

Agrippa d'Aubigné. *Écrits politiques*.

Vol. 2 of *Œuvres*. Textes de la Renaissance 104. Ed. Jean-Raymond Fanlo. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2007. 824 pp. index. append. illus. bibl. €63. ISBN: 978-2-7453-1351-5.

We now have on our desks the second volume of the new edition of Agrippa d'Aubigné's works: the review of the first tome appeared in *RQ* 58, no. 2 (2005):

620–21. It is worthy of note that the general title *Œuvres complètes* has been replaced on the cover and title-page by *Œuvres*, which is closer to the truth, since this collection will be everything if complete. I am also glad to remark that this second volume does not suffer the same disturbing blemishes as the former, which was not an auspicious beginning, to put it mildly. Volume 2 now gathers d'Aubigné's political writings, some of them very well-known and already readable in the old Réaume and Caussade edition or in the volume of *Œuvres* at the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. "Political writings" is a vexed category, insofar as d'Aubigné's *magnum opus*, the *Tragiques*, may be as well regarded as an epical, religious, satirical, and political poem. These pieces of writing, already known except for a few pages, were composed during the French civil conflicts and at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War. In these decades, which had brought out the best and the worst in humanity, d'Aubigné's political thought appeared deeply reactionary, for he refused the increasing secularization of politics. His admiration leans more toward the prophets of the Old Testament than *Il principe*.

Like any potential purchaser in a bookshop, let's start by a glance at the back cover, which informs us that "this edition gathers chronologically hitherto unpublished texts or publications unknown until recently." The revelation of unpublished material by a great writer is always appealing to scholars. It is not entirely misleading advertising, but out of 800 pages, this book only contains about a dozen pages of hitherto-unpublished works, which are clearly to be ascribed to d'Aubigné, but which are by no means hidden masterpieces. We may add three pages of debated authorship. This is not much and means that hundreds of these pages have already been given to print before, thanks to several scholars including Fanlo himself, who forgets to declare he has already published the *Italien françois* (whose attribution to d'Aubigné is not obvious) in the small journal *Albineana* (15 [2004]: 207–30). We may also observe sizeable cuts in footnotes (which means a reduction of available material for comment), between this volume and the first editions (which are thus definitely not to be discarded) of d'Aubigné's texts in such estimated periodicals as the *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, the *French Studies Bulletin*, and the *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*. The rather small amount of hitherto-unpublished texts Fanlo has been able to bring to the eyes of the reader is in inverse proportion to the number of discussions, quarrels, and quibbles he has raised with other critics. Polemic is always a two-edged sword, and in this case reasons are not hard to fathom, even if they belong to what Wordsworth called the still, sad music of humanity. It is not exaggerated to state that Fanlo sometimes behaves as if d'Aubigné's works were his personal property, his own piece of real estate, closed to other people. He is bound to them in an intimate relationship, as the Viking was once bound to the sea or the Eskimo to the tundra. For reasons that are sentimental and emotional rather than logical, he is likely to regard the publication of unedited material by any scholar other than himself as a regrettable piece of impertinence, and he is generally reluctant to ascribe to d'Aubigné the authorship of a text he has not personally discovered. In his opinion, works edited by other scholars either do not bear

d'Aubigné's hallmark, or, if they do, they are badly printed. Fanlo is unable to conceal his ire at having been preceded, even by dead scholars (like Jean Plattard), but there is really no reason to let him plough this furrow alone. Some footnotes or acrimonious discussions are fairly good manifestations of what a humorist once called the NIH (Not Invented Here) syndrome. We do read these pages with the overwhelming — and of course false — impression that the editor knows everything, has read every book, and is able to decide on every subject, without further discussion and with the aplomb of a purist grammarian dropping a particularly revolting neologism into his killing bottle. A certain amount of modesty is as useful to a scholar as a good encyclopedia and, in the battlefield that d'Aubigné's studies have become since the early 1990s, the vexed question of attributions may deserve a decade or two of benign neglect, before being resumed by scholars with more reason and less passion.

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