

John D. Lyons and Kathleen Wine, eds. *Chance, Literature, and Culture in Early Modern France*.

Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009. ix + 223 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$99.95. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6435-2.

This volume collects papers originating, for the most part, in a colloquium held in Tours, France at the Centre d'Etudes Supérieures de la Renaissance in July 2006 and a panel held in the United States at the Kentucky Foreign Languages Conference, also in 2006. The three articles from the Tours colloquium, translated from French,

serve in part as a conceptual introduction, presenting tensions inherent to providential thinking in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. They include reflections on Montaigne and fortune (Alain Legros), providence and sacred geography (Frank Lestringant), and monsters (François Rigolot). They are followed by nine articles primarily addressing seventeenth-century topics, but also including reflections on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century narrative theory (Virginia Krause, Kathleen Wine), and Montaigne (Richard Regosin, Amy Wygant). Analyses of the shock of the sublime (John Lyons) and the Cardinal de Retz's attitude towards circumstance (Malina Stefanovska) are also present.

The collection explores the ways providence intersects with apparent chance from the standpoint of philosophy, theology, and poetics. Michael Moriarty explores the tension between divine omniscience — “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted” (Matthew 10:29–30) — and the appearance of randomness, represented in particular by Epicurean physics in Lucretian guise. Moriarty's lucid analysis of Nicolas Malebranche's *Traité de la nature et de la grâce* (1680) is an excellent point of departure for the collection as a whole; the conceptual problems Malebranche attempts to solve haunt providential thinking more generally. Several articles provide unexpected perspectives on familiar debates, for example, John Campbell's investigations of chance in Racine's tragedies and Emma Gilby's considerations on Descartes and fortune. Several examine the relationship between narrative and providence, such as Kathleen Wine's partial rehabilitation of Bakhtin's theory of “chronotope” in an article on Gomberville's *Polexandre* (1638), one that engaged this initially sceptical reader, suggesting that Bakhtin's creative “misreadings,” taken with a considerable amount of salt, can perhaps be more fruitful than their dully scrupulous (and equally ideological) correctives. Richard Regosin's cogent article on ethics and *phronesis* in Montaigne adds to a sizeable bibliography on prudence but reposes familiar questions helpfully in relation to the philosophy of contingency. John Lyons's analysis of the sublime as a sudden rupture in the fabric of expectation: either a revelation of the “workings of God” (108) or a sign “open-ended in terms of ultimate causes” (109) is exemplary. Marina Stefanovska describes the shrewdness of the factional leader as the virtuosic reaction to what the Cardinal de Retz calls (in the masculine) “le rencontre” (186), that is to say the particularities of a given situation, the fall of the political dice.

The inherent problem of such a volume is its heterogeneity. Reflecting the contingent interests of its contributors, such a collection cannot cover the period comprehensively, thus disappointing researchers in search of synthesis. The most striking omission is a substantive discussion of chance and providence in Pascal. Although Pascal's work on probability appears at the opening of the introduction (1–2), a more technical discussion of Pascal's advances in probability theory — including, but not limited to, the “wager” contained in what has come to be called the “discourse of the machine” — would certainly have been welcome. Indeed, the reader looking for information on Pascal and probability will no doubt turn first to

pages 211–14, in search of an extended discussion, and be disappointed to find that they are actually part of the volume's bibliography. Pascal's work on chance is familiar territory, but a cogent review of, or even a new perspective on, these issues would hardly have been out of place. The volume is generally free of small errors, although these (almost inevitably in an age of economy) appear. One wonders, for example, which of St. Paul's epistles to the Corinthians Richard Regosin is referring to (129) in an otherwise helpful discussion. This reference to St. Paul's (first) epistle is also missing from the index. Such minor blemishes do not detract from the usefulness of this handsome volume.

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