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Bruce Hayes, *Hostile Humor in Renaissance France*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2020. xiv + 218 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781644531778; \$32.50 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781644531785.

Review by Lucy Rayfield, University of Oxford.

Notoriously, humor is a subject that—when examined under a critical lens—is anything but humorous. Yet Bruce Hayes’s volume is not just a reevaluation of the ways in which texts were transformed into highly effective polemical weapons, but also a welcome introduction for the general reader to sixteenth-century French satire. Although the author sets out a number of important and original arguments about humor and the role of comedy in times of crisis, this book is accessible and at times anecdotal, making it rather a comical read in itself.

The first chapter focuses on political and polemical pamphlets, examining a certain paradox inherent to weaponized satire: how humor becomes at once more constrained and more violent as crisis intensifies. Also of interest is the marginalization of bawdy laughter, which was increasingly synonymous with blasphemy. These notions are discussed in relation to a number of texts, which include Antoine Marcourt’s Protestant placards and the response to these of the Catholic Jérôme de Hangest. Hayes explores the possible reasons behind the slowness of the Catholics to effectively engage in early propaganda—which include, but are not limited to, their reluctance to write in French and their emphasis on theology—as well as analyzing their failure to attract the attention of a broad readership. Attention is also drawn in this chapter to Marie Dentièrre, who is little known today but was the first woman to put forward ideas for a reformed theology in the French language.[1] Through a careful analysis of Dentièrre’s humor, Hayes shows precisely why her work caused such commotion in Geneva, through its dual sober-mindedness and mockery.

Chapter two turns to the farces of Marguerite de Navarre, making the case for her use of theater as a vehicle for disseminating reformist standpoints. Hayes creates a backdrop for his study of Marguerite by looking in detail at the *Sottie des béguins* (1523) and the *Sottie du monde* (1524), describing the ways in which these plays exploited the Erasmian *risus sardonicus* as a means of exposing Catholic insincerity and double-dealing. This chapter provides new evidence for Marguerite’s reliance not only on medieval farce but also on these more recent, biting satires and *sotties*, which had been used as religious propaganda. In this way, Hayes shows to be overstated a long-standing series of claims by scholars that Marguerite’s work centers mainly on the mystic and spiritual. Instead, he demonstrates Marguerite’s important position within the ever-shifting condition of humor as polemic.

The third chapter contains one of Hayes's most significant contributions, which is the bringing to light of the work of Artus Désiré, a prolific Catholic polemicist. Désiré knew how to market his viewpoints in a way that reached unprecedented numbers of readers—between 60,000 and 70,000 in the mid-sixteenth century—ensuring that his work constituted wholly effective propaganda in Rouen, Lyon, Paris, and beyond.[2] Désiré's modes of humor are fully interrogated, and Hayes proposes an original means of reading his bold and aggressive styles of rallying to action. Additionally, Hayes offers some lively insights into how humor in this period at once castigated and was castigating, showing at the same time how satire was intended both to anger and to galvanize potential readers. This chapter also comments on a comedy that has, unfairly, long been overlooked: Conrad Badius's 1561 *Comédie du pape malade et tirant à la fin*. Désiré himself is portrayed as a character in this comedy, which recreates vividly the world of sixteenth-century pamphleteers. Hayes uses this comedy to show how polemicists were crucial in forging innovative routes across plays and pamphlets, and also across forms of hopeful, innocent, and negative laughter.

In chapter four, we turn to the writers Pierre Viret and Théodore de Bèze. Works by both authors—particularly their pamphlets—have been neglected in scholarship: as Hayes explains, this is partly due to the fact that they do not fit into any neat generic category. The period in question in this chapter is from 1540 to the starting point of the first War of Religion. As well as analyzing the pamphlets of Viret and Bèze in isolation, this chapter considers some of their collaborative political work, asking how they made use of some paratextual forms to achieve their aims. There are particularly rich close readings of the poetry in Bèze's 1560 *Satyres chrestiennes*: Hayes identifies the variety of humor used to attack monks (see, for example, his discussion of the pun on *rats* and *ras*, “shaved” or, in this case, “tonsured”; p. 115). Hayes ultimately shows how both polemicists walked a very fine line between acceptable and unacceptable forms of humor; he also looks forward to the inevitable crossing of this line by later rhetoricians.

Chapter five focuses more explicitly on theater and performance. Hayes presents a multifaceted analysis of works by two of the most famous French acting troupes in the early and mid-sixteenth century: the Conards de Rouen and the Parisian Basoche. This chapter argues that as religious tensions heightened, so, too, did the use of the morality play as a political tool. Using a number of case studies, including the little-known 1564 play *Moralité de Mars et Justice*, Hayes sets out the ways in which drama was used as a weapon to mobilize spectators. He also shows how the strife and violence enacted in reformist plays by the Conards and in Catholic *moralités* by the Basoche undermine the joy that had long been associated with the troupes' work. This chapter is a thought-provoking example of how, as the conflict intensified, mirth was “lost under the rubble of war” (p. 132): having been forced to turn their talents to polemical purposes, comic troupes could provide little to induce laughter.

The final chapter centers on France's leading Renaissance poet, Pierre de Ronsard, and takes a look at the *libelle* written by Antoine de la Roche-Chandieu and Bernard de Montméja as a reply to Ronsard's 1563 *Response aux injures et calomnies, de je ne sçay quels predicans et ministres de Genève*. Hayes's exploration of these replies from Geneva, as well as of Ronsard's reaction to these responses, help to show in a new and quite terrifying light the efficacy of satire and humor as crucial instruments in warfare. Hayes also demonstrates that despite Ronsard's claims to the contrary, mockery was central to the persuasiveness of his poetic technique in the *Response*. It

was this mockery that sought dually to incite laughter and to silence it, aiming at once to galvanize supporters and to suppress adversaries.

Hayes's volume makes a critical intervention in the fields of humor, rhetoric, and warfare, as well as showing very successfully the reciprocal relationship between these areas. *Hostile Humor in Renaissance France* tells an intriguing story of how hostile humor—as well as the laughter it incited—changed the course both of rhetoric and of conflict in the sixteenth century. This volume has also brought to light a range of obscure texts, and provides close readings that will no doubt provide a useful framework for further exploration of these plays and pamphlets. *Hostile Humor* offers some important innovations and does a service to the study of the history of emotions, while also providing an accessible route through which to enter the comic (and tragic) world of sixteenth-century France.

NOTES

[1] See Mary McKinley, “Marie Dentièrre’s *Epistle to Marguerite de Navarre* and the *Heptameron*,” in *Teaching French Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Colette H. Winn (New York: MLA, 2011), p. 2.

[2] Denis Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu: La violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610* (Seysell: Champ Vallon, 1990), vol. 1, p. 191.

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