



1993

Review Essay: Del Sera, Beatrice. *Amor di virtù: Commedia in cinque atti, 1548*

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Recommended Citation

Johnston, Robert M. (1993) "Review Essay: Del Sera, Beatrice. *Amor di virtù: Commedia in cinque atti, 1548*," *Quidditas*: Vol. 14 , Article 35.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rmmra/vol14/iss1/35>

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the basis for the boy's account. In further examining these phenomena, the author presents a number of theories as to why the boy believed in his own words. He was certainly, as Sebald comments, an amazing actor and largely in control of his own interrogation.

This is a well-written and fascinating study that sheds new light on witchcraft and the witchcraze in seventeenth-century Germany. Sebald develops a host of potential avenues for approaching the confession, including the psychological concept of mythomania, but he shies away from working towards concrete conclusions. These could have been derived by way of comparisons, but Sebald is almost too fascinated with this one case to widen the basis for his study and to present it in its exemplary nature.

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Del Sera, Beatrice. *Amor di virtù: Commedia in cinque atti, 1548*. Ed Elissa Weaver. Longo Editore, Ravenna 1990. 286 pp.

This carefully prepared edition of a sixteenth-century convent play will interest Renaissance scholars for at least two reasons: (1) it brings to light a fine example of a neglected Italian dramatic tradition, the 'teatro claustrale', and (2) it offers an intriguing psychological view of feminine religious experience. In the same years that Ariosto, Machiavelli, Bibbiena, Trissino, and Aretino wrote their well-known secular plays for educated, courtly audiences, behind the walls of monasteries and convents flourished an equally vital tradition of sacred and religious drama. Largely unpublished, these plays have drawn little attention from modern scholars. Elissa Weaver's critical edition of *Amor di virtù* by the Dominican sister Beatrice del Sera helps to fill this lacuna.

Intended for performance by the nuns of San Niccolò a Prato in Tuscany, *Amor di virtù* draws its story and most of its characters from Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. In her excellent introduction (pp 9–73, in Italian), Weaver explains Del Sera's skillful reduction and reorganization of Boccaccio's long narrative to adapt it for the stage. The play's original title, *Amor di virtù, opera fatta da una donna fiorentina sopra il 'Filocolo', nella considerazione d'uno animo valoroso nelle virtuose imprese; il quale deliberadamente cercando il fine dell'aurata beatitudine, perviene alla cognizione di Dio*, states clearly the intended Christina allegory. Weaver's sensitive reading of the play's additional themes, however, reveals an autobiographical subtext that mixes worldly, secular concerns with the spiritual. In the motifs of imprisonment and the power of money, Weaver finds a strong criticism of the forced vocation of young women. Del Sera was herself a victim of this practice, common among Florentine families who could not maintain their wealth and social station and at the same time provide adequate dowries for their daughters. In the love story of Aurabeatrice, Del Sera's *alter ego* and the play's protagonist, Weaver finds both an allegory of the soul's unison with God and a dramatic, psychological exploration of the romantic experience impossible to the author in real life.

Weaver's 'Nota al testo' (pp 78–86) includes a description of the unique manuscript of the play, a list of obvious manuscript errors, and explanations of her regularization of spelling, usage, and abbreviations. Copious footnotes explicate obscure passages and grammatical constructions found in the text and compare scenes, actions, and characters of the play to their counterparts in Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. Indices of historical and mythical names and of terms that appear in the footnotes follow.

One may choose to read *Amor di virtù* as an example of Renaissance *imitatio*, as an introduction to a relatively unstudied area of early European drama, or as a document of Florentine social history. In all cases, its publication is a valuable contribution to the Renaissance studies.

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Sommerville, John C. *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England*. University of Georgia Press, Athens 1992. 211 pp. \$35.00.

Although the title of this study leads the reader to expect something along the lines of Philippe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood*, some of the most original observations have a slightly different focus: the family and Puritanism.

John C. Sommerville wishes to demonstrate that the Puritan preoccupation with children can be derived from the dynamics of the Puritan movement itself — from its attempt to build a future in the face of Elizabethan opposition. In structuring that ideal future, children became the natural focus of Puritan efforts, resulting in an acute sensitivity to the nature of childhood itself. Only later, after the failure of the great experiment and after the Restoration, did Puritanism evolve into a Dissenting survival mentality.

In the seventeenth century, a realistic depiction of childhood emerged, allowing the Puritans to see children as they really are. In the process, covenant theology and the central doctrine of human depravity were softened and even transformed into an effort to produce a milder paradigm of the childhood experience.

Although Sommerville may at times exaggerate the degree to which theology was bent to accommodate a perceived childhood reality, the Puritan image of childhood, 'warts and all', does seem to differ significantly from the establishment view. Sometimes, however, the definition of Puritanism employed in this study is so inflexible and static that little recognition is given to recent interpretations of more elastic, mythic dimensions of Puritan sensibility (in Bercovitch, for example). This somewhat rigid view of Puritanism later results in questionable statements: 'The concept of Puritan humor is virtually a self-contradiction' (p 111); Nathaniel Ward, author of *The Simple Cobler of Aggawam*, would not agree.

Sommerville's analysis of Puritan educational writing is more thought-provoking than his treatment of humor and entertainment. It is directly committed to the Puritan ideal of respect for the individual and for that individual's right to achieve salvation without mediation. This observation permits an important distinction: