian confraternities. It examines in detail the "performance" of sacred songs, that is, of the *laude* that were the traditional songs of late medieval confraternities in central Italy. The extensive repertoire developed by and for Italian confraternities included quite a number of "dramatic lauds" meant to be sung by two or more performers who would, in a way, assume a "role", very much as an actor would. The most famous such "dramatic laud" is Jacopone da Todi's *Donna de Paradiso*, also known as *Pianto della Madonna* (not to be confused with his *Stabat mater*, which narrates the same situation, but in Latin and as a narrative, not as a dialogue). The corpus of lauds available to confraternities was quite large and contributed significantly not only to their devotional rituals, but also to the development of a devotional theatre that, in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, blossomed into elaborate sacred representations (*sacre rappresentazioni*) and spectacular spiritual comedies.

For her study, Mara Nerbano focuses her attention primarily on the region of Umbria and its three major cities—Perugia, Assisi, and Orvieto—though occasionally she does also refer to the larger context of the Umbro-Tuscan region. Although in many ways homogenous, this repertoire does reveal a number of differences that reflect local situations, traditions, and interests. As a result, the repertoire is both

rich and subtly differentiated. This variety is reflected also in the use to which the lauds were put, whether within the confraternity itself, and hence quite private, or outside in processions or other civic rituals, and hence quite public.

The volume is divided into five chapters, each with its own set of subdivisions. The first chapter surveys the “textual repertoire”, that is the lauds produced in the major centres of Perugia, Assisi, and Orvieto (1–40). It identifies an early stage of experimentation between 1324 and 1339 that established the basic characteristics of the genre. In the following hundred years, this basic repertoire was copied, recopied, elaborated and even increased, but, as Nerbano points out, the initial impulse had been spent and nothing truly innovative was produced. After the mid fifteenth century, even the recopying, let alone the commissioning of *laudari* disappears. In the second chapter, “Between Ritual and Representation” (41–115), Nerbano seeks to connect the written *laudari* to the devotional practices of the confraternities, systematically analysing the extant records that speak of the performance of *laude* within and without their devotional contexts. This chapter leads naturally into the third, “Confraternities, Places, and Theatrical Space” (117–184), which examines the geography, both physical and symbolic, of these performances. Nerbano carries out a virtual census of confraternities in the three major cities and examines their history up to the time when they acquire permanent quarters that, very quickly, become “theatres” for the staging of dramatic and non-dramatic *laude*. At this point, Nerbano examines the “morphology” of these sites and locations both from the perspective of their being a static container for the performance of theatre and devotional rituals and of their being a dynamic element for the growth and development of these practices. The fourth chapter, “Material Culture” (185–251), examines the props and other materials used by confraternities in their performance of *laude*. Not only the lauds themselves, but confraternity inventories point to a rich array of costumes, props, and machinery available and maintained from year to year for such performances. Some reflected contemporary reality, other were instead stylized interpretations, some aimed for naturalistic effects, others for the surprise of the marvellous. The fifth and last chapter, “Words and Images” (253–335) examines how the verses of the *laude* and the imagination of the performers (but also the spectators) blended together to give meaning to experience, to play with emotions so as to offer hope to the devout. The volume comes to a close with a rich bibliography (which, unfortunately, is limited to texts published in Italian or French and ignores most of the scholarship in English on *laude* and, more generally, on the confraternal movement in Italy), an index of names, and 48 black/white illustrations.

Nerbano’s thorough examination of the various ways in which devotion and spectacle intersected at multiple levels and on different occasions in late medieval Umbrian confraternities is solidly based on a careful reading of the sources and a detailed analysis of the documents. It thus renders an invaluable service not only to historians of theatre, who will find much in it to enrich their own work, but also to historians of devotional practices, of literature, and of society who will tap into

it for their own interests. By connecting so well the enclosed setting of private confraternity devotions with the wide-open setting of late medieval urban religion, Nerbano brings into focus the liminal nature of confraternal life and its contribution to the life of the community.

Konrad Eisenbichler
Victoria College
University of Toronto