

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Franklin, Mary, and Hannah Burton. *She Being Dead Yet Speaketh: The Franklin Family Papers*. Ed. Vera J. Camden

Leah Knight

Volume 44, Number 4, Fall 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1089372ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i4.38665>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Knight, L. (2021). Review of [Franklin, Mary, and Hannah Burton. *She Being Dead Yet Speaketh: The Franklin Family Papers*. Ed. Vera J. Camden]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(4), 274–276.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i4.38665>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2022

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Louis de Masures (723–736) et la postface de Gilbert Dahan (737–752), ce beau volume se termine par une riche orientation bibliographique (753–772).

MATTEO LETA

University of Toronto

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i4.38664>

Franklin, Mary, and Hannah Burton.

She Being Dead Yet Speaketh: The Franklin Family Papers. Ed. Vera J. Camden.

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 71. Toronto: Iter Press, 2020. Pp. xxi, 349. ISBN 9780866986236 (paperback) US\$59.95.

Who speaks in this volume? Primarily, we are privy to the voices of two Londoners, hailing from two centuries: the seventeenth and the eighteenth. They never met; one died a decade before the other was born. Still, grandmother and granddaughter shared the expressive space of a single notebook. On one page, poignantly, both their hands appear. Thanks to Vera J. Camden's curation of these and related texts, that manuscript can now tell these women's tales to a larger readership than they might ever have imagined.

Mary Franklin was a Dissenter whose writings first found an audience among her religious community, with her autobiography being quoted in her own funeral sermon, which in turn was published for an early eighteenth-century audience; it is also edited here. Franklin began writing about her life after her preacher husband lost his living during the religiously intolerant Restoration. This loss heralded two decades of familial torment involving his repeated stints in prison, the state seizure of their assets, and attendant penury for her and their many children. Franklin concisely recorded these experiences, as well as memories of her early life, in one of her husband's sermon notebooks turned upside down (aptly, given the circumstances). As is the norm in accounts of this kind, her afflictions are rigorously reframed as blessings.

Franklin's notebook eventually passed to her daughter's daughter, Hannah Burton, who filled the blank pages with a heart-rending diary that is of considerable substance (occupying about a hundred pages of this volume) despite being written over a single season in late 1782, when she was in her late

fifties. Amid prolific prayers for salvation, the widowed, lonely, hungry, debt-ridden Burton documents her fruitless attempts to forestall destitution and to maintain a faith in divine providence as staunch as was her grandmother's. Between her calls to a deaf-seeming god, we are afforded glimpses of socio-economic circumstances that are both moving and informative. She fears every knock at the door, lest it herald a creditor or taxman; she lives chiefly on bread and cheese, in ragged clothes; she laments that she cannot help the poor, since she is among them, and that as head of her family she cannot maintain her adult children, who are also impoverished and sick. Equally revealing is the view provided of Burton's education and intellect, through her frequent quotation of poems, hymns, sermons, and scripture; this citational habit attests to a rich web of spiritual literacy that sustained her when nearly nothing else did. Even so, the diary's final entry trails off in an indecipherable hand, as though she had no more strength to write.

Camden reimagines the diachronic circumstances of this manuscript's making by setting its makers within unique if overlapping contexts—religious, familial, geographical, and economic—as well as a collection of adjacent primary sources that she treats as parts of a familial archive. Readers new to the subjects encountered here will value the editor's extensive introduction, if they do not find it overly long or, like the volume's contents, structured with perhaps undue deference to the miscellaneity of the assembled materials. While the introduction helpfully refuses to assume that readers know a Dissenter from a Nonconformist from a Puritan, the same audience served well on this front will be misled by the claim that England was Protestant from Henry VIII until James II (Mary I only makes an appearance a few pages on). Generally, however, key aspects of political and cultural history are selected and sourced with care.

The format of this modernized and richly illustrated edition should suit classroom use, although some peripheral materials, like the letters and wills in the appendices, pull focus from the Franklin-Burton text rather than illuminate it. Those appendices might have been better populated with the texts that currently break up that central manuscript. Franklin's autobiographical account is here preceded, for instance, by a separate notebook, in her hand and others, featuring copies of gallows speeches and farewell letters from figures implicated in seditious plots in the 1680s, among other items; the autobiography is then followed by a brief flurry of marital correspondence, and next by Franklin's will, before Burton's diary is presented. In the original manuscript,

by contrast, Burton responds directly to (indeed, on) the final page inscribed by her grandmother. The interpolation of extraneous documents here seems at odds with the ethos and pathos of the source, which Camden articulates so well: “in writing in her grandmother’s journal she [Burton] is aspiring to a proximity and protection, touching as it were the hand that penned an account of God’s protection” (70). That touch, achieved with material ease in the original, is somewhat dulled by a thick weave of textual addenda in this collection.

Assembling, modernizing, annotating, and contextualizing such a diverse anthology—by many hands, in several genres, and including previously unpublished work—is nonetheless a major accomplishment. The presentation of these materials as a familial archive counterbalances our tendency to decontextualize historical texts by viewing them in isolation as the products and possessions of individual authors, rather than as part of a larger community or intergenerational inheritance. Similarly, the non-elite status of the creators of the Franklin family papers counterbalances the mass of such survivals, which disproportionately derive from higher-status people. On the whole, this volume offers a rich and complex resource for historians of early modern religion, urban life, the family, and life-writing to discover and further draw out.

LEAH KNIGHT

Brock University

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i4.38665>

Gagné, John.

Milan Undone: Contested Sovereignities in the Italian Wars.

I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021. Pp. xvi, 452. ISBN 978-0-6742-4872-4 (hardcover) US\$94.95.

As John Gagné says in the introduction to his new work, “as much as scholars have chased the history of the modern state by asking after its genesis or origins, there has been little talk of its failures, collapses, and stillbirths” (7). One might think that the study of state formation would offer nothing new, but Gagné brings something fresh to the perspective by homing in on these collapses and what he terms as the “surfeit of sovereignty” in the first three