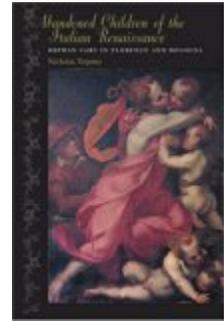


Nicholas Terpstra. *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. 336 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-8184-8.

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Children, Charity, and Civic Culture in Early Modern Italy

Nicholas Terpstra's *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna* is a well-researched and important study of orphanages and conservatories and their relationship to the civic settings of two significant Italian cities. The Bolognese and Florentine institutions discussed in this volume served as models for institutions subsequently established throughout early modern Europe. Terpstra tackles this subject with an unprecedented level of depth and rigor and has made his findings accessible and engaging to an English-language audience. His careful analysis of links between these children's institutions and the cultural and political contexts of their host cities form a central theme of this book and one of its many strengths.

The "Renaissance" discussed here is not the flowering fifteenth century, but instead the messier sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Florence was no longer even nominally a republic but now a "prototype of absolutist government" (p. 22) ruled by the ennobled Medici dukes. Bologna, the "second city" of the Papal States, existed within the purview of a Vatican that by this time was wary not only of uppity cities within its Italian territories, but also of marauding Spanish and French armies on the peninsula and the rising tide of Protestant reformers elsewhere. Nonetheless, continuities with the preceding decades remained, including regular outbreaks of plague, large numbers of orphaned and needy children, and the continued importance of confraternities in communal welfare. In this book, Terpstra explores how citizens in two Italian cities responded to these circum-

stances. Specifically, he investigates "how orphanages emerged out of a host of needs, expectations, resources, and opportunities" and notes "the gradual evolution of common forms, the slow construction of networks of homes in a couple of Italian cities, and the dawning realization that the cost of care could be borne in some part by those being cared for." (pp. 4-5).

Terpstra charts these developments through an examination of 18 homes for children (8 in Bologna and 10 in Florence), including both institutions for boys (which he calls "orphanages") and for girls ("conservatories"). Collectively, these institutions accommodated children from diverse situations, not all of whom were indigent or abandoned. In both cities, wards and/or their families frequently came to contribute to the costs of running the establishments. Textile work produced by residents in some institutions' workshops helped generate revenue, and especially in Bologna, some charity homes for girls began to allow comparatively well-off families to temporarily board their daughters for a fee.

The different institutions in each city varied widely in size and also in terms of the social classes of the children they served. Yet Terpstra argues that the seemingly fragmented provision of institutional relief was really "a form of coordinated decentralization: what seem on the surface to be a number of entirely independent homes turn out on closer analysis to be a network linked together by a series of personal and official connections." (p. 241). He argues that this was the case in both Bologna

and Florence, but he also notes differences between the two cities. In Bologna, orphanages and conservatories were more selective (a general poorhouse in the city accommodated the most marginal children), served mainly city residents, offered more personal care, and emphasized the eventual reintegration of wards into community life beyond institutional confines. In contrast, the homes in Florence accommodated a broader range of children but were more bureaucratic and less personal, reflecting the evolution of a centralized welfare system characteristic of an “absolutist” state.

Terpstra organizes his findings into six chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, Terpstra summarizes key features of family and children’s history in late medieval and early modern Italy and introduces readers to the charitable and political structures of sixteenth-century Florence and Bologna. The six numbered chapters fit into two main categories: those focusing on the administrative history and governance of children’s homes, and those focusing on the operations and the lives of children within these institutions. A short conclusion titled “The Politics of Renaissance Orphanages” highlights major findings concerning the organization and administration of Florence and Bologna’s homes and their links to the religious and political traditions and contexts of each city; this conclusion also provides a brief epilogue on the spread of institutions for poor children in early modern Europe.

Terpstra stresses the role of confraternities in the administration of juvenile charity homes in both Bologna and Florence. This is familiar ground for Terpstra, who has written a book on the subject.^[1] He attributes many of the differences he notes between the children’s home in Florence and Bologna to distinct confraternal models, which he in turn relates to the cities’ distinct “local traditional and political realities” (p. 195). As Terpstra explains, “Briefly, collegiate administration was favored by large confraternities that undertook many different activities, and that found it easier to allot these to different subgroups or companies. Congregational administration was leaner and more focused, with all (or almost all) members of a much smaller confraternity or congregation taking a hand at running the group’s charitable home” (pp. 193-93). Terpstra explains that Bologna’s confraternities adopted the collegiate model for political reasons: “Allowing distinct subgroups to function with a degree of autonomy within a larger corporate body matched the status that Bologna aimed to create for itself as a city within the papal state” (pp. 200-201). In contrast, congregational governance flourished in Florence as a re-

sult of local charitable and confraternal traditions and the continued popularity of the ideals articulated by the executed Dominican preacher Girolamo Savonarola. This model also allowed the Medici greater involvement and oversight and thus facilitated their state-building efforts.

Terpstra notes differences in the clergy’s role in each city as well. In Bologna, confraternal and civic leaders wary of encroachments by the papacy vigorously defended lay leadership of the confraternities and the institutions that they ran. In Florence, by contrast, leading families were less suspicious of the papacy and forged alliances with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Popular Florentine adherence to the “Savonarolan vision of Florence as a holy and charitable republic led by friars and laity together” (p. 284) also supported more prominent clerical roles in the administration of charity institutions.

Terpstra also discusses questions of gender, examining the distinct treatment of male and female wards, highlighting differences between institutions run by women and by men, and chronicling how the roles of female administrators changed over time. He finds that girls in charity homes generally had less freedom of movement, less formal education, and could remain in institutional care longer than boys. He also argues that when women ran institutions, administration was less formal, decisions were often made in group meetings, and there was closer contact between administrators and the wards in their care. Yet he notes that “In all instances, the women’s mode of governance was within a few decades (or less) criticized and reformed to bring them closer to local (male) conventions” (pp. 222-23). In Bologna, the important administrative roles that women had exercised were curtailed in the mid-sixteenth century; though prominent women continued to be involved with these institutions, men now assumed the main decision-making roles. In Florence, many conservatories had begun as communities of lay women (often widows) who lived together and took in poor girls, but they eventually underwent a “metamorphosis from conservatory to convent” (p. 233). With this transformation, the lives and future expectations of Florentine conservatory wards also changed. In contrast to their Bolognese counterparts, who were prepared for lives beyond institutional walls and reintegrated into Bolognese society as domestic servants and wives, many of the girls who entered Florentine conservatories remained in them permanently as adults.

Terpstra employs both quantitative and qualitative analysis, mainly based on research in the archives of

the various institutions he profiles, supplemented with pertinent references to other contemporary sources, including some artwork. Despite very uneven extant data across institutions, and especially scant documentation for boys' institutions (which Terpstra notes with dismay), much information is effectively presented in charts or tables within the chapters and in an appendix on institutional finances. The tabulated quantitative material includes both institutional budgetary and financial data, as well as aggregated information about institutional wards, such as their ages and lengths of stay at different institutions. In addition, Terpstra deftly uses selected anecdotes and brief case studies to illustrate many of his points. He is also judicious in his use of prescriptive institutional and confraternal statutes, using them to discern founders' attitudes and ideals without assuming that their stipulations were necessarily followed. Indeed, a theme running throughout the book is the malleability of the institutions and the ways that multiple parties used this malleability to their advantage.

Given Terpstra's subject and findings, the title *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance* is somewhat puzzling. The subtitle *Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna* more accurately characterizes this important book. The phrase "abandoned children" suggests that this will be another study of abandoned babies and the foundling homes that accommodated them—ground already well trod by other scholars. This volume represents much more than that. It is a groundbreaking study of far less commonly studied institutions, those serving orphans and other (generally older) children and adolescents in two important Italian cities. The subtitle also clarifies Terpstra's finding that children who entered charitable homes in Bologna and Florence frequently were not abandoned at all, but instead came from variety of social classes and family backgrounds and were treated with various degrees of care and attention within charity institutions, sometimes until advanced ages.

Terpstra's study contributes significantly to our understanding of both charity homes for children and the civic contexts in which they operated. The multilayered comparative framework—comparing not only multiple institutions within both Florence and Bologna, but also the broader charitable networks that existed in each of the two cities—is especially fruitful in explaining the urban contexts that shaped the foundation and development of orphanages and conservatories in sixteenth-century Italy. This approach facilitates many subtle insights and cautions against simplistic "one-size-fits-all" characterizations of charity homes and early modern

charity providers. That said, the very plethora of institutions, sponsoring confraternities, and associated individuals discussed in any given chapter sometimes makes the text difficult to follow. Perhaps this is the inevitable result of Terpstra's willingness—indeed, insistence—on viewing individual institutions not in isolation but as components of broader networks within each city. If so, this valuable perspective is worth the complication (and the effort of making notes to help keep straight the various institutions and players).

Terpstra also deserves credit for his attention to both the administrators and the residents of the institutions profiled here. Despite the substantial number of pages and chapters dedicated to the lives of children in these institutions, the book's overarching arguments centrally concern the administrative history of orphanages and how they were enmeshed in both the charitable and political cultures and traditions of each city. The introduction, conclusion, and chapters 1 ("Opening a Home") and 5 ("Running a Home") make these points most explicitly, though the same themes are evident throughout all the chapters, even those focusing on the children. For example, the strong role of patronage in the operation of orphanages is exceptionally well illustrated in the chapter discussing children's entry into these institutions.

This is not to say the book will solely serve those interested in early modern Italy and/or political, religious, or institutional history. This volume also has much to offer students and scholars of the history of children, family, and charity, regardless of their geographical and chronological areas of expertise. Especially rich in this regard are the ample portions of the book focusing on children in these institutions, which include separate chapters on entering and leaving, and two substantial chapters on the internal operations and work regimes in female and male institutions, respectively. Here, Terpstra presents numerous findings about the lives of children in these institutions, ranging from their age profiles to their discipline. He distills some of this research into summary statements about the principal differences between Florentine and Bolognese institutions discussed above and other points (e.g., "Girls created a community, while boys shared a residence." p. 153). Yet this thoroughly researched book presents far more information than can be summarized by Terpstra, or this reviewer, in just a few lines. The wealth of information about children and institutional life that Terpstra presents will undoubtedly prove a treasure trove to those interested in the lives of early modern and/or institutionalized children generally.

One curious feature of this important book concerns the contextualization of the findings for Florence and Bologna within the broader scholarship on early modern orphanages. The serious scholarly study of orphanages and conservatories has lagged considerably behind the attention to the foundling homes that took in abandoned babies. With this book, Terpstra has taken a major step in redressing this imbalance. He is thus ideally positioned to integrate his findings with those of the emerging scholarly literature on this topic, yet he seems reluctant to do so fully. Given the thoroughness of his archival research and the very ample bibliography, it is surprising that Terpstra does not reference some relevant scholarship published in the last decade or so on similar institutions in other early modern Italian cities, including Sandra Cavallo's research on Turin and Eugenio Sonnino's and Angela Groppi's work on Rome.[2] These studies provide information on institutions comparable to those discussed by Terpstra, albeit for somewhat later parts of the early modern period. Thus, it might have been useful to use this scholarship to establish ranges of similarity and difference across early modern Italian orphanages and conservatories beyond Florence and Bologna.

Terpstra does engage much other relevant scholarship within and beyond the Italian context, including Anne McCants's and Thomas Safley's books on orphanages in early modern Amsterdam and Augsburg, respectively.[3] Yet while Terpstra points out parallels and differences with their and others' findings on specific points, he does not fully engage their broader arguments. This is surprising because both Safley and McCants, like Terpstra, are centrally concerned with urban orphanages and their administration as a part of civic life in early modern European cities. Terpstra does set this study in broader historical and historiographical contexts in other respects, and makes a strong argument for the seminal role of the Florentine and Bolognese institutions as important precursors to the kinds of homes that would later emerge in other contexts. Yet by emphasizing their unique role as pioneering institutions, he passes the chance to flesh out a fuller discussion of the implications of his study for our understanding of orphanages

in early modern Italy and Europe more broadly. This is more of a missed opportunity than a flaw, however, and certainly does not diminish the groundbreaking research and analysis presented here.

Terpstra has unearthed much rich material and offers readers a compelling analysis of the origins, roles, operations and development of children's homes in two important Italian cities. His book also provides very valuable information and perspectives on children's lives in these institutions and the ways that orphanages were enmeshed in the cultural and political traditions and contexts of Italian cities. This work is a major contribution to the study of early modern orphanages and will be indispensable to those interested in history of children, charity, and family in early modern Europe, and also very valuable to students and scholars of Renaissance cities, the Catholic Reformation, early modern women's and gender history, and the history of philanthropy and social welfare.

Notes

[1]. Nicholas Terpstra, *Lay Confraternities and Civil Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[2]. Sandra Cavallo, *Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy: Benefactors and Their Motives in Turin, 1541-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Angela Groppi, *I conservatori della virtù: Donne recluse nella Roma dei papi* (Rome: Laterza, 1994); and Eugenio Sonnino, "Between the Home and the Hospice: The Plight and Fate of Girl Orphans in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Rome," in *Poor Women and Children in the European Past*, ed. John Henderson and Richard Wall (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 94-116.

[3]. Anne E.C. McCants, *Civic Charity in a Golden Age: Orphan Care in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); and Thomas Max Safley, *Charity and Economy in the Orphanages of Early Modern Augsburg* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997).

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