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Michael Meere, ed., *French Renaissance and Baroque Drama: Text, Performance, and Theory*. Lanham: University of Delaware Press, 2015. xi + 336 pp. Notes, bibliography, index, list of contributors. \$77.45 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 978-1611495485.

Review by Jonathan Patterson, University of Oxford

The unpretentious title of this volume of fifteen articles whets the appetite for what is a rich and diverse exploration of pre-modern drama. In his commendably lucid introduction, Michael Meere wastes no time in setting out the parameters of the book, parameters that in no way restrain the variety and deep cultural significance of the materials under study. Meere is very clear in his use of the terms “French,” “Renaissance,” and “Baroque.” His definitions are sensible and relatively uncontroversial. “French” is taken as a linguistic rather than a geopolitical delineator; this justifies the study of French-speaking communities stretching beyond France to Geneva. “Renaissance,” as one might expect, foregrounds the strong element of recrudescence that characterized the long sixteenth century: a period when humanist writers and artists incessantly rediscovered ancient Greek and Roman texts and creatively adapted them, often through and against Italian works. “Baroque,” meanwhile, is taken chronologically as a period roughly from the 1570s to the 1650s; and analytically as an *a posteriori* descriptor for works of art and literature in this period, favouring movement, instability, metamorphosis, illusion, and ostentation. “Renaissance” and “Baroque” imply considerable chronological overlap. Yet the two terms are weighted with enough conceptual difference to do justice to the uneven terrain of dramatic literature directly preceding the much idolized canon of “Classical” masterpieces in the later seventeenth century.

The methodological distinctiveness of *French Renaissance and Baroque Drama* lies in its emphasis on “drama”—a term that historically implied more than the narrower term “theater” (primarily an architectural structure, tiers, or stage). Accordingly, the studies in this volume are not restricted to conventional stage plays. They examine an array of dramatic forms including farce, tragedy, the mystery play, comedy, the pastoral play, royal entrances, and court ballets, the *histoire tragique*, as well as meta-theatrical writings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Privileging drama from multiple standpoints, Meere et al. illuminate a number of preoccupations that cut across early modern French culture, concerning demonic possession, sacrifice, war and religion, sexuality, community, and international relations. Many of the articles touch on more than one of these domains, but I shall focus on the most salient contributions in each.

The first article, by Andreea Marculescu, exposes demons in a dramatic form that long outlasted its late medieval origins: the mystery play. Adopting a nominally post-structuralist perspective, Marculescu investigates the effects of mystery plays beyond their actual staging and printing. Drawing on Joseph Roach's notion of genealogy of performance, she shows how the mystery play elicits “mnemonic reserves”(p. 8). In other words, the *mystère* displays images, words, and behavioural patterns linked to demonic possession that are internalized by certain individuals and groups and then re-transmitted elsewhere: for instance, in the accounts of young Nicole Obry and her numerous exorcisms performed in Laon in 1566. For Marculescu, mystery plays and the possession narratives they inspired both aim at erasing demonic elements from the human body.

As the *mystère's* provincial popularity continued in the 1550s and 60s, new forms of religious drama began to appear on the French stage. Outstanding among these was the Protestant Théodore de Bèze's *Abraham sacrificiant* (1550), a well-known tragedy that John D. Lyons considers for its puzzling

absence of clearly discernible markers of genre. Aristotelian poetics are of limited use. Fear and pity are generated but not purged, as Abraham is tempted by Satan (a gesture towards the mystery play) to succumb to “humane” impulses and thereby defy God's orders that he must ritually sacrifice his son Isaac. In the suspenseful *Abraham sacrificant*, concludes Lyons, we can see a playwright playing with *ethos* in both rhetorical and philosophical senses: in the first sense, as the emergence of Abraham's “character,” feeling yet ultimately suppressing pity for his son; and in the second, as a problematic “ethics” engendered by human reason that risks alienation from God. In both cases, the spectacle of sacrifice is compelling. No less gripping are the Greek tragedies of the Catholic Robert Garnier, whose *Hippolyte* (1572) and *La Troade* (1579) are the quarry of Antónia Szabari. Here we find a further analysis of how sacrifice as a form of ritualized violence may help us understand the effects of performance. Szabari reads the two Garnier tragedies in light of Rebecca Zorach's concept of the “secular sacred”: reshaping ancient Greek iconography of sacrifice with indirect Christian allusions. As such, Garnier provides a parallel to Bèze, extending the latter's art of dramatizing sacrifice to the point of inspiring feelings of barbaric cruelty *and* of mercy.

Catholic and Protestant responses to the Wars of Religion (1562-1598) through drama are the subject of notable articles by Phillip John Usher and Sara Beam. Usher revisits the tragedies of Garnier and finds an innovative route to follow: he traces how two of Garnier's plays, *Marc Antoine* (1578) and *Antigone* (1580), specifically associate themselves with the Parlement de Paris (an institution in which the lawyer Garnier forged various personal and professional allegiances). Usher notes how these plays were dedicated to distinguished magistrates (Guy du Faur de Pibrac and Barnabé Brisson) in an idiom analogous to that of contemporaneous trials. Garnier breaks down the barrier between tragedy and the courtroom. He enjoins Brisson and Pibrac to view these works as if they were actual trials, exemplifying not just violence, but negotiations towards order and peace. Beam's contribution, like Usher's, advances recent scholarly trends in approaching Reformation conflict obliquely. Her object of study is the little-known genre of Calvinist *comédie* produced in Geneva during the 1560s. Calvin's dislike of the theater is well attested; yet, as Beam shows, he did not wholly ban it. A genre of comic drama emerged in Calvin's city at the very moment where it was being censored in France. These plays aimed to communicate the reformers' message to simple folk, presenting it as an alternative to Catholic corruption rather than as a precise set of doctrines and practices. Although the Protestants end up on the winning side, conversion to the reformed faith comes across as a lifelong struggle.

Finding, defining, and preserving community emerge as powerful motifs across *French Renaissance and Baroque Drama*. Comedy, as Corinne Noiret argues, did not always successfully bring individuals together. Noiret's piece is an exposition of how the soldier-poet, Jean de la Taille, found himself between a rock and a hard place as he sought an audience for his comedies during the Wars of Religion. La Taille's chances of success dissipated as he tried to pitch his plays at incompatible groups: the persecutors and the persecuted, the disempowered and the mighty, those who could (royals and aristocrats), and those who knew (poets, humanists, and possibly hounded Huguenots). Hounding—or rather, pounding—is a central feature of a lively piece by Caroline Gates and Michael Meere, which considers anew a famous portion of Rabelais's *Quart Livre*: a “comedy of cruelty”<sup>[1]</sup> in which the litigious Chiquanous are subjected to elaborate, symbolically charged beatings. This article offers an anthropological take on the episode, showing how Lord Basché and his people form a normative *communitas* (in Victor Turner's nomenclature),<sup>[2]</sup> to rid the Basché household of the Chiquanous once and for all. Drama is present at every turn, encompassing a fake wedding, a feast, a violent mystery play, and finally a contrived punch-up that successfully combines violence, play, and laughter, concord and discord. Dramas of concord also feature notably in another anthropological analysis of festivals by Fabien Cavaillé. Here the focal point is Montaigne's *Essais*, and the ways in which two chapters (I.26 and III.6) provide an original reflection on public *jeux*. Cavaillé foregrounds Montaigne's insistence that such festivals should unfold in neutral, liminal public spaces (to use Turner's term). Such areas offer the best setting for honest exercises of recreation that will promote civil unity and the setting aside of confessional differences.

Several further articles explore community and drama in an international context. Ellen R. Welch offers a timely rethinking of court spectacles and diplomats who witnessed them under the final

Valois monarchs. She points to English and French sources suggesting that foreign observers did not always “correctly” interpret and could indeed resist the subliminal political messages of the French crown supposedly transmitted by royally sponsored masquerades and ballets. Following Timothy Hampton, Welch suggests that multimedia court entertainments had great potential as a “space and tool of compromise” between royal patrons and foreign envoys.[3] The final chapter in the present volume by Richard Hillman analyses a not dissimilar dynamic of resistance and compromise in an intertextual study of two French Baroque plays: Puget de la Serre's *Pandoste* (1631) and André Mareschal's *La cour bergère* (1640), both adapted from Elizabethan pastoral narratives. Hillman's essay reads these works against a backdrop of fraught and fluid Anglo-French relations, showing how Puget and Mareschal keep political meanings in play and even (in the case of the latter) constitute a riposte to rival English adaptations of Sidney's *Arcadia*. Conflict and compromise are taken in a very different direction in Elizabeth Guild's thoughtful reading of Montaigne's encounters with “cannibal savages” in Rouen, at the royal entrance of Charles IX (1562). With judicious references to Lacanian theory, Guild shows how Montaigne's writing resists the tendency to rush into assertions of his own humanity at the expense of foreigners whose otherness has an ineliminable element of the unknown. Montaigne fears that it may be already too late to prevent himself (and fellow Europeans) from slipping into polarized self-other binaries; but it is not too late to ask his readers to resist them with an enquiring mind.

Questions of sexuality do not receive quite as much coverage as some of the aforementioned themes, but readers will still find enlightening material in chapters by Christian Biet, Alison Calhoun, and Stephanie O'Hara. All three consider material on the Baroque end of the dramatic spectrum. Biet's contribution (modified from an original earlier French essay) is the most sustained piece in this volume on sexual matters. He looks at Jacques de Fontenay's late sixteenth-century pastoral drama, *Le beau berger*, and its capacity for displaying melancholy as a means of refuge—in this case, for homosexual shepherds from the world of heterosexual normativity. O'Hara considers sexual themes insofar as they connect with poison narratives which traversed five plays in the 1630s (*Alcméon*, *Sophonisbe*, *Hercule mourant*, *Médée*, and *La mort de Mithridate*), as well as cognate dramatic genres such as the popular *canards sanglants*. In this material, women are shown to be lethal poisoners on multiple levels; indeed, the woman's body and its milk constitute both physical and metaphorical manifestations of poison in dramas of horrific and ignominious deaths. The collapse of dignity—social and moral—is central to Calhoun's reading of burlesque ballets under Louis XIII. Bawdy motifs (sexual excess and impotence) feature prominently in this dramatic form. As Calhoun shows, it had a unique role in exposing not only embarrassing proclivities, but equally, Louis's surprising readiness to join in the performance and play the part of grotesque characters.

Although *French Renaissance and Baroque Drama* privileges the broadly dramatic over the strictly theatrical, matters of stagecraft are not neglected. Sybille Chevallier-Micki offers a rewarding study of stage designs across the forty-five tragedies that feature in the little-known Rouen corpus of plays in the period 1589–1625. Chevallier-Micki's article sheds light on the cruel ambiance of such theater, exacerbated by scenographic particularities (doors, tents) that expose the spectator to acts of vicious rape. Elevated scaffolds, meanwhile, metonymically symbolize public execution and judicial punishment, recalling Rouen's violent years during the Wars of Religion. Above all, the existence of multiple spaces *in*, *within*, or *in front* of which actors performed, suggest the considerable lengths to which local dramaturgists were prepared to go in order to encourage mobile spectatorship. Such attention to stagecraft highlights cogently the aesthetics of irregularity inherent in the notions of Baroque developed throughout this collection of studies.

In short, *French Renaissance and Baroque Drama* is a must-have volume for specialists of pre-modern theater and drama. Meere and his fellow contributors have made considerable strides in the current re-evaluation of the French dramatic canon. The diversity of sources and methods—from philological to psychoanalytic—will appeal to a wide spectrum of scholars, but particularly, I think, to those congenial to New Historicism, and contemporary performance theory. The standard of scholarship and referencing is generally good (nb. Hampton's work referenced on p. 104 should be *Fictions of Embassy*, not *Fictions of Diplomacy*). French quotations are usefully translated into English for non-francophone readers.

## LIST OF ESSAYS

Andreea Marculescu, "Mystery Plays Reloaded: Performing Demonic Possession in the *Histoires véritables*"

John D. Lyons, "*Abraham sacrificiant* and the End of Ethics"

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Phillip John Usher, "Courtroom Drama during the Wars of Religion: Robert Garnier and the Paris Parlement"

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Stephanie O'Hara, "Poison in French Tragedy and Tragic Stories, 1600-1636"

## NOTES

[1] M.A. Screech. *Rabelais* (London: Duckworth, 1979), pp. 335-40.

[2] Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 96.

[3] Timothy Hampton. *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 5.

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Due to a planned power outage, our services will be reduced today (June 15) starting at 8:30am PDT until the work is complete. We apologize for the inconvenience. Reflections on the Revolution in France, by the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, considered : also, observations on Mr. Paine's pamphlet, intituled The rights of men [i.e. man] : with cursory remarks on the prospect of a Russian war and the Canada Bill now pending. Item Preview. remove-circle. Renaissance Quarterly. Article contents. Abstract. French Renaissance and Baroque Drama: Text, Performance, Theory. Michael Meere, ed. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015. xxxii + 336 pp. \$90. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 20 November 2018. Katell Lavant. To send this article to your Kindle, first ensure no-reply@cambridge.org is added to your Approved Personal Document E-mail List under your Personal Document Settings on the Manage Your Content and Devices page of your Amazon account. Then enter the `name` part of your Kindle email address below. Find out more about sending to your Kindle. Michael Meere, ed. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015. xxxii + 336 pp. \$90. Volume 69, Issue 2. In essays ranging from conventional stage plays (tragedies, comedies, pastoral, and mystery plays) to court ballets, royal entrances, and meta- and para-theatrical writings of the period from 1485 to 1640, French Renaissance and Baroque Drama: Text, Performance, Theory seeks to deepen and problematize our knowledge of texts, co-texts, and performances of drama from literary-historical, artistic, political, social, and religious perspectives. Moreover, many of the articles engage with contemporary theory and other disciplines to study this drama, including but not limited to psychoanalysis, gender studies, anthropology, and performance theory. ^ Michael Meere, French Renaissance and Baroque Drama: Text, Performance, Theory, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, ISBN 1611495490. ^ "se dit seulement des perles qui sont d'une rondeur fort imparfaite." Vol. 5, The Age of the Baroque and Enlightenment 1600-1800. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2005. ^ Ducher, Robert, La Caractéristique des Styles (2014), pg. "Calvinist Comedie and Conversion during the French Reformation: La comedie du Pape malade (1561) and La comedie du Monde malade et mal pense (1568)," in French Renaissance and Baroque Drama: Text, Performance and Theory. Edited by Michael Meere. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2015, 63-82. "Rites of Torture in Reformation Geneva," Past and Present (2012) n. 214, supplement 7, Ritual and Violence: Natalie Zemon Davis and Early Modern France, 197-219. "Why Did Protestants Lose their Sense of Humour: Comic Performance and the Reformation," Re/Creations: Text and Performance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, UCLA Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, April 10, 2015.