

Elizabeth Vinestock and David Foster, eds. *Writers in Conflict in Sixteenth-Century France: Essays in Honour of Malcolm Quainton*.

Durham Modern Languages Series 2008. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011. xxii + 390 pp. £20. ISBN: 978-0-7190-8587-1.

This book assembles seventeen essays (in French and English) from many of the leading *seizièmistes* in tribute to Malcom Quainton. The variety of essays mirrors the breadth of Quainton's own work, as well as his particular expertise on Ronsard (the subject of five studies in this collection). Elizabeth Vinestock notes in the preface that "close reading and finely observed textual analyses characterize his [Quainton's] writings, which are invariably scholarly, convincingly argued, and clearly expressed" (xiii). In this respect, the book surely does credit to Quainton's legacy. Without exception, the essays present detailed and careful readings informed by impressive familiarity with classical and Renaissance sources.

The challenge in this type of anthology is the coherence of the whole, and Neil Kenny's introduction achieves this through a broad definition of conflict. Kenny frames the collection as a series of "case-studies" to show that "sixteenth-century writing in France was not only frequently conflictual but also, to varying degrees, conflicted" (17). The second section of the book, focused on the wars of religion, most successfully integrates the theme of conflict and forms a satisfying unit. Kenny suggests that the studies in this volume will in fact challenge the hypothesis that in sixteenth-century France "conflict was always conceived in essentially religious terms" (3). The other two sections of the book, "Living and Writing in Conflict" and "Intertextuality as Conflict," do indeed investigate much more than the religious disputes that characterize the century, but some stretch the definition of conflict to such an extent that the theme fails to inform the analysis or vice versa. Therefore, individual chapters were fascinating and well worth reading, but the book as a whole left me with little insight into its central theme. In fact, it ultimately fortified the hypothesis that it proposed to challenge; studies in sections 1 and 3 also related quite often to religious conflicts (or at least to political ones provoked by religious difference).

Despite this critique of the theme, the essays generally stand on their own and are consistent in their high quality. The best essays in the collection combine excellent and original close reading with significant conclusions or worthwhile questioning. In this respect a few essays stand out. Jean Vignes analyzes Baïf's reactions to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre through an analysis of his *Euvres* and presents a nuanced understanding of Baïf's own divided opinion. Philip Ford's meticulous study of Ronsard's "Hymne des Astres" proves not only that Plotin's *Ennéades* was an important source for the poet, but also convincingly illustrates how Ronsard worked to resolve a conflict between Neoplatonic philosophy and Christian beliefs. One of the most accessible chapters in the book, Ann Moss's study of "Pandora at the Crossroads," is another example of detailed and thorough textual analysis, meaningfully placed in the context of conflicts in interpretive practices. Finally, I must also mention Richard Cooper's essay, which offers not just

a thorough examination of two early responses to Marot's flight after the *Affaire des Placards*, but also the welcome contribution of the texts themselves, published for the first time in this volume.

Although this book spans most of the sixteenth century and studies many major authors, the essays focus mostly on minor works. For specialists, these essays valuably expand our field of study, and the book would be a useful acquisition for a research university's collection. This same specialization, along with the weakness of the unifying theme, might not justify the investment for a personal or undergraduate-oriented library. Nonetheless, the essays provide excellent models of close analysis, based on mastery of sources and attention to rhetorical and poetical structures.

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