

Thomas V. Cohen and Elizabeth S. Cohen — *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome: Trials before the Papal Magistrates*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. Pp. xx, 308.

Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome deals with eight trials or pre-trial investigations conducted by magistrates to determine the grounds for a case or a conviction. Most are from the late 1550s, with one from 1542 and another from 1574. At this time both Church and State across Europe began emphasizing and enforcing obedience to ever more clearly prescriptive laws, passed and upheld by ever more clearly defined hierarchical orders. Rome is a particularly good test case, since here Church and State melded into one. The eight trials are plucked from the reams of court transcripts with some care, and are representative not as "ideal types", but as indicators of the complex shifting reticulations that define early modern social relations, and as exemplars of the puzzles and epiphanies that characterize trial records. For one thing, they lay out the tangled workings of the judicial system, where abstract laws superintended by three distinct courts intersected with traditional extra-judicial systems of settling accounts and with complex codes of honour as these were shaped by gender, age, rank, and occupation. They therefore show how tradition undermined the state-church drive to obedience, less through direct opposition than through simple incomprehension or canny circumvention.

Beyond this, most of the accounts reproduced here are incomplete, due to editorial choice, judicial procedure, notarial lapse, or decayed manuscripts. One student who worked with the Cohens on these trials complained, "The worms always eat the punch line" (p. 31). There is a vibrant interplay of voices, since magistrates heard evidence from different witnesses on different days, and those under investigation seldom heard the testimony of others. It is sometimes difficult to determine where the offence lay in the crime, and in most cases no sentence survives. The authors have not attempted to tie up loose ends or impose some neat and convenient closure. This effectively conveys some of the frustration and confusion arising from working with these records. It also reflects the variation resulting from the researchers' point of view and the Cohens' belief that these trials do not teach a single lesson. Their historical promise is delivered only when one accepts incomplete records and ambiguous interpretations. Finally, through all this confusion we get a sharper image of the individuals who passed before the court. They may be marginalized, but they are not hapless victims of social subordination or state power. In many cases the state and court display considerable confusion, while the witnesses before them display considerable resourcefulness.

So what individuals are these? The first case concerns a couple of hapless assassins employed by the Bishop of Ancona and his son, the Abbot of San Galgano. It demonstrates how patron-client relations frequently involved negotiation, persuasion, and betrayal and how the reservations of hired killers might revolve more around the dishonour than the immorality of the deed. The second transcript embraces two trials and five stories centred on a Roman gentleman (Paolo di Grassi), three courtesans (Camilla the Skinny, Pasqua the Paduan, Ottavia the Spaniard), and a supporting cast that includes servants, neighbours, and a Milanese fencing master. The large cast and

variety of intersecting stories make it by far the most confusing of all the transcripts in the collection. It demonstrates how a prostitute's origin, *qualità*, and personality became factors in defining her sexual honour, and how this was further complicated by her degree of contact with a rakish gentleman. This trial introduces a further complexity, the legal limbo that characterized the time between the death of one pope and the election of his successor (called the Vacant Seat).

In the third case we are presented with a puzzling multiplicity of motivations for the flight of the teenaged Ottavia with her Spanish music teacher, Bernardino. Does she force him, or he her? What roles do a missing dowry, a widowed mother, and cross-dressing play? Does Bernardino's torture bring out truth? The fourth case has a perjurious Agostino Bonamore in litigation with homicidal in-laws who pass off their deflowered daughter as a virgin and treat their son-in-law with contempt ever after. Rank, honour, the role of women in promoting vendettas, and the uncertain loyalties of short-term servants suborned as witnesses all figure here. The fifth has a Roman notary, Gieronimo Piccardi, pursuing the truth in the adultery of his wife Giulia and the complicity of her servant Camilla, and brings up the competing solidarities of teenage brides, rough husbands, and lower-class servants. An initial alliance based on gender collapses in face of the realities of marriage and rank. The sixth illustrates the desperate love magic of a Greek courtesan, Lucrezia, betrayed again by a formerly complicitous servant. The seventh gives the testimony of a cobbler Danese, who engages in lay exorcism, and a seamstress, Cassandra, who casts spells, and illustrates the gap between learned and vernacular conceptions of magic as the magistrates try to convince the two that they are operating in league with the devil. Finally, the eighth investigates a group of villagers who have put on a Carnival play which, in the eyes of a nervous clergy, gives too much credibility to demi-gods and devils and too much attention to a randy hermit.

The Cohens use the trials to undermine any binary view of Roman society. Easy oppositions of popular and elite culture give way to an intermixing of vernacular and learned, where borrowings are reciprocal and outcomes unpredictable. Networks of solidarities based on age, gender, rank, and occupation connect vertically and hierarchically with relations of loyalty and betrayal. "Hierarchy did not beget social segregation; on the contrary, it could foster strongly felt connections" (p. 21). Individuals calculated loyalty and betrayal on considerations of shame and guilt, the former determined in the face of the community, and the latter by the inner voice of conscience. In this interplay of honour code and Christian ethic, honour was paramount: "Romans regarded honour as a scarce commodity; there was never enough to go around" (p. 24). The courts were a complex forum for this interplay, sending ambivalent messages. In this period "criminal" was an adjective, not a noun, and commutations of harsh penalties were common.

The Cohens have used trial records in classrooms from the primary to the graduate school level and recommend *Words and Deeds* as a text to illuminate the epistemological and anthropological issues that inform social history. To this end, they put the trials into context with an introduction, glossary, and commentaries that are clearly argued and engagingly written. The introduction sets the general background with compact discussions of Rome's politics, judicial machinery, society, and codes of

honour. Each transcript includes a commentary highlighting historical, anthropological, and interpretive issues and offering hypotheses on motivations, meanings, and outcomes. It stands alone as a valuable text that can lift students beyond survey textbook certainties and stimulate seminar discussions. Those wishing to put these microhistories into a broader judicial and historical framework would be wise to pair *Words and Deeds* with Thomas Kuehn's *Law, Family, and Women: Towards a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1991).

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James Grantham Turner, ed. — *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp. xvii, 345.

"If we put the sex back in history," asks the editor of this collection of essays, "where does this leave the Renaissance?" (p. 1). Actually the sex never really was left out of history, but it is true that historians today are far more sensitive both to the history of sexuality and to the role of gender than was the case in the past. There is also no doubt that our perception of the Renaissance as a cultural and historical epoch is bound to be reshaped by the recognition that social behaviour and cultural artifacts were deeply moulded by assumptions and beliefs — sometimes open, sometimes hidden — about sex and gender.

This book is conceived as a contribution to the historical study of the late Renaissance; indeed, as the preface rather grandly proclaims, the essays in this volume "rise to the challenge of producing a new history" (p. xv). Only two of the authors are themselves professional historians; the other contributors are all specialists in the study of literature or art, whose techniques of analysis are generally little familiar to historians. But social historians can certainly learn much from their work.

Some of the authors in this collection do use familiar historical sources or frame their arguments in terms with which most social historians will be entirely comfortable. The historian Guido Ruggiero, for example, argues that to understand the society of Renaissance Italy we must look not only at the world of "civic morality" with its emphasis on order and controlled sexual behaviour, but also at the sexual demi-monde that existed in every Italian city. Despite vigorous attempts to suppress this illicit sexuality, Ruggiero argues, its availability actually helped mainstream society to function as smoothly as it did. The author's viewpoint is fresh, but his approach and style of exposition are reassuringly familiar. The other historian in this collection, David Kuchta, examines the "semiotics of masculinity" in Renaissance England. While his terminology may unsettle some historians, the substance of his argument about formal and informal codes of dress among English courtiers certainly will not. Constance Jordan also uses sources of a type long familiar to social historians — tracts from the great Renaissance "dispute about women" — to address the old question of class and gender: some male and female authors, she shows, were