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### Le Flanchec, Vân Dung, Michèle Clément, and Anna-Pascale Pouey-Mounou, eds. Maurice Scève. *Le poète en quête d'un langage*

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**Le Flanchec, Vân Dung, Michèle Clément, and Anna-Pascale Pouey-Mounou, eds.**

**Maurice Scève. *Le poète en quête d'un langage*.**

Etudes et essais sur la Renaissance 121. Paris: Classiques Garnier 2020. Pp. 565. ISBN 978-2-406-09008-3 (paperback) €58.

From the late 1540s, the poetry of Maurice Scève—by which was meant his *Délie*—was deemed by contemporaries to be difficult. Peletier and Du Bellay condemned his “obscurité” and Sebillet criticized directly “la rudesse de beaucoup de mots nouveaux” which caused Scève’s “conception” to be “malaisée à en estre extraite.” Sebillet did admit that these neologisms are indispensable to the expression of the poet’s thought, and Guillaume des Autels recognized that the vocabulary revealed “la force de la passion par luy vivement exprimée.” Still, in 1828 Sainte-Beuve found *Délie* to be “à peu près illisible” and the historiographers of French literature tended thereafter to class Scève as fit only to figure briefly in anthologies. Maurice Allem’s *Anthologie poétique française xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1918, reprinted 1968) granted him only six pages, compared to twenty-four for Marot and twenty for Louise Labé. V.-L. Saulnier’s 1948 thesis on Scève ought to have opened the door to more French research in this area, but instead he remained a figure of marginal interest in France, “une curiosité [...] même un mystère,” as Pierre Boutang unwillingly described him in 1953.

Attitudes started to change in the 1980s, and more especially after the publication of Gérard Defaux’s three-volume edition of the *Délie* (2004), as is reflected in this volume of the proceedings of a 2016 “grand colloque international.” Among the twenty-nine contributors (only five of whom are not French), many are junior or middle-rank scholars who counterbalance the work of “les vieux et les vieilles de la vieille” by bringing approaches informed by more modern methodologies and new critical approaches and facilitated by the latest technologies. The result is a volume of papers that complement each other and that expand the readers’ sense of Scève’s literary complexity.

What both Scève’s contemporaries and our own have found obscure in his poetry was less the subject—the emotions tied to the narrator’s unrequited love for *Délie*—than the language in which that subject was articulated. Scève’s neologisms, hyper-erudite references, lexical ambiguities, and grammatical and syntactical peculiarities have all been seen as wilful “obstacles à la fluidité

du discours ‘normal’” and as the purposefully negative counterpart to Marot’s “facilité” (46). By its very title, this volume announces that the locus of these obstacles is not, however, in the *lexis/elocutio*, the selection of a form of words with which to clothe the thought; but in the *heurêsis/inventio*, the thought itself whose complexity is identical with and inseparable from the words that speak it.

After the introduction—three short essays by the volume’s editors—the twenty-six chapters are grouped by topic into sections and sub-sections, but are tied together by eleven pages of good-humoured “Conclusions” by the indefatigable Richard Cooper and by a useful two-part “Bibliographie” of all the “Sources primaires” and “Ouvrages critiques” cited in the book, a two-part Index (“Noms de personnes” plus “Personnages”) and the abstracts of each of the chapters. The authors’ chief focuses are *Délie*, *Microcosme*, and *La déplorable fin de Flamete* (Scève’s 1535 translation of Juan de Flores’s Spanish novel), with a secondary focus on Henri II’s 1548 royal entry into Lyon that Scève orchestrated; on the *Blasons du corps féminins*; and on some other minor pieces. *Arion* and *La saulsaye* are barely mentioned. The chapters range in methodology from the digital analysis of Scève’s “habitudes d’écrire” to discursive accounts of his collaboration with contemporaries, with close studies of specific texts or small sets of texts occupying most of the volume. Scève’s philosophical and linguistic-poetic debts to his Italian and French predecessors are a major topic of these essays, as are the aural/oral, musical, and visual dimensions of his work, including, of course, the enigmatic presence and function of the emblems that punctuate the *Délie*. But underlying it all is the issue of his “obscurité,” the syntactic density of the *dizains* coupled with a polysemic lexicon that has created an (intended by Scève?) interpretative ambivalence.

Outright errors in the volume are few: François Rouget is confused with François Roudaut (155n24) and Jerry Nash is called “John” (532). In some places, one has the sense of reading a gratuitous display of erudition, and in others the author seems content to “rapporter du langage à du langage,” to borrow a phrase from Foucault, without any meaning actually being generated. In the passages where the *dizain* is being analyzed as a poetic form, the arguments would have been bolstered by citing Ned Duval’s seminal chapter, “Lyric Form and Logical Structure of the *Dizain*,” in Nash’s *Scève Celebration*. More serious, indeed unpardonable, is the fact that not a single contributor seems aware of Henri Weber’s *Le langage poétique de Maurice Scève dans la Délie* (Florence,

1948); nor does anyone even mention his more accessible *Création poétique... de Maurice Scève à Agrippa d'Aubigné* (Paris, 1955). At best, many of the problems broached and conclusions reached in this present volume had already been explored and confirmed—albeit concisely—by Weber.

These reservations aside, *Maurice Scève, le poète en quête d'un langage* is an essential book for all *seiziémistes* in the way it illuminates one of the century's most troubling authors: a book that can be consulted as well as read, and a tableau of the literary culture of France in which Scève is less of an outsider than he has too often seemed.

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**Loughnane, Rory, and Andrew J. Power, eds.**

***Early Shakespeare, 1588–1594.***

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. xiii, 324. ISBN 978-1-108-49524-0 (hardcover) £75.

Rory Loughnane and Andrew Power have edited another substantial collection of essays on Shakespeare, a companion volume to their earlier collection, *Late Shakespeare, 1608–1613* (2013). Like the previous volume, this collection will be of great interest to all readers of Shakespeare; it is required reading for Shakespeare scholars. Yet *Early Shakespeare* comes with a twist: while the playwright is thought to have actively collaborated both at the beginning and end of his career, the present volume takes up the question of collaboration more emphatically and, in the present critical climate, likely more controversially. The controversy will arise partly from the assumption or substantiation of recent claims of Marlowe's co-authorship of the *Henry VI* plays, and especially from the acceptance of the partial attribution of *Arden of Faversham* to Shakespeare, which underwrites several of the essays in the volume.

The collection both begins and ends—with the editors' introduction and a conclusion by Gary Taylor—by addressing what “dedicated readers of Shakespeare” *want* to believe about the playwright's early (and indeed later) working life; this structure in effect allows readers of the collection to “play out”