

La comédie à l'époque d'Henri III: Deuxième Série, Vol. 8 (1580–1589).

Mariangela Miotti, Jean Balsamo, Charles Mazouer, Anna Bettoni, Nerina Clerici Balmas, Concetta Cavallini, and Eugenio Refini, eds.
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This collection of six French comedies—all of which are edited here for the first time since at least the nineteenth century, and presented with an introduction that includes a discussion of the editorial process—demonstrates the genre's desire to be taken seriously. It portrays a genre that established rules for itself (such as the five-act norm) and that wanted to distinguish itself from medieval farce, as well as from ancient and Italian models, in order to fulfill Joachim Du Bellay's call a generation earlier to "illustrate" the French language with original works, including comedies. This point has, of course, received much critical attention already in the discussion of comedy and literature of the French Renaissance.

Jean Balsamo notes that François d'Amboise, author of *Les Napolitaines* (the second play in the collection), dedicated his comedy to Charles de Luxembourg, and that this was the first time a French comedy was dedicated to a member of the high nobility. In his dedication, Amboise insists that the support of noble patrons is necessary in order for true French comedy—and not just translations from Italian—to exist. In this way, Balsamo explains, comedy stopped being a simple form of entertainment and took on a political and cultural dimension. It is no surprise, given the political dimension introduced early in the collection, that the last two plays presented—Benoît Voron's *Enfer poétique* and the *Comédie facétieuse et très plaisante du voyage de Frère Fecisiti en Provence*, attributed to Jacques Bienvenu—support opposing sides in the Wars of Religion: Voron's play takes the Catholic side, and the *Comédie*, published in Calvinist-friendly Nîmes, the Huguenot side.

The introductions to several of the texts address another commonly discussed feature of comedy: it is often an open question whether a comedy follows Horace's advice in his *Ars poetica* to use laughter to correct vice, or if the comedy instead uses laughter to encourage the acceptance of human imperfections. While *L'Avare cornu* and *L'Enfer poétique* seek to correct vice, Charles Mazouer finds that Odet de Turnèbe's *Les Contents* is the "chef d'oeuvre" of French comedy of this period because of the author's indulgence for humans as they are (257). Another aspect of many of these plays that the editors comment on but that deserves more discussion—perhaps in an introduction or conclusion to the collection, neither of which is present—is linguistic variation. From the medieval *Farce du Maître Pathelin*, to Rabelais's *écolier limousin*, to various of Molière's plays, premodern French comedy is rife with portrayals of the many patois spoken in the kingdom at the time. In the *Ecoliers*, as Nerina Clerici Balmas notes, a character realizes that, in addition to changing his clothes, he must imitate the patois of

a villager if he wants his disguise to work. What is noteworthy about *Les Napolitaines*, though, is that, although it brings together characters from Paris, Naples, Spain, and the Basque Country, Amboise chooses not to portray their linguistic differences. Foreign characters, as Balsamo notes, do not speak French with any mistakes or suggestion of an accent. Amboise thus passes up an opportunity to exploit linguistic variation for comic effect.

When compared to works like *Pathelin*, *Les Napolitaines* would appear to be written in that sort of comic style (distinct from farce and found in the works of Corneille, amongst others) that fits in with what Claude Favre de Vaugelas, in his 1647 *Remarks on the French Language*, deemed “good usage.” Writing a comedy in the variety of French most commonly spoken by Parisian elites, it would seem, is one way of getting the genre to be taken seriously. Meanwhile, *Les Contents* portrays the peculiar usages of various comic figures, such as the pedant, who are typical of the genre. This variation, as Mazouer notes, helps to create a sense of realism, of individualized characters, and of literary richness more broadly. The collection thus raises questions as to what type and amount of linguistic variation best creates a high-quality comic work that illustrates the French language. Such questions, along with others, could be explored in a discussion of the collection as a whole.

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“*La Dernière Semaine, ou consommation du monde*”; précédé de “*Discours dédié à Monseigneur le Duc de Guise*.” Michel Quillian.

Ed. Sylviane Bokdam. *Textes de la Renaissance* 213; *République des Muses* 4. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018. 546 pp. €59.

Regarding content and renown, there is no equivalent to *Divina Commedia* or *Paradise Lost* in French literature. Nevertheless, the late Renaissance provided readers with reflections on religious topics in numerous long poems that do not rise to the dignity of classic Renaissance texts: Michel Quillian’s *Dernière Semaine, ou consommation du monde* (1596) ranks among them. The Catholic Quillian models his work on the better-known *Semaine ou création du monde* (1581) by the Huguenot Guillaume Du Bartas, and he adopts the style of this short-lived best seller. Du Bartas dealt with the topic of creation with a cosmologic and encyclopedic purpose. He was widely known and admired and even wrote a successful *Deuxième semaine*. In spite of an “anamorphic intertextuality” (74) with Du Bartas, Quillian is subverting its model in the service of his own confessional perspective.