

Reading Publics and Religious Controversy in Sixteenth-Century Italy, England, and France

Workshop facilitators: Simon Gilson, David Lines, Maude Vanhaelen

Report on the seminar held at Warwick University, 11 November 2011

This proved to be a highly successful workshop, which focused upon reading publics in relation to matters of religious controversy in sixteenth-century Italy, England, and France. It explored, within a comparative European perspective, the realm of book consumption and its broader implications for both individual readers and networks of readers. Papers delivered at the workshop considered the writings and audience of figures who moved either between Italy and France and/or Italy and England because of their religious commitments (or indeed of texts that moved between these countries).

The workshop was very well attended with over twenty participants in total. The grant allowed us to fully fund 3 US and 1 Italian speaker (a further speaker was based at Warwick), 1 US respondent (Dr. Paul Gehl), and 5 invited UK respondents (Drs. Abigail Brundin, Lisa Sampson, Chiara Franceschini, Claudia Rossignoli, Ambra Moroncini). A further 15 colleagues from Warwick and other UK institutions were in attendance.

This made for a lively and highly focused group of scholars, whose interests ranged geographically (esp. England, Italy, France) quite widely and in terms of discipline (historians, literary specialists across French, Italian and English literature, classicists), but who all shared a keen interest in sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century Europe. After a brief introduction by the organizer, the day was organized around five papers (each of 30-45 minutes with questions). This was followed by an extended round-table discussion that drew a number of stimulating contributions from Dr. Paul Gehl, the invited respondents, and other colleagues.

We were extremely fortunate to be able to hear papers from leading specialists in the field who were able to illuminate well the ways in which books and intellectuals moved between Italy and England, on the one hand, and Italy and France, on the other. Dr. Anne Overell spoke on sixteenth-century book collections and their movement between Italy and England; Prof. Thomas Mayer spoke on Pole's reading of Machiavelli; Prof. Michael Wyatt dealt with an early seventeenth-century sermon delivered in Italian by an Italian protestant at the court of King James; Dr. Ingrid De Smet spoke on the organization of du Thou's library; and Prof. Rosanna Gorris spoke of a little-known library at the sixteenth-century court of Turin.

In the roundtable, we discussed: the complex intersections between print, manuscript and orality, the role of libraries and inventories in the constitution of knowledge and religious controversy, the various modes of reading employed (and related vocabulary), the status and range of approaches to the Bible; issues of censorship and its avoidance; the role of correspondence; the place of memory and memorization; the household as a locus for reading and writing; the role of gift books in readerly exchange; the crossovers between cultures and the lack of synergies between them; the reactivation of complex legacies, including medieval ones, in the process of reading and in reading communities.

The comments made by speakers and participants are suggestive of the quality and degree of engagement and dialogue promoted by the event: 'the level of academic engagement was very high indeed'; 'such an enjoyable and productive event'; 'I found the symposium to be enormously stimulating'; 'stimulating and enjoyable conference at Warwick that expanded research horizons'. My particular thanks are due to Jayne Brown for her help in organising the workshop.

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/warwicknewberry/mellon-newberry/renaissanceandearlymoderncommunities/readingpublics/>