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Catherine Gimelli Martin and Hassan Melehy, eds., *French Connections in the English Renaissance*, Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. x + 212 pp. £60 (hb). ISBN 9781409466253.

Review by Gesa Stedman, Centre for British Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

There is much to be praised in this collection of essays on Anglo-French connections during the Renaissance. First of all is the fact that it exists at all, and that its editors Catherine Gimelli Martin and Hassan Melehy have undertaken the task to open a conversation between academics from French Studies, English Studies and Comparative Literature. Secondly, that they have attempted quite a broad scope, comprising literary studies, the history of ideas, gender studies and the history of political and religious discourse. Thirdly, their own introduction not only provides an overview of previous scholarship on Anglo-French connections in the early modern period, but also establishes their own project, and with a methodological meta-commentary.

Gimelli Martin and Melehy make very clear that they are involved in an attempt to overcome traditional disciplinary boundaries, and that national literature as taught in many university departments not only in the US but elsewhere is an outdated concept which they want to overcome, in both teaching and research. Rather than falling for the stories which early modern authors told, claiming a 'national' literature devoid of foreign influence, scholars and critics should become aware of the manifold exchanges which existed in the early modern period and which had a considerable impact on the development of both English and French 'national' literatures. "In particular, the legacy of nineteenth-century nationalism has been so powerful that the conventions of treating the literatures of England and France as neatly divided by national borders remained almost unshakable for most of the twentieth century" (p. 9).

It is impossible to do justice to the detailed analyses which can be found in the separate chapters, all of which were written by different contributors and which are grouped according to the following three categories: "Translating and Transferring Gender", "Textualizations of Politics and Empire", and "Translation and the Transnational Context." In the first section, the two chapters deal with two largely unrelated aspects of gender history. While A.E.B. Coldiron focuses on the differences between the English and the French version of one of the well-known 'battle of the sexes' texts, Deanne Williams is interested in the discrepancy between Isabelle de France as a historical figure, and her literary representation in Shakespeare's *Richard II*.

In the second section, Hassan Melehy shows that *The Faerie Queene* is part of a political project which establishes the epic poem firmly as a canonical model in the context of an emergent, rather than pre-existing national literature. Spenser engages with models developed by Du Bellay, according to Melehy, but distances himself from his French colleague, "in order to present a new poetry that is necessarily implicated in transformation, but that nonetheless expresses a wish for stasis" (p. 63). In an article by Timothy J. Reiss, we learn that La Boétie's thought was vital for Hobbes' in order to develop his own concepts and political framework: "The intellectual air that Hobbes breathed was created by the sixteenth century; it allowed certain theoretical questions and not others, and a certain style of questions. In a precise sense, it *produced* the thought of the liberal state" (p. 66). The final chapter in this section by Catherine Gimelli Martin explores the many links which exist between the works of John Milton and French Huguenot writers and thinkers. She teases out these rather complex 'French connections' in great detail, placing them alongside English and Scottish Calvinist thinkers.

In the third section, Dorothea Heitsch follows the fate of Bandello's novella on the Albanian Knight to France, England, and Spain, while Roger Kuin investigates the Sidney's translation of Duplessis-Mornay, discussing among other issues who helped with the translation, and how much of it was actually by Philip Sidney himself, as well as comparing Philip and Mary's respective translations of *De la vérité de la religion chrestienne*, and the *Excellent discours de la vie et de la mort*. In the final chapter, Anne Lake Prescott, with Lydia Kirsopp Lake, explore the links between France, England, and the Continent on the basis of Thorius's Latin transformations of some of Ronsard's love poems, thus "edg(ing) Ronsard a little closer to the schoolroom" (p. 173). Adding cultural weight to the poems may be one reason for rendering them in Latin, a specific male gender-bias another, making the verses exclude women readers because they only "suit(ed) an international, masculine, highly educated network of humanist poets, a network that connected Ronsard to Thorius, Thorius to Rogers, Rogers to Sidney, and Sidney to all over the place on both sides of the Manche/Channel" (p. 176).

The volume left this reviewer somewhat puzzled for a number of reasons. Experts on Milton, early modern gender debates, Shakespeare, the Sidneys, Hobbes, Milton, Spenser, Ronsard etc. will want to enter into a more in-depth discussion with the individual arguments made by the authors. My approach is slightly different, and aims at a critical assessment of the design of the volume, and the positions which the authors appear to have taken up.

First of all, I was surprised to find the individual contributions entitled as 'chapters' since this implies a coherence which the volume does not have. In spite of the groupings mentioned above, which make sense, the chapters do not enter into a dialogue with one another. One does not get the impression that the authors share an approach, or that they have exchanged their ideas. Perhaps they did, but this is not obvious on a meta-level which could have been made visible through the shared use of categories. And it is remarkable that the contributions by the editors themselves, while also providing detailed and close-readings of their chosen texts and cases of cross-Channel exchange, are much more trenchant in their use of categories and at least sometimes comment on their purpose, rather than simply presenting a detailed case without further explanation as to the reasons for the choice of this particular case, and its relevance for the bigger picture of Anglo-French literary or cultural connections.

What struck me most is the almost complete absence of an explicit positioning, a theoretical debate which explains how Anglo-French connections ought to be approached, which categories are helpful and which might not work for the early modern context. There is such a wealth of work being done and there are so many theories and methods, ranging from cultural exchange studies, translational studies, transnational studies to postcolonial studies that at least some kind of commentary would have been necessary to place the volume and its individual contributions in this wider debate. Many of the chapters, though, seem to rely on a rather outdated model of sources and influence studies, often to the exclusion of material history, cultural, social, and in some cases, even political contexts.

Since comparative literary studies have moved beyond this stage quite some time ago, I wondered why this rather static concept seems to have provided the basis for much of the argument. Added to which a rather odd appearance of an authenticity debate which I found unexpected and not very helpful. Why is it relevant what the actual, factual historical queen Isabel de France looked like and how old she was compared to Shakespeare's dramatic version of this historical figure in *Richard II*? If it is relevant that there is a discrepancy between the representation and the represented, I would have liked to have been offered a critical commentary, as well as a conceptualization of the relation between the represented and the representation studied here.

Likewise with the debate whether Bandello's novella, which spread to many European countries, might have been based on facts or not. Why would this be important? Is it not sufficient to learn that the novella was so widely-read and translated as to have spanned several geographical boundaries? Admittedly, the author Dorothea Heitsch compares the various versions and explains the differences between them, in order to show how national literatures were emerging and in which manner they used neighbouring cultures to demarcate their own. Here, we are provided with a meta-commentary on the purpose of such cross-cultural literary exchanges, which mirror the introduction's contention that, although scholars may finally want to overcome national literatures as a category, historical

discourse shows that marking borders between truly or seemingly distinct (emerging) national cultures was something in which many authors were involved.

In some articles the fact that a connection between writers or their texts could not be proven was commented on, and happily, it was not considered crucial whether factual evidence of knowledge or connection could be found or not. Rather, it was argued that obvious discursive closeness was more important than chasing possibly elusive traces of readership, possession or at least knowledge of certain texts. In the case of very widespread distribution and circulation of ideas and concepts, this kind of verification is not only unnecessary but it would also detract heavily from the more important aspects of cross-cultural or literary exchanges, namely, the uses of similar arguments, stylistic devices, categories, images, concepts or even literary characters.

This might be a more minor point, but I was also surprised to read that Timothy J. Reiss's chapter on Hobbes (chapter four) had been published in different versions elsewhere. I was unable to find out why this particular version included in the present volume was considered to advance the argument which had already been made in previous versions of the article. The same criticism applies to the reprint of a version of A.E.B. Coldiron's article.

Overall then, readers may find inspiration for their particular field, if they are interested in the texts, authors, and connections which are covered by the various contributions in this volume. If they are seeking conceptual innovation, or a contextualization of these case studies, they will have to look long and hard to glean from the chapters what they can. Catherine Gimelli Martin and Hassan Melehy have missed a chance to map an emerging field of study since their introduction (and in particular Melehy's own contribution) attempt(s) a conceptual and theoretical grounding of Anglo-French connections but this attempt is not really supported by the individual articles in this collections.

LIST OF ESSAYS

A.E.B. Coldiron, "La Femme Replique': English Paratexts, Genre Cues, and Versification in a Translated French Gender Debate"

Deanne Williams, "Isabelle de France, Child Bride"

Hassan Melehy, "Spenser's *Mutabilitie Cantos* and Du Bellay's Poetic Transformation"

Timothy J. Reiss, translated by Hassan Melehy, "Utopia Versus State of Power, or Pretext of the Political Discourse of Modernity: Hobbes, Reader of la Boétie?"

Catherine Gimelli Martin, "Milton and the Huguenot Revolution"

Dorothea Heitsch, "Cross-Cultural Adaptation and the Novella: Bandello's Albanian Knight in France, England, and Spain"

Roger Kuin, "Life, Death, and the Daughter of Time: Philip and Mary Sidney's Translations of Duplessis-Mornay"

Anne Lake Prescott, with Lydia Kirsopp Lake, "From 'Amours' to Amores: Francis Thorius Makes Ronsard a Neo-Latin Lover"

APPENDIX

Anne Lake Prescott, "Ronsard in England, 1635-1699"

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