

Sforza Pallavicino. Martyr Hermenegild. Ed. and trans. Stefano Muneroni

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RECENSIONI / BOOK REVIEWS / REVUES DES LIVRES

Sforza Pallavicino. *Martyr Hermenegild*. Ed. and trans. Stefano Muneroni. Toronto: CRRS, 2019. Pp. 106. ISBN 9780772721976.

Born in Rome in 1607, the Jesuit theologian, cardinal, and literatus Sforza Pallavicino was at the heart of much of the baroque Catholic Church's theological future, the developments of the faith's global reach, and the city of Rome's position as the metropole of Catholic spectacle. For example, he played an integral part in organizing ceremonies surrounding the 100th anniversary of the Society of Jesus in 1640, mostly around the Gesù, the Jesuits' mother church in Rome. Fascinated by the many plays and theatrical entertainments that peppered Rome—such as Carnival, religious processions, receptions of diplomats, weddings, and festivals—Pallavicino possessed both a passion for the propagation of the faith and, as translator and editor of this volume Stefano Muneroni explains, for “the power of performance to move the audience and promote Christian behaviour” (13). Pallavicino and his 1644 martyr play *Martyr Hermenegild* are therefore anything but marginal or minor aspects of the theatricality of the Catholic baroque and the Jesuits as participants in it.

In this sense, Muneroni's translation of *Martyr Hermenegild* is a welcome addition to the corpus of translated texts related to baroque Catholic theatre, Jesuit history and literature, and the blurred lines between generic media through which the Catholic Church pursued catechesis and evangelization. The play follows the story of Hermenegild, the Visigothic prince executed by his father, King Levigild, in Seville in 585 AD for rejecting Arianism and accepting the Trinitarian formula of the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). Written and first staged in 1644 at the Collegio Romano, the play combines both Pallavicino's dexterous skill in moral philosophy—he was working on his *Del Bene* (On the Good) at the same time—and his passion for the theatricality of the baroque. Pallavicino's play centres on illustrating that Catholicism was the true and single faith, that one should pursue good works, that martyrdom was the ultimate demonstration of one's faith, and that religious authorities remained morally superior to those of the state. It is, in no small sense, the epitome of Jesuit theatre, which was a central facet of Jesuit education and evangelization efforts across the globe.

As for the volume itself, it allows us to contextualize the play within the Catholic baroque as well as early modern theatre generally. This is due in no small part to the excellent introduction that provides us with a thorough overview of Pallavicino's life and career, the themes of the play, the nature of theatre at the Jesuits' Collegio Romano, the role of aesthetics and Pallavicino's Aristotelian bent, as well as a brief note on translation and performance. Jesuit plays in abstract can be challenging to unpack, especially for undergraduates who may not have a thorough background on the period, the history of the Jesuits, or early modern theatre and performance theory. The introduction is an essential tool for anyone interested in teaching this play to students but is also useful for scholars. For example, the introduction's section entitled "Theatre Aesthetics and Aristotelianism" is crucial for understanding Pallavicino's approaches to writing and staging the play. This will be all the more important for students if they are not reading Aristotle's *Poetics* or the play is being read by non-theatre students or scholars who may not be familiar with the traditions of *Commedia dell'arte* or Jesuit theatre, all of which Muneroni explains thoroughly.

Muneroni's translation also strives to ensure that the text itself not become an obstacle to accessibility while maintaining fidelity to the original. As Muneroni explains in the introduction, and anyone who reads early modern Italian knows, baroque Italian can often be, well, very baroque: long poly-clausal sentences, double or hidden meanings, and tortuous syntax. Muneroni both has an eye for the aesthetic of the original language and is attuned to the need for comprehensibility. Rather than attempt to maintain the original syntactical structure, Muneroni chose to break these long sentences down into more digestible English, which results in a highly readable text that student and scholar alike will appreciate. Much of this can be attributed to the fact that Muneroni staged the play in its entirety and used that experience to continue to hone the translation.

Muneroni also includes Pallavicino's letter to the reader at the end of the play, which provides the reader with insights into Pallavicino's view of the play, why he made certain structural choices (e.g., avoiding soliloquies and choral interventions), and his use of a rhyme scheme that he directly linked to epics, hymns, and classical tragedies. This letter is an excellent springboard for discussions about the relationship between theatre and theology; performance and interpretation; and the aesthetics of early modern theatre. Likewise, the volume has a short but useful bibliography related to baroque and Jesuit theatre.

Overall, Muneroni's edition and translation of Sforza Pallavicino's *Martyr Hermenegild* is an excellent addition to our understanding of Jesuit education, the

artistic enterprise of baroque Catholicism, theatre and spectacle in early modern Rome, and the multifaceted approaches to the Catholic Church's efforts to propagate the faith. Whether scholars and students come to the play because of its value as a theological text, an example of Jesuit pedagogy, or as evidence of the diversity of early modern European theatre beyond the traditional canon, they will not be disappointed.

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