

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Pot, Olivier (ed.). Simon Goulart, *Un pasteur aux intérêts vastes comme le monde*

George Hoffmann

Volume 37, Number 2, Spring 2014

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1090734ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v37i2.21830>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Hoffmann, G. (2014). Review of [Pot, Olivier (ed.). Simon Goulart, *Un pasteur aux intérêts vastes comme le monde*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 37(2), 182–184. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v37i2.21830>

**Pot, Olivier (ed.).**

***Simon Goulart, Un pasteur aux intérêts vastes comme le monde.***

Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 514. Geneva: Droz, 2013. Pp. 584 + 33 ill. ISBN 978-2-600-01581-3 (paperback) \$96.

If one could ever get inside the head of Simon Goulart, few mysteries would remain regarding the French Reformation. Historian, poet, satirist, scholar, playwright, lyricist, translator, and indefatigable editor, Goulart entered a horse

in just about every race that reformers joined. He did not always place, but the range of his multifarious activities spans the entire breadth of a movement whose variety and scope still remain too poorly understood. Leonard Chester Jones's 1917 biography reads more as a narrative bibliography: one learns when and what Goulart published, but little about the combination of motivating spirit and external circumstances that led him on from one project to the next. Recently, Cécile Huchard and Amy Graves have produced two excellent monographs on distinct facets of Goulart's career that demonstrate all that is to be gained from further study of the man and his work. The present collection of 21 essays, four appendices, an updated bibliography, index, and a substantial introduction is a welcome arrival, setting in place the building blocks for any future study that will attempt to fit together the disparate activities of this fascinating figure.

In a painstaking introduction, Olivier Pot enumerates the long record of neglect that Goulart has suffered at the hands of scholars. But he does not explain the causes of this oversight. In a movement still perceived mainly through theological categories, Goulart did not make a single doctrinal contribution; were it not for the wealth of source materials he published, his name might have been forgotten altogether.

But for anyone who still thinks that the French Reformation can be summed up in the person of Calvin, Goulart stands as a salutary antidote. It is precisely his lack of involvement in theology, one almost wants to say, that makes his case so instructive. He believed in divine providence, but his voluminous histories charted the vagaries and human contingencies of the religious wars. He consented to live in Calvin's austere Geneva, but he threw himself into the task of promoting a lush poetic aesthetic that would allow reformers to pursue what proved to be the literary afterlife of the late Valois court. More surprising, he subscribed to the doctrine of inscrutable predestination, yet he indulged a lifelong fondness for crystal gazing and astrology.

Goulart held no sympathy for the Roman Church's excesses. But he teaches us what many histories do not: despite the sharp dividing lines staked out in one polemical work after another, reformers lived in a fluid social world that invited, even demanded, accommodation. He experienced no difficulty in turning from vehement diatribes against the Roman Church to meals shared with Catholic or Catholic-leaning friends. Nor did he flinch at purchasing a work of cabbalism. Unlike Calvin and Beza, Goulart did not renounce

his youthful humanist interests. His lifelong efforts to disseminate Amyot's Plutarch and direct France's reception of this towering monument of humanist translation helped make it a staple of every serious writer's library well into the nineteenth century.

Another lesson to emerge from this volume comes in how decisive Goulart's encounter with Montaigne's *Essays* proved for the trajectory of his career. Although he brings both more doctrinal commitment and more studiousness to his editorial labours than does Montaigne, he repeatedly found inspiration not only in the diverse materials of the *Essays* but also in Montaigne's novel manner of self-presentation. Goulart's scientific interests receive attention as well, but still more here remains to be explored. In particular, it would be fruitful to place Goulart's Paracelsian interests into dialogue with the prevalence of a similar strain of Paracelsianism among artisanal reformers in western France that Neil Kamil unearthed in his 2005 *Fortress of the Soul*.

The impression of Goulart to emerge from this volume is a refracted one in which the divergent tendencies can seem nearly impossible to reconcile. Some heretofore unsuspected proclivities reveal astonishing complexity: Olivier Pot's 70-page analysis of Goulart's poetic sensibility reads as a mini-monograph in its own right. The range and variety of issues covered in this volume do not make the task of pulling together Goulart's many faces into a coherent portrait any easier for the future scholar, but they will make the result far richer and more interesting.

GEORGE HOFFMANN

University of Michigan