

Mariangela Miotti, Monia Mezzetti, Nerina Clerici Balmas, Anna Bettoni, Giovanna Melis, and Jean Balsamo, eds. *La tragédie à l'époque d'Henri III: Deuxième Série, Vol. 6 (1589)*.

Théâtre français de la Renaissance. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2012. 512 pp. €53. ISBN: 978-88-222-6184-7.

This volume, the fifteenth in the Théâtre français de la Renaissance collection and the sixth devoted to the tragic genre, contains three plays published in 1589: *Clytemnestre*, a classically inspired tragedy by Pierre Matthieu; the biblical tragedy *Sichem ravisseur* by François Perrin; and the historical tragedy by Antoine Favre, *Les Gordiens et Maximins, ou l'ambition*. This volume represents the great interest of the series as a whole, which aims to collect an exhaustive corpus of comedies and tragedies from 1550 to 1600, whether they have originated from a well-known

author like Matthieu, or from more obscure writers like the other two in the present volume who hitherto have not appeared in modern editions. Each text is preceded by a substantial introduction, and accompanied by a set of historical and philological notes. Reproductions of paratexts from the first editions provide a means by which to identify the social networks in which these authors were embedded.

The young Pierre Matthieu likely wrote *Clytemnestre* around 1578, but he would only publish it later, in the same volume with *Vashti* and *Aman*, in 1589, the very year that he ceased to write for theater. Drawing from Seneca's *Agamemnon*, Matthieu is the first to cast the queen as an eponymous character. He focuses the action on Agamemnon's murder, but downplays his infidelity and the sacrifice of Iphigenia as motivations for the regicide to underline instead the curse of the house of Atreus and the love between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. In his opening monologue, the ghost of Thyestes demands that his son Aegisthus kill Agamemnon in order to avenge the crime of Atreus. Acts 2 and 3 follow with a series of debates on the nature of love. After the murder described in the final act, the denouement emphasizes the punishment that awaits the guilty, prophesied by Cassandra and invoked by Electra. The introduction by Mariangela Miotti and the notes by Monia Mezzetti underscore Matthieu's debt to his Latin model as well as to his contemporaries Garnier and Ronsard — a double influence already highlighted by Ernst and Lobbes in their respective editions — along with Jodelle and Boccaccio.

Edited by Anna Bettoni and Giovanna Melis, *Shechem ravisseur* is the only tragedy ever written by François Perrin, canon of Autun. Perrin adapts the biblical episode of the rape of Dinah, daughter of Jacob, by Shechem, Prince of Canaan (Genesis 34). Overtaken by curiosity, Dinah agrees to meet Shechem, but rebuffs his advances. The rape takes place between acts 2 and 3. Dinah's brothers, Levi and Simeon, accept the marriage proposed by Emor, father of Shechem, as reparation for the assault, on the condition that all Canaanites undergo circumcision. But Levi and Simeon take advantage of the situation to massacre the whole people. Perrin's project bears the mark of Christian didacticism. Preceded by a speech about human sin, the play stigmatizes both amorous zeal and radical vengeance. Blame is thus shared between Dinah, whose behavior is condemned by her parents (as well as the Argument that figures in the second edition); Shechem, whose desire is incriminated by Emor and the chorus; and Dinah's brothers, whose cruelty disturbs Jacob himself. The ruin of the Shechemites and the meditation on the duties of a sovereign resonate, as Nerina Clerici Balmas points out, with the civil wars then ravaging France.

Les Gordiens et Maximins, ou l'ambition is less a tragedy — it was not meant to be staged — than a long “dramatic poem” (248), product of the literary *otium* of Antoine Favre, magistrate of the duchy of Savoy. Drawing from the Byzantine historian Zonaras and the *History* of Herodian, Favre opts for a subject never before treated in the French theater: the succession of rival tyrants in the Roman Empire of the third century CE. Gordian, having considered the justifiability of rebelling against a tyrannical but legitimate sovereign, agrees to take power in Africa. But when Maximinus's army defeats him and his son is killed, he hangs

himself with his own hair. The other plot line focuses on the tyrant Maximinus, who urges his army to take Rome. But after an initial reversal, the soldiers mutiny and he too takes his own life. The tragedy, Jean Balsamo argues, denounces the tyrannical tendency of Machiavellianism as much as the right to rebellion upheld by the Protestant monarchomachs. Written when Favre had just entered the Senate of Savoy, it glorifies the role of the magistracy, whose responsibility is to define the proper order of the state.

Despite a few typographical errors and the uneven quality of the critical apparatus — Balsamo's work distinguishes itself by its rigorous editorial protocol and analysis — this new volume completes a collection that has become an indispensable resource for those interested in Renaissance drama. It brings together three texts that illustrate how playwrights were making use of myth, the Bible, and history during that turbulent year of the Estates General of Blois, the assassination of the Guises, the death of Catherine de' Medici, and the subsequent regicide.

SYLVAIN GUYOT
Harvard University