MANUSCRIPT CULTURE IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

Even after the arrival of printing in the fifteenth century, texts continued to be circulated within Italian society by means of manuscript. Scribal culture offered rapidity, flexibility and a sense of private, privileged communication. This is the first detailed treatment of the continuing use of scribal transmission in Renaissance Italy. Brian Richardson explores the uses of scribal culture within specific literary genres, its methods and its audiences. He also places it within the wider systems of textual communication and of self-presentation, examining the relationships between manuscript and print and between manuscript and the spoken or sung performance of verse. An important contribution to a lively area of the history of the book, this study will be of interest both for the abundance of new material on the circulation of texts in Italy and as a model for how to study the cultures of manuscript and print in early modern Europe.

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Preface

This book is intended as a contribution to the history of the circulation of texts in Renaissance Italy. It is based on the premiss that this history is, or should be, an integral part of the study of literature itself, not merely a complement to it. If one is to understand fully the nature and the influence of texts, it is necessary to know who their authors were addressing, how these authors expected their works to reach readers and the ways in which these works were in fact received, both during their first diffusion and in the longer term.

The central topic of the book is manuscript culture: that is, the activities and values associated with the circulation of handwritten texts. Manuscript culture in early modern England has been the subject of important new work since the 1990s, including the seminal writings of the late Harold Love, of Arthur Marotti and of Henry Woudhuysen. In early modern Italian studies, the situation is somewhat different. Scholars have produced excellent work on the traditions of specific texts in manuscript and on some professional scribes, and I have relied greatly on information drawn from their research. But relatively little attention has been paid to manuscript circulation as a distinctive part of a wider system of textual communication, used sometimes on its own, sometimes in conjunction with circulation through print and the spoken or sung word. There has been a pervasive tendency to assume that, after the introduction of the printing press to Italy in the 1460s, publishing became synonymous with printing: any text that remained in manuscript is all too easily described as unpublished or 'inedito', as if to have a text printed was the only way to make it available to the public. And the copying of Italian manuscripts in the sixteenth century – whether by authors, by scribes or by other users of texts – has been documented and studied less fully than that of the earlier period. For instance, the series of catalogues of *Manoscritti datati d'Italia*, very useful for the fifteenth century, takes 31 December 1500 as its cut-off point for almost all libraries. The result has been an obscuring,

or even masking, of a set of social and intellectual practices that played a significant linking role in the histories of Renaissance literature and of the Renaissance book.

This book has a wide scope in terms of chronology, geography and the types of literature and copying covered, while giving particular attention to certain aspects of manuscript culture. It spans the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, so that both continuities and diversities of practice can be traced between the years before and after the arrival of printing. However, I am concerned especially with the latter period, when manuscripts were no longer the sole means of written communication but, in some cases and where a choice was possible, became an alternative to print. Examples have been drawn from throughout the Italian peninsula, even if those from the northern half predominate, and I attempt to take account of the diverse contexts encountered in different states at different moments. I have concentrated particularly on the diffusion of works newly or recently composed, though some mention is made of the circulation of older texts, including a few from before the fifteenth century. I study both the transmission of these texts 'outwards', by their authors and other owners, and their reception by readers. The scribal culture studied embraces writing by all people, not simply by professional scribes. The texts considered are literary in a broad sense: they include works of the imagination but also those concerning history, politics and religion. On the other hand, this is not a general survey of all the uses of manuscript, which would have accorded more space to everyday needs such as correspondence, drafts and official and private record-keeping or, at the other extreme, the production of de luxe manuscripts for personal or family use. The majority of works discussed are written in the vernacular, but works in Latin are treated alongside them; I do not perceive any major distinctions in the nature of the transmission of texts in the two languages. Transcriptions in Greek, however, constitute a specialized sector in terms of both production and readership, and they are discussed only briefly in Chapter 2 Section 2.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the nature of the manuscript culture of the Italian Renaissance. It assesses the reasons for which it continued to flourish and considers some of the factors that differentiated it from print publication. It then considers how texts were circulated within society, either by their authors or by their users, sometimes within very close circles, sometimes within wider ones. Finally, it examines the public posting of certain kinds of text. In Chapter 2, I turn to the practicalities of scribal culture, asking which kinds of handwriting were in use during the

period and how they were taught, and what help was available from paid scribes if a fair copy of a text were needed. The next pair of chapters deals with the use of manuscripts in circulating those genres of literature in which it was most important. Chapter 3 looks at how handwritten poetry, especially lyric poetry, was sent from authors to readers, sometimes inviting or provoking responses in kind, and at how some readers made personal collections of verse in manuscript. Chapter 4, on prose, covers works concerned chiefly with a variety of topics of actuality: current affairs, religious controversies, prophecies of impending renewal and literary debates.

In all these chapters, manuscript culture is considered mainly in its own right as a context for the circulation of literature. However, in order to define its boundaries and its specificities, it also needs to be studied in relation to the two other modes of circulation that were available in the sixteenth century: to the oldest of all, oral performance, and to the newcomer, the printed word. These three forms of communication can be seen as standing in a triangular relationship. Texts were first created in handwritten or sometimes in vocal form, but could then move freely into another medium. Further, one form of transmission could be used simultaneously with another. Thus a manuscript text might continue to be circulated in handwritten form alone, but it could be passed into print, sometimes immediately, sometimes after an interval. At that point, manuscript circulation might cease or at any rate diminish, but from print a text sometimes found its way back into manuscript. Printed books, especially early ones, might be completed, corrected or decorated by hand. Manuscript and printed texts could be read aloud or, in the case of verse, sung. Equally, performed texts could be transcribed by the pen and perhaps subsequently printed.

In the last two chapters I therefore go on to consider aspects of the borders of manuscript culture with print and orality. Chapter 5 focuses mainly on the paratexts used by authors to address their manuscript works to their readers – to dedicatees in the first instance yet also, explicitly or implicitly, to a wider public; it then asks how far there was continuity of practice in the paratexts of print publication. Although this chapter deals with just one point of comparison between manuscript and print, it suggests the general importance of not seeing the two systems as isolated from each other. Not only did printing not bring about a sudden or complete break with some of the uses of manuscript, but scribal culture influenced print publication in many respects, including the central activity with which this book is concerned, the social circulation of literature: both manuscript and print were used as means of self-fashioning, of

shaping one's social and intellectual identity. Chapter 6 turns to the links between manuscript texts and oral performance. After considering some factors that encouraged a culture of performance throughout our period, I study evidence for the reading aloud or singing of verse in manuscript, and the role that handwriting might play in recording and circulating texts that had their genesis in performance.

Transcriptions from primary sources are moderately conservative: most abbreviations have been expanded, *u* and *v* are distinguished, accentuation has been regularized and punctuation has sometimes been modernized. Translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

Like some of the texts discussed in the chapters that follow, sections of this book have been circulated among friends (though not in manuscript) for their comments. Orality has also played its part in the gestation of the book, in the form of discussions of some of its subject-matter, whether informally or following seminar papers. I am extremely grateful to all those who have provided help of one sort or another. The first person I would have wished to thank individually is the late Conor Fahy: the idea for the book germinated and grew with the help of his promptings and suggestions for reading, often drawn from recondite sources. For their careful scrutiny of drafts of chapters, I am grateful to two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press; to Richard Andrews, Guyda Armstrong, Rhiannon Daniels, Filippo de Vivo, Laura Nuvoloni and Richard Rastall; and especially to Simon Gilson and Helena Sanson, who generously shouldered the heaviest burden. Information and suggestions were also kindly offered by a number of colleagues including Jonathan Alexander, Lilian Armstrong, Giliola Barbero, Margaret Bent, Warren Boutcher, Abigail Brundin, Peter Burke, Colin Burrow, Stefano Cracolici, Cristina Dondi, Thomas Earle, Iain Fenlon, Neil Harris, Anthony Hobson, Dilwyn Knox, David McKitterick, Ian Maclean, Ian Moxon, Erika Milburn, Angela Nuovo, Dorit Raines and Phil Withington. Linda Bree and Maartje Scheltens of Cambridge University Press have given admirable guidance and advice.

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Abbreviations

ASF	Archivio di Stato, Florence
ASI	*Archivio storico italiano*
BAM	Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City
BCAB	Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna
BCR	Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Rome
BEM	Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena
BHR	*Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*
Bibl.	Biblioteca
BL	British Library, London
BLF	Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence
BMCV	Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice
BMV	Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice
BNCF	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence
BNN	Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III, Naples
BNP	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
BPP	Biblioteca Palatina, Parma
BRF	Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence
BTM	Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan
DBI	*Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–)
GSLI	*Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*
IMU	*Italia medioevale e umanistica*
IS	*Italian Studies*
JRM	John Rylands University Library, Manchester
LB	*La Bibliofilìa*

MdP	Mediceo del Principato
NAL	National Art Library, London
ONB	Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna
RSI	*Rivista storica italiana*
SFI	*Studi di filologia italiana*
SPCT	*Studi e problemi di critica testuale*