

Catherine Gimelli Martin and Hassan Melehy, eds. *French Connections in the English Renaissance*.

Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013. xi + 212 pp. \$99.95. ISBN: 978-1-4094-6625-3.

Among the welcome lessons of this stimulating collection is the reminder that “connections” can be of various kinds. Those proposed in these eight essays by North American scholars range from close textual relations, through large history-of-ideas influences, to more subjective conjectures.

The two opening chapters define the extremes of the range. A. E. B. Coldiron compares the French original and English translation of a late fifteenth-century intervention in the *querelle des femmes*. There is nuanced close analysis here, both literary and bibliographical, although its conclusion is notably inconclusive: “While the content of the poem itself may successfully span some cultural distance between early modern France and England, the aesthetic and poetic distances are too great” (25).

By contrast, Deanne Williams’s essay on *Richard II*, “Isabelle de France, Child Bride,” leaps over distances, radically recasting Shakespeare’s queen as the historical ten-year-old Isabelle. Regrettably, performance issues are neglected. So is the principle that play worlds regularly override facts from sources, including age: should Hotspur, on stage, display his historical advance of twenty-three years over Hal? Conversely, if (like many) she prefers to discount Bullingbrook’s accusation that Bushy and Green led Richard sexually astray, shouldn’t Williams still, by her own logic, reckon with Holinshed’s reference to “abominable adultery”?

The only obstacle Williams acknowledges is a post-Victorian resistance to historical truth, compounded by a supposed misreading of Daniel’s *Civil Wars*. Her claim that Daniel depicts Isabelle “unwaveringly as a girl” (38) is, however, questionable. The poet’s statement about lending the queen passions beyond her years implies redrawing the character; describing her “ouercharged hart” as a “too small a vessel” (38) need not imply a child’s body. In reconstructing Shakespeare’s text, Williams’s readings are often farfetched, if clever. They do not, in any case, establish significant French connections beyond those previously proposed, which Williams ignores. Her consuming interest is in rejuvenating Isabella, and she ends by flouting the challenge of matching text with stage effect: “While it may very well be time to see this character played by a child actor, it is certainly time to read and imagine her as a girl” (47).

The three following chapters, grouped as “Textualizations of Politics and Empire,” elicit more-plausible connections. Hassan Melehy extends his previous work on Du Bellay and Spenser to the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, developing the paradox that Spenser engages his French precursor so as at once to resist and acknowledge poetic dependence on change. Timothy J. Reiss, in a wide-ranging survey of political theories and philosophical underpinnings, persuasively traces Hobbesian modernity at least indirectly to La Boétie’s utopianism. Catherine Gimelli Martin recuperates the monarchomachs for Milton’s intellectual heritage. Her analysis is subtle and historically informed, although it might have more fully accommodated the urgent political origins of Huguenot theories.

The collection concludes by returning to translation, and to somewhat uneven connection making. The last piece, by Anne Lake Prescott (with Lydia Kirsopp Lake) is least problematic, because Prescott cheerfully acknowledges that the Latin adaptations of Ronsard by the Flemish Protestant Francis Thorius have only a tenuous link with England. She then acutely applies the witty erudition that distinguishes her work generally. Especially welcome is her attention to the issue of translating vernacular literary texts into Latin.

The contributions of Dorothea Heitsch and Roger Kuin, while engaging, are finally less convincing. The former's focus is variously blurred. Heitsch follows a novella of Bandello through its *histoire tragique* adaptation by Belleforest, then into English and Spanish redactions (by Fenton and Millis, respectively). The connections proposed between stylistic innovation and cultural nation building remain elusive, however. More particularly, the link drawn between the *histoire tragique* and the supposed "high popularity" of tragic drama in France in 1559 calls for greater precision, as does the affirmation that tragedy "would be perfected . . . by the English dramatists" (131).

By contrast, the focus of Kuin's essay dealing with Philip and Mary Sidney's translations of Duplessis-Mornay appears at times too narrow. This is familiar territory for Kuin, and his knowledge is impressive, but appreciative enthusiasm blunts the analytical edge, while the discussion of Mary's translation of the *Excellent discours* surprisingly ignores the prior translation by Edward Aggas (1576). Mary's Oxford editors (cited on 152n26 without reference to this issue) concede that she knew Aggas and at some points copied him. A case for the special qualities of Sidney's translation would benefit from a comparison.

Finally, the volume's "comprehensive" (11) bibliography calls for comment. Apart from chapters and articles of my own, I noted the omission of any work by Jean-Marie Maguin or Ton Hoenselaars, and of the 2008 volume edited by Ruth Morse, *Shakespeare, les Français, les France*. These are Europe-based scholars, but surely what the introduction terms "reconstructing the national crossing of . . . influences" (5) requires bridge building also across academic cultural divides.

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