

French Renaissance and Baroque Drama: Text, Performance, Theory.

Michael Meere, ed.

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French Renaissance and Baroque Drama is a collection of fourteen articles (although they are presented as chapters) that will be of interest especially for specialists of drama in the long sixteenth century, who will enjoy reading how a series of traditional concepts of theater are challenged in many different ways. The contention of the editor is that one should study together various forms of drama and performance in French from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century, thus extending the traditional chronological scope for such studies as well as taking into account the dramatic production of French-speaking regions outside the French kingdom (although ultimately, only two articles deal with drama outside France, namely in Calvinist Geneva: Beam and Lyons). By observing together the Renaissance and the Baroque periods and their theatrical productions, one should thus be able to better understand trends, continuities, and echoes in texts and practices over this whole time frame, and see links between genres that have until now been studied separately. The authors also advocate a capacious definition of *drama* that includes studies of nontheatrical texts whose interaction with an audience or a reader can be considered performative. This is why varied situations are taken into account, such as ballets (Welch, Calhoun), royal entries (Guild), and even fictional and nonfictional narratives (Rabelais in Gates and Meere; Montaigne in Cavallé, Guild; exorcisms in Marculescu). This is an innovative and exciting approach, in line with recent developments in theater and performance studies for the early modern period.

This also explains why the volume does not present a global, common approach, but rather a large array of texts and situations, as well as methodological approaches, that have

common ground. Each article allows the reader to reconsider traditional boundaries and conceptions of drama thanks to the study of lesser-known texts, or to reread well-known texts thanks to new contextual or theoretical insights. Because they touch on very different literary and historical fields, the aggregation of these studies ultimately forms an interesting global view on several problems linked with drama in this period. Many articles underline the difficulty of assigning a specific genre to hybrid performative texts, and show that it is ultimately counterproductive (Noirot, Chevallier-Micki, Beam). They offer new interpretative strategies to understand how such texts could function in their historical and/or performative context (Lyons, Szabari, Biet, Hillman, O'Hara). A large number of articles explore the complex links between drama and society, especially in the tense period of the Reformation and the Wars of Religion, underlining the specific strategies of the theatrical discourse and practices in this context (notably Lyons, Beam, Usher). An interesting angle chosen by several articles is to investigate the polymorphic nature of the notion of spectacle and its impact on different kinds of audiences (especially Marculescu, Gates and Meere, Welch, Cavaillé, Chevallier-Micky).

As such, this is also a demanding volume. With a shortage of time, one can be tempted to read only the few articles directly linked with one's field of study, at the risk of losing the benefits of associating texts and situations from different contexts that have strong resonances with each other. One can also regret that not all contributions to this volume are equally successful at deepening the theoretical implications of their renewing approach, thus somewhat limiting the scope of their analysis to a mere case study rather than connecting it strongly with the aims and ambitions of the volume as a whole, which is why I prefer to speak of a collection of articles rather than of a series of chapters. On this point, one might miss more extended conclusions in the introduction provided by Meere, which could have underlined better the common features of the different articles. On the other hand, the introduction is enjoyable precisely because it is synthetic and to the point, opening a number of exciting questions. Despite these reservations, it is a stimulating volume that calls for more similar studies, since the advocated approach of comparing texts and situations that may at first sight appear as dissimilar certainly yields very interesting results.

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