

*Recueil des sotties françaises, Tome I.* Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès, Jelle Koopmans, and Katell Lavéant, eds.

Bibliothèque du Théâtre Français 19. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014. 676 pp. €68.

Popular forms of Renaissance theater have often suffered from a lack of reliable modern editions and, consequently, critical neglect. Despite some important studies and editions in the last few decades, this holds true for the ill-defined *sottie*, more so than for its related genres, farce and morality play, even though such generic distinctions were at best unstable during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This new undertaking in three volumes attempts to provide not only the first complete critical edition of all extant *sottie* plays but also a general discussion of this problematic form, a long-overdue project that the editors handle with the erudition and elegance that one would expect from such eminent scholars of popular theater. The first volume is divided into three parts: the “Recueil du British Museum” (seven texts), two texts from Geneva, and the “Plaisans Devis” (seventeen *sotties* from Lyon), which seems particularly interesting, as almost all of them fall into the period of the religious wars, an especially problematic time for any type of satirical writing. Each of the three parts has its own introduction and each play is presented briefly with an analysis and comments on the *mise-en-scène*, the characters, the historical context, and the versification, which proves useful to specialists and nonspecialists as well as to students.

In their general introduction, the editors touch on the main aspects and problems of this elusive genre, in particular on much-neglected issues such as performance as well as historical contexts and documents, all the while drawing on important studies such as Jean-Claude Aubailly’s *Le monologue, le dialogue et la sottie* (1976) or Olga Anna Duhl’s *Folie et rhétorique dans la sottie* (1994), to name only two major contributions to the field. It seems that the problematic of “performativity” and the difference between the action on stage and

the spoken word, on the one hand, and the fixed printed text, on the other, causes a major problem for the interpretation of the *sotie* and its distinction from its close cousins, farce and morality play. This context is extremely difficult to reconstruct, however, but the editors do their best to shed new light on this issue, through careful textual analysis and the consultation of historical documents, although much necessarily remains theory and speculation, as they freely admit on several occasions. This approach is highly laudable and fruitful, however, and not only contributes considerably to the understanding of the *sotie*, but also avoids the common unsatisfactory solution of relating all difficulty to the form's inherent "obscurity," an easy way out that strikes the editors as profoundly unsound, philosophically and philologically (21). Coded language (to avoid censorship), subversive intentions, or the dichotomies fiction/reality and literal/allegorical meanings are only some of the important questions related to the practice of the *sotie* within the larger context of militant, committed forms of expression, of which it has been a largely underrated representative. Especially in light of attempts by the authorities to control language in the public sphere, study of the *sotie* therefore appears a promising undertaking that far exceeds the narrow limits of theater. In this context, more than subscribing to the modern notion of genre, the *sotie* seems to boast a social and communicative function within the scenario of representations on stage, providing, for example, a master class in rhythm and the rapidity of dialogue; hence the attempt to bring alive a form in all its "incongruity, its rebellious, experimental, and esthetic qualities" (19) to allow for a more informed assessment of its art, functions, and impact. Consequently, the question of genre, in its widest possible acceptance; the *sotie's* place in the sequence of theatrical performances; and its most common recurring themes are the main critical issues that the editors aim to discuss. This fine edition will be the work of reference for study of the *sotie* once volumes 2 and 3 are published. It will be of immense interest to Renaissance scholars of various specializations and will also be a welcome addition to the classroom.

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