

Reveries of Community: French Epic in the Age of Henri IV, 1572–1616.
Katherine S. Maynard.

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Published in the series Rethinking the Early Modern, *Reveries of Community* contributes to the reexamination of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature. Katherine Maynard supplements close reading with a comprehensive but concise consideration of previous scholarship to argue against the “discourse of epic failure” (5)—that is, the traditional view that French authors failed to produce an epic on par with either classical models or Italian and English contemporaries. Instead of seeing the French Wars of Religion as an explanation for the failure of the epic genre, Maynard uses this same historical context and the corresponding political need for national unity as a lens for rereading the works of Pierre de Ronsard, Guillaume Salluste Du Bartas, Sébastien Garnier, Pierre-Victor Palma Cayet, and Agrippa d’Aubigné, and argues that these works “demonstrate epic poetry’s capacity to play a role in political realities, as well as the benefits of creating imagined communities at war and, most importantly, at peace” (12).

The introductory chapter clearly explains the nation-building potential of the epic genre and situates the argument in both historical and literary contexts, setting up the following chapters, which treat chronologically the epic works of the five poets mentioned above. Chapter 1, “Empires of Erasure in Pierre de Ronsard’s *Franciade* (1572),” considers the epic “a continuation” of the *Discours des misères de ce temps*, and, rather than focusing on the incompleteness of the work, examines the poem that does exist within the context of the years of its composition, 1566–71. In these turbulent years, Ronsard imagined the establishment of a French nation with “erasures,” particularly through a lack of geographical specificity, which omitted the spaces of recent violence with Protestants. Maynard argues that Ronsard’s creation of “a space of epic fantasy” and the suppression of memory “reduces the communal possibilities of the imperial imaginary” (32). This attention to geographical representation returns in chapter 5, “Re-Forming Communities in Agrippa d’Aubigné’s *Les Tragiques* (1616),” when Maynard studies the re-inscription of memories of the Wars of Religion into specific sites of battle. The contrast between Ronsard and d’Aubigné highlights the difference between war-time poetic production aiming toward peace and peace-time composition that attempts to revive the solidarity and community experienced in war. In light of the religious persecution that reemerged over the course of the seventeenth century, Maynard reads d’Aubigné’s work as a preemptive attempt to keep the French Protestant community from falling into complacency.

While chapters 1 and 5 neatly bookend Maynard’s argument and demonstrate the vast differences in these imagined communities, chapters 2, 3, and 4 provide other case studies in the use of the epic genre. Chapter 2 traces the changes from regional to

national visions of community in Du Bartas's work, as he writes first for Jeanne d'Albret and then for the newly crowned Henri IV. Maynard situates Du Bartas's final poem, "Le Cantique d'Ivry," within the context of legitimizing Henri IV and demonstrates how the portrayal of Henri as a warrior nonetheless downplays violence and highlights Henri's capacity for toleration. Similarly, Maynard demonstrates how Garnier's *Henriade*, discussed in chapter 3, works to unify France, both through the characterization of an outside enemy, Spain, and through the representation of Henri's acts of forgiveness and clemency. The work of Cayet, the focus of chapter 4, allows the reader to appreciate another step in the construction of Henri IV's unified France. Maynard compares Cayet's *Heptaméron de la Navarride* to key passages from Virgil's *Aeneid* and *Eclogues* to highlight the depiction of a golden age that is dawning as Henri IV and Marie de' Medici marry and produce an heir.

In this journey across the work of five epic poets, Maynard not only provides ample evidence for the importance and the vitality of the French epic, but also provides a productive lens through which to consider these difficult, formative decades of French history. Beyond the very clear argument about the epic genre, however, further conclusions are left up to the reader, and the short final chapter leaves the reader wanting more. Written clearly with ample explanation for a nonspecialist, the book offers a textually grounded opportunity to contemplate the deep connections between war, religion, memory, place, and community.

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Senses of Style: Poetry before Interpretation. Jeff Dolven.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. viii + 254 pp. \$25.

Jeff Dolven's inspiring *Senses of Style: Poetry before Interpretation* is an utterly sui generis meditation on the rich but often suspiciously viewed subject of style. The book's initial point of departure is the improbable connection between the courtly Petrarchist Sir Thomas Wyatt and, some four hundred years later, the avant-garde writer Frank O'Hara. But while the two poets are never far from sight and, in fact, grow ever closer to each other as the study evolves, Dolven has in mind a different kind of book than what we usually find in studies either of influences and afterlives or of style. Neither linear in plot nor prescriptive in tone, *Senses of Style*—the plural usage plus the play on *sense* is crucial—is a series of micro-essays. Few are longer than a page. Many are an aphoristic sentence or two, reminding us at times, in their weighty perspicuity and venerable collectability, of both Wallace Stevens's *Adagia* and Erasmus's *Adages*. They vary in tone from the austere heights of academia ("If history-as-experience has a method" [167]) to a middle ground of reportage ("O'Hara looks out the window