

Guy Poirier. *Henri III de France en mascarades imaginaires: Mœurs, humeurs et comportements d'un roi de la Renaissance.*

Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2010. xi + 217 pp. bibl. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-2-7637-8924-8.

In *Henri III de France en mascarades imaginaires*, Guy Poirier explores the textual representations of the last monarch from the House of Valois. Poirier's book presents itself as a complement to the numerous recent historical studies of Henri III and his court, with which the author shows great familiarity, in its attempt to seize the descriptive and narrative riches that contributed to make this controversial king legendary. From the very beginning, Poirier establishes very clearly the scope of his study which is much less concerned with Henri III as a historical character, than with the mutating modalities of representation — the “mascarades imaginaires” (imaginary masquerades) — of this historical figure. From otherwise a very clear and very informative introduction the literary-minded reader may find rather short and elusive the definitions of the genres associated with what Poirier calls satirical and polemical writings, which were in flux and very much at the center of literary discussion during the reign of Henri III.

The study proceeds chronologically beginning with the youth of Henri III, when the future king was still known as the Duc d'Anjou. The first two chapters look at the literary production preceding the first wave of satirical and polemical texts attacking the future King of France. The encomiastic poetry and the celebratory texts examined in the first chapter are written by individuals such as Ronsard, Jamyn, Belleau, Baïf, and Brantôme, to name a few, who were often in close contact with the young military leader of the royal victories during the Third War of Religion. Many of these texts present Charles IX's younger brother as a new

Alexander, Theseus, Hercules, or Achilles. It is the poet Philippe Desportes who is the first to produce a hybrid portrait of the young Henri combining physical femininity and manly courage. As Poirier justly notes, this positive androgynous figure would later be borrowed and developed as an ambiguous and negative figure by satirists in their attacks against what they perceived as a degenerate monarch.

The second chapter examines the textual representation of the young king upon his return to France from Poland to claim his newly acquired throne after the death his brother in 1574. The textual production dating from the beginning of the reign of Henri III of France corresponds to the traditional representation of a Renaissance monarch beloved by his subjects. These various panegyrics, biographies, discourses, and official publications in verse entitled *souhais* (wishes) all heavily rely on a network of mythological allegories, Neoplatonic symbolism, and the obliged solar images. In this section, Poirier gives much attention to advisory discourses both in prose and in verse noting that some of these *Discours*, in a somewhat prophetic way, advise the king to be suspicious of the influence of his flattering entourage. Here the efficiency of Poirier's presentation is particularly welcomed because of the reader's knowledge of the promised subsequent masquerade. On the other hand, the historically-minded reader might wish for more contextual and background information on less familiar literary figures and their various texts.

The third chapter deals with the first manifestations of polemical writings attacking Henri III and his entourage. Poirier meticulously demonstrates that these satirical texts initially targeted those around the monarch, starting with his mother, Catherine de Médicis, passing by his immediate entourage, the infamous *mignons*, and finally closing in on Henri himself. For this part of his text, Poirier relies heavily on the writings of Henri Estienne and Pierre de L'Estoile. The two humanists offer numerous examples of the satirical writings depicting in graphic detail the scandalous life style of Henri III's court characterized by its profound affectation, its feminization, and its exacerbated sexuality often against nature. Poirier eloquently illustrates the gradual desacralization of Henri III who becomes a fictional character.

The fourth chapter analyzes the virulent and systematic condemnation of the king and his vices in pamphlet literature from the death in 1584 of the Duc d'Alençon, Henri III's younger brother and political adversary, to the assassination of the controversial monarch in 1589. Poirier concludes this chapter analyzing the numerous attempts of contemporary historians to interpret the habits and behaviors of the late king through the production of biographical texts. The fifth and final chapter explores the representation of Henri III beyond the sixteenth century. Poirier demonstrates the importance of Agrippa d'Aubigné's representations of the king in shaping the tone of Henri's reception in subsequent literature dating from the second half of the seventeenth to the beginning of twenty-first century.

*Henri III de France en mascarades imaginaires* is a well documented, clearly and efficiently written book. Poirier's contribution constitutes a rare example of

scholarly work managing to successfully exploit the porous boundaries between history and literature and for this reason will be of great interest to both historically and literary-minded readers.

PHILIPPE BAILLARGEON

University of Massachusetts, Amherst