

Antoine Arena. *Ad suos compagnones . . . 1531: Édition bilingue.*

Ed. and trans. Marie-Joëlle Louison-Lassablière. Textes Littéraires de la Renaissance 9. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2012. 224 pp. €55. ISBN: 978-2-7453-2303-3.

Antoine Arenas's fascinating hybrid of soldier's autobiography and *basse danse* (low dance) instruction manual comprises 1887 lines of elegiac couplets in a macaronic Latin suffused with loan words from the author's native Provençal. Louison-Lassablière bases her text on the 1531 Lyon edition (Claude Nourry), itself a re-edition of the 1528 princeps. Twenty-seven subsequent editions of varying

fidelity from the 1540s to the mid-eighteenth century attest to its durable success. With a lucid introduction, critical apparatus comparing the editions printed between 1528–33, clear and concise annotations, plus a nuanced French translation printed after the verse original, the edition will enrich Renaissance studies from diverse angles. It will also be accessible for graduate students, generalists, and even advanced undergraduates.

The poem itself begins with a foot soldier's view of the Italian wars in the 1520s (ll. 1–128), an experience that culminates with an inglorious return to France, defeated and empty-handed (ll. 129–408). Focus then shifts to an account of student life in Avignon (ll. 409–632) and of a plague outbreak (ll. 633–708). Shifting course, the speaking subject explains how to master the slow, deliberate *basse danse*, a staple of court culture throughout Europe. Louison-Lassablière draws attention, in this sequencing, to a parodic inversion of epic hierarchy, in that the poetic voice shifts from war to dance, declaring that he will now turn to his true subject (18). He thus casts the loftiest of epic topics as a digression.

In this inversion, Louison-Lassablière underscores autobiography's therapeutic power. After narrating hardships of war he experienced firsthand, Arenas relives them within a ludic framework. On this subject, the editor bypasses the opportunity to connect her insights on autobiography to the broader field of inquiry. She simply states in passing that autobiography in the Renaissance has been little explored ("Comme l'autobiographie est un genre très peu exploré à la Renaissance, il vaut d'analyser la façon don't Arena parle de lui dans *Ad suos compagnones*," 25). One misses an effort to ground analysis of Arenas's poem in a consideration of the state of the question. That said, the introduction is particularly eloquent as it casts light on the broader literary and cultural context, offering a fascinating discussion of the linguistic melting pot of southern France, where the "kitchen Latin" that originated in northern Italy in the fifteenth century gained new dimensions when added into the already rich linguistic mixture of Provence. She notes the implications of grammatical choices, as with his tendency to favor the first declension for verb forms (31). In terms of lexicon, Louison-Lassablière draws attention to the predominance of loan words from Occitan that convey auditory perception. On the fusion of legal culture and courtly dance, the editor reminds us of how Arenas gently mocks the amateur's anxious sidelong glances (ll. 1387–88, analysis, 50–51): "Semblant latrones qui se plerumque revirant / quando borrellus rite foetat eos." She translates this as: "ils ressemblent à des larrons qui se contorsionnent quand le bourreau les fouette" (191: "they appear as thieves who contort when the hangman [duly] whips them"). Here, the introduction notes the sly judicial allusion built into *rite*, which subtly mocks the constant appeals to age-old tradition in legal argument (51). The choice not to translate this term in the parallel French text attests to the inevitable trade off by which the editor sought the concision that would allow the French translation to closely match the original couplets.

Indeed, a preface speaks to these compromises (9–11). The editor renders the hexameters and pentameters of elegiac couplets as loose versets in an effort to approximate the rhythm of the distichs. She concedes, nonetheless, that we must

ultimately accept that Arena's song rendered in French is but a muted version of a Renaissance passionate about dance: "il faut s'y résigner: le chant d'Arena en français n'est qu'une partition en sourdine qui porte à nos sens les échos lointains d'une Renaissance qui danse" (11). One could hardly imagine a better road map with which to explore this beguiling realm of serious pleasure.

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