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John O'Brien and Marc Schachter, eds., *Sedition: The Spread of Controversial Literature and Ideas in France and Scotland, c. 1550-1610*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2021. 324 pp. Figures, notes, and index. € 90.00 (hb). ISBN 9782503589909; € 90.00 (eb). ISBN 9782503589923.

Review by Scott Francis, University of Pennsylvania.

Not surprisingly, one of the most important recurring terms in the literature surrounding the French Wars of Religion (ca. 1560-1600) is “sedition.” While the term is strictly used to denote rebellion against established authority in modern English and French, it was highly polyvalent in Middle French, as was its Latin equivalent *seditio*, and over the course of the Reformation and Wars of Religion, was used to describe not just open revolt or conspiracy, but general unrest, division, and factionalism. Springing from a July 2017 conference held at Durham University, *Sedition* brings together essays that shed light on the resonances of this term in domains ranging from political theory to material bibliography to gender. In this way, the organizing principle adopted by the volume’s editors, John O’Brien and Marc Schachter, may be compared to that of *Renaissance Keywords*, albeit focused on a single keyword instead of seven.[1]

The editors make it clear in their introduction to the volume that the contributors approach sedition from a political rather than a theological perspective, and while some of the entries have interesting implications for the study of religious difference and conflict, the focus is indeed overwhelmingly on political history and theory. In this context, the concept of sedition is mobilized for the purpose of legitimizing models of governance or forms of resistance to authority, and especially royal authority. Sedition seems to be a term one applies to one’s adversaries rather than to oneself, just as the accusation of *nouvelleté* is used on all sides in the theological arena to stake a claim to oneness with the primitive church and denigrate other sects as the result of subsequent human inventions. In other words, what was and was not seditious during the Wars of Religion depended largely on one’s own confessional and political allegiances and convictions, and the volume’s chapters trace the permutations of this keyword across a wide variety of writers, historical actors, and viewpoints.

The first section, “The Language of Sedition,” is the most specifically geared toward the shifting vocabulary of civil unrest in late Renaissance France. Paul-Alexis Mellet shows how, regardless of their allegiance, authors of remonstrances consistently use sedition to denote the reversal of rules and norms or the divisions between subjects of the commonwealth, accusing their opponents of encouraging these twin evils: in Protestant remonstrances, unscrupulous Catholic churchmen foment sedition through “le scandale de leurs mauvaises vies” (p. 45), whereas in remonstrances written by partisans of the Catholic League, *politiques* or *moyenneurs* who favor the

royal policy of compromise are seditious Machiavels who allow the established Church to fall into ruin for their own political gain. In fact, even though the League was in open rebellion against Henri III, it is the Leaguers who accuse the king of sedition in their remonstrances as, in their view, he is to blame for disturbing the social order. Charges of sedition are thus strictly products of discourse rather than of historical fact, and indicate how reality was perceived moreso than what actually transpired: in this way, they constitute what Denis Crouzet would call an “histoire sans événement.”[2]

George Hoffmann goes on to examine the brief and oft-overlooked reign of Francis II (1559-1560) as a crucial turning point in the history of pacification. Through a close analysis of the vocabulary and phrasing of royal edicts, he detects a shift from treating Protestants as heretics, as had been the case under Francis I and Henri II, to treating them as seditious. Essentially, he sees edicts prior to the 1562 January Edict, which inaugurated the royal policy of toleration, as attempts to deal with a religious problem by treating it as a civil matter, and thereby to foster religious unity and social cohesion rather than the *modus vivendi* of mere coexistence aimed for in the January Edict and its subsequent iterations.

The second section, “Sources of Sedition,” focuses on several significant texts as either sources of sedition or reflections on the concept. Andrea Frisch’s chapter that opens the section follows quite logically from Hoffmann’s, as it considers the relationship between heresy and sedition in Guillaume de La Perrière’s *Miroir politique* (1553), Estienne Pasquier’s *Recherches de la France* (1560), Pierre de Ronsard’s *Discours des misères de ce temps* and its continuation (1562), and Pierre Boton’s *La France divisée* (ca. 1595). In Frisch’s assessment, La Perrière and Pasquier are typical of discussions of the Reformation in sixteenth-century France in that they associate heterodoxy with sedition *qua* departure from the established norm, which they see as indissociable from the law. Indeed, this was the logic behind the 1557 Edict of Compiègne promulgated by Henri II, which shifts the target of persecution from “Lutherans” to “nouvelles opinions” (p. 90). Ronsard attempts to pursue the same logic in his *Discours* by condemning the Reformation as seditious on account of its heterodoxy and its foreignness, but he ends up revealing the limitations of this logic, as it is at odds with the “Frankish, and therefore pagan and Germanic” origins of the French monarchy and French law that scholars agreed upon at the time and that Ronsard could not occlude in either the *Discours* or in the *Franciade* despite his best efforts to blend it with the myth of France’s Trojan origins (p. 94). Ronsard, then, serves as a case in point of how the supposedly stable and ancient consensus held up by the likes of La Perrière and Pasquier is anything but, and when Pierre Boton writes in support of Henri IV at the end of the century, he completely replaces shared cultural inheritance with the will of the sovereign as the touchstone for sedition.

Éric Durot’s contribution to the section focuses on John Knox, whose centrality to the Reformation in Scotland is a given, but whose role in the French Reformation is murky at best. Knox made little reference to France in his writings, which were neither translated into French nor printed in France, so Durot instead examines Knox’s stay on the continent as a Marian exile in the late 1550s. While he raises various intriguing possibilities related to the potential influence of his conception of revolt against Catholic authority, which was more radical than that of Calvin or Bèze, Durot’s essay remains largely speculative. While it is clear that Knox gained some notoriety for preaching in Poitiers and Dieppe and benefited from Calvin’s adoption of him into the fold of the Reformed Church, and while it is equally clear that at least some Huguenots drew inspiration from the Scottish revolt set into motion by Knox, a clear picture of Knox’s influence

on the French Wars of Religion does not emerge, and Durot's claim that "the 'British' John Knox was also one of the first Huguenots" seems overstated (p. 122).

In the final chapter of the second section, John O'Brien examines the transformations of the Ciceronian dictum "salus populi suprema lex est" ("may the welfare of the people be the highest law") in Renaissance political theory. [3] As O'Brien astutely points out, the saying is pointed to in the Renaissance as a justification for resistance to abuses of monarchic power (real or perceived) and even for tyrannicide, but it is taken completely out of context. In Cicero, the phrase is not a statement of universal law, but a hortative prescription for the duty of the consuls. O'Brien goes on to show how this misreading underpins such influential works of political theory as François Hotman's *Francogallia* (1573) and its argument for constitutional monarchy; he then relates it to the appropriation of Étienne de La Boétie's *La Servitude volontaire* by Protestant Monarchomachs, such as in the notable case of the 1574 *Reveille-matin des François*. Although La Boétie does not cite the aforementioned Ciceronian dictum, Protestant readers of his treatise fixate on an analogous Ciceronian expression, the "joug de la servitude" (*jugum servitutis*), essentially choosing to read both La Boétie and Cicero as calling for insurrection and revolutionary liberation (p. 140).

The third section, "Genre and the Question of Seditio," traces the shifting meaning of sedition in various forms of propaganda. Natalia Wawrzyniak surveys the ample pamphlet literature that accompanied the Wars of Religion, taking as her framework Erasmus's description of polemical books and pamphlets as *dentassimi libelli*, or "books with sharp teeth" meant to cause harm, a description echoed nearly a century later by the founder of the Mazarin Library, Gabriel Naudé (p. 153). As such, she is less concerned with pamphlet literature itself than with "anti-pamphlet discourse" among humanists like Erasmus: she brings to the fore condemnations of slander and libel in classical, Christian, and humanist discourse, as well as associations between libel and sedition. Yet, if pamphlet literature would seem to be anathema to humanism on a theoretical level, Wawrzyniak explains that physical traces of reading left behind in surviving copies of pamphlets reveal a "thoughtful and careful perusal typical of humanist reading culture" (p. 162).

Ullrich Langer focuses on a series of pamphlets printed in the early 1560s on behalf of Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, the commander of the Huguenot forces who took up arms after the massacre of Vassy in March 1562. Although Condé's actions were "objectively seditious" (p. 169), the pamphlets obviate this charge by insisting on Condé's warrior ethos and blood ties to the crown, presenting him as a practitioner of frank outspokenness (*parrhesia*) in contrast with the Catholic "triumvirate" of the Duc de Guise, the Connétable de Montmorency, and the Maréchal de Saint André, who are depicted as flatterers and tyrants in that they pursue their own ends at the expense of the kingdom. It is they who are seditious and Condé is simply striving to free Charles IX and Catherine de' Medici from their nefarious influence. However, the pamphlets' insistence that the Reformed Church is the only true religion in France ultimately transcends Condé's gesture toward amicable and open relations among aristocratic relatives; the solicitous *parrhesia* of friendship gives way to the radical *parrhesia* of witnessing and martyrdom.

Tom Hamilton's contribution examines the unusual case of François Brigard, a Parisian *procureur du roi* and a committed Leaguer who was put on trial for sedition by the Parlement of Paris in 1591. Brigard was suspected of having colluded with Henri de Navarre and his entourage during the siege of the capital between March and August 1590. Hamilton goes over the particulars of the case in painstaking detail, but its interest for the volume lies in the fact that Brigard was put

on trial not for sedition against the monarch, but for sedition and lèse-majesté against the city of Paris, which was at the time under the control of the League and in open rebellion against the Protestant king. Although the Parlement ultimately proved reluctant to assert the League's sovereignty, the case runs counter to the commonly accepted narrative that France was on a steady path toward royal absolutism throughout the sixteenth century.

The essays of the fourth and final section, "Gender, Sedition, and Literature," are united in their concern for how gendered conceptions and categories are marshalled either to support or to criticize sedition. Armel Dubois-Nayt offers the second of two Scotland-focused studies, an analysis of five popular ballads written by the poet and controversialist Robert Sempill. The ballads criticize Mary Queen of Scots for aspects of her reign, but particularly for her marriages to Henry Lord Darnley and James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell. Dubois-Nayt considers whether Sempill's poems adhere to the anti-gynecocratic theories of John Knox and George Buchanan, and ultimately answers in the negative: Sempill opts for "misogyny but not anti-gynecocracy *per se*" (p. 235).

Marc Schachter returns to the *Reveille-matin des François*, arguing that the dialogue engages in virtue politics. Rife with denunciations of the supposed depravity of Charles IX and the entire royal family, the *Reveille-matin* essentially aims to drive French Protestant nobles to sedition or even tyrannicide by calling their masculinity into question if they continue to submit to Valois rule. Schachter focuses on how the *Reveille-matin* employs Ronsard's account of the Merovingian "do-nothing" kings (or *rois fainéants* [4]) in the *Franciade* as justification for the slaying of tyrants ruled by their own passions; resistance to tyranny is not sedition, but good citizenship, whereas submission to tyranny amounts to complicity with its effeminizing luxuriousness. Perhaps most interestingly, Schachter also shows that despite its clearly Protestant bent, the dialogue also tries to recruit Catholic allies by offering "a virile, non-sectarian, self-evidently commonsensical French perspective which is also universal" (p. 256).

If Schachter's essay shows how conceptions of gender can be used to fan the flames of civil strife, Kathleen Long relates them to a very different form of sedition in her study of an oddball satirical novel, *L'Isle des Hermaphrodites* (1605). While the novel is typically taken to be a satire of Henri III's effeminate *mignons*, Long reads it as part of the current of Pyrrhonian skepticism that became prominent in French thought after Montaigne. For Long, the illegibility of the hermaphrodites' gender makes them inherently seditious and resistant to authority, as "[a] constantly changing body withholds the legibility that permits social control and social participation" (p. 277). The novel may thus be seen as a reflection on self-fashioning in the context of state-sponsored sectarian violence, a context in which survival may well hinge upon shifting between different religious or gendered identities. Long's chapter is followed by the conclusion to the volume, which recapitulates the different facets of sedition discussed in the chapters and supplements them with additional data reflecting the frequency with which "sedition" and other related terms occur in official documents of the period.

*Sedition* is thematically coherent and contains a number of truly excellent and erudite studies that would be of great interest to scholars of Renaissance France and historians of political thought. Indeed, although I myself tend to be more interested in theology and religious conflict than in political history and theory, I found that several of the chapters (Hoffmann's, Wawrzyniak's, and Long's in particular) had a great deal to offer me in spite of the volume's resolutely political focus. That said, I do have two quibbles with the volume as a whole. First, I find it odd that Mellet's

chapter is entirely in French when English translations for quotations are universally provided elsewhere in the volume; not only is it inconsistent, but it is a hindrance for a book clearly meant to be accessible to readers without French. Second, the two chapters focused on Scotland (Durot's and Dubois-Nayt's) are ultimately out of place. Their inclusion is justified on the basis of the Auld Alliance and on connections between the Scottish and the French Reformations, but Dubois-Nayt's chapter in particular scarcely touches on France at all. I'm left with the impression of a *seiziémiste* volume with two Scottish essays tacked on for reasons of professional courtesy.

These gripes aside, *Sedition* makes for a worthwhile read in its entirety, and Mellet's, Hoffman's, Frisch's, O'Brien's, and Long's chapters stood out in particular for this reviewer. What is perhaps most timely about this volume is the way in which many of its chapters use the concept of sedition to arrive at an understanding of how western political theory accounts for factionalism and sectarian conflict. I fully expect that other readers will be just as struck as I was by the relevance of this approach to events in North America and Europe over the last several years.

## LIST OF ESSAYS

### Introduction

John O'Brien and Marc Schachter, "Sedition: From Disobedience to Revolt"

Paul-Alexis Mellet, "La sédition pendant les guerres civiles (France, 1560-1600): Une histoire sans événement"

George Hoffmann, "The Language of Religious Conflict: Seditions, Assemblies, Emotions, *Violences...*"

Andrea Frisch, "Heresy and Sedition in Pierre de Ronsard's *Discours des misères de ce temps* (1562) and Pierre Botton's *La France divisée* (c. 1595)"

Éric Durot, "The Role of John Knox and his Seditious Writings in the Outbreak of the French Wars of Religion"

John O'Brien, "Cicero the Revolutionary: Some Seditious Motifs in the Literature of the French Wars of Religion"

Natalia Wawrzyniak, "'Books with Sharp Teeth': The Perception of Seditious Books in Early Modern France"

Ullrich Langer, "How Not to Be (and Sound) Seditious: The Prince de Condé's Justifications for Starting the First War of Religion (1562-63)"

Tom Hamilton, "Political Crime in the Wars of Religion: François Brigard's Sedition"

Armel Dubois-Nayt, "The Sempill Ballads: Gendering Sedition and Rebellion"

Marc Schachter, "The Seditious Pleasures of the Prince in the *Reveille-matin's* Denunciation of Tyranny"

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Kathleen Long, “Styling Sediton in *The Island of Hermaphrodites* (*L’Isle des Hermaphrodites*, 1605)”

Mark Greengrass (with Dénes Harai), “The Several Faces of Sediton”

#### NOTES

[1] Ita Mac Carthy, ed., *Renaissance Keywords* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[2] Denis Crouzet, *La Nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy: Un rêve perdu de la Renaissance* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).

[3] Cicero, *De legibus*, 3.8.

[4] The original Latin phrase, “rex nihil faciens,” dates back to eleventh-century chroniclers. The French version dates from the fourteenth-century *Grandes chroniques de France*. See E. M. Peters, “Roi fainéant: The Origins of an Historians’ Commonplace,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 30/3 (1968): 540.

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