Like the belly of Shakespeare’s Falstaff, this magnificent, literally weighty book contains a school of tongues. Philip Hardie’s subject is how literature depicts the basic human impulse to achieve social recognition, praise, renown—and how literature reflects upon its own part in furthering and creating such fame. He studies the Virgilian figure of Fama, who erupts into the fiction of Book 4 of the Aeneid, as well as Ovid’s version of this Fama and of her house in Metamorphoses 12; he examines their Homeric and Hesiodic precedents in kleos and eris, and follows their subsequent literary fortunes. The first half of the book deals with classical literature, mostly Latin epicists and historians, but also Martial, Juvenal, and Nonnos. The second turns to the literature of Renaissance Europe, mostly neolatin and English, but it also includes a discerning treatment of Petrarch’s Trionfi, in which the depiction of fame branches out into a new and highly influential modern form. Hardie’s unflagging analytical energy and intelligence traverse the long literary history and history of classical reception traced by the book: the big picture he draws consistently illuminates its episodes and details. These are connected by cross-references and by the book’s narrative arc: the chapter on Livy’s third decade and the trial of Scipio, itself an illustration of the difficulty of containing individual fama within the oligarchical power-sharing of the Roman republic, prepares for Hardie’s later treatment of Petrarch’s Africa, an epic in which Scipio is the hero. The scholarship of the book is monumental, the thorough notes are an education in themselves, the lucid prose is highly readable. The volume is lavishly produced with wide margins and illustrations: it concludes with an overview of the iconography of Fama.

Encyclopedic in scope and ambition, this is nonetheless a book of ideas. Hardie explores the paradoxes that Virgil has synthesized into his fame-monster. Fame can correspond to true happenings and achievements or be the product of empty rumor and gossip. The many tongues of Fama indicate the multiple ways that events can be retold and evaluated—or, in the case of Virgil’s defamatory story of Dido that occasions Fama’s intervention into the narrative, can be entirely made up as a poetic myth. Fame can accordingly be a tool of ideology: political rule depends on the maintenance and manipulation of reputation, on the selection of who and what are worthy of mention, on the vilification and calumny of enemies. The fame of virtue and the infamy of crime may, in fact, be two sides of the same coin. Class and gender distinctions
separate—as an ethical desideratum—the acclaim of noble, prudent male peers from the instable vox populi and even more volatile female garrulity. Posthumous fame cannot be enjoyed by the deceased, but must be imagined proleptically by the living. The pursuit of self-aggrandizing and earthly fame may not easily be reconciled with Christian humility and the different immortality of an afterlife. The writer who eternizes the great man or woman simultaneously engineers his own fame and that of the text, which may, in fact, eclipse that of their celebrated subjects. (This last notion is most transparent in lyric poetry, where we know next to nothing of Corinna, Cynthia, Laura, and the unnamed mystery young man of Shakespeare's Sonnets, all of whose poets promise them eternal fame.) Hardie has an especially acute eye for metaliterary moments when the discourse of fame turns back upon the text that produces it. Fame as personification is depicted as a source of stories, a stand-in for the writer; narrative, in turn, can be understood as the attempt to rescue experience from time and death.

Like most comparative books, especially ones of this size, Rumour and Renown is likely to be read in parts by specialists who will turn to the chapters that directly address their fields and subfields. That will be their loss. Hardie's arguments gain power in their cumulative and ramifying reiterations. The book should be required reading for students of early modern literature like myself: it contains the best recent discussion I have read of Spenser's Faerie Queene, focussing on the poem's various figures of defamation (Ate, Sclaunder, Malfont, the Blatant Beast), a brilliant, fresh reading of Shakespeare's second tetralogy that reexamines how the usurping Lancastrians build their dynasty through metadramatic publicity stunts, excellent analyses of Milton's first and last poems, In quintum Novembris and Samson Agonistes. At the heart of the book, Hardie, a key scholar-critic of Virgil of his generation, develops at length his reading of the Aeneid's Fama episode, first sketched out in his earlier Cosmos and Imperium. As sister both to the first-born line of Titan and to the illegitimate giants, speaker of truth and lies, Fama is the earth-born (read human) counterpart in Book 4 to Mercury, bearer of the divine word and of the official party line of the Aeneid: he descends from heaven, she rises from earth, but by the time she is done she too is in the heavens, her head lost among the clouds. Fame, that is, threatens, in a gigantomachy of words, to usurp—or deconstructively unmask—the language of religio-political authority. Jupiter, himself, Virgil's jealous Iarbas complains, may only be an empty figment of fame (famam...inanem), and Iarbas should know, since he is a bastard who claims to be the son of a god. So did Augustus and others we might think of. Fame is a secularizing, skeptically, self-reflexive construct—and therefore must be viewed as monstrous by the authorities. Burckhardt saw the emphasis