

**Lana Martysheva, Mark Greengrass (dir.),
Jacques Davy du Perron (1556–1618). Figures
oubliées d'un passeur de son temps, Rennes
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Kilian Harrer, Mainz

The history of »great men« is decidedly past its prime. That said, what about the history of men who were once considered great but were later consigned to near-total oblivion? Based on a conference held in 2019 at the Sorbonne, this volume revisits the tumultuous decades around 1600 by zooming in on one such man, the French cardinal Jacques Davy du Perron. A prolific theologian, fierce confessional controversialist, renowned poet, ambitious court prelate, and skillful diplomat, Du Perron wore many figurative hats in addition to the literal cardinal's hat he received in 1604. What makes his life even more remarkable is that he came from a relatively humble background and developed many of his talents autodidactically. His parents belonged to the petty nobility of western Normandy and sought refuge in Bern around the time of his birth because they adhered to Calvinism. Jacques Davy du Perron only converted to Catholicism in his early twenties – a decision that helped enable his brilliant career at the royal court from the early years of Henry III's rule as king of France through the regency of Marie de' Medici in the early 1610s. Historians Lana Martysheva and Mark Greengrass have made an excellent choice by drawing attention to Du Perron, not in order to restore his »greatness« but rather to see what his dazzling success can tell us about the politics of religion and the Republic of Letters in the late Renaissance.

In addition to an introduction by Martysheva, a conclusion by Greengrass, and a short biographical overview by Joseph Bergin, the volume assembles thirteen impressively researched chapters. Most of the contributors are historians, but the two chapters dedicated to Du Perron's poetry are authored by scholars of French literature (Béatrice Brottier and Miriam Speyer, respectively) and relate his writings to the wider literary history of his time. Both Brottier and Speyer have done a convincing job of relating their subject-matter to the political history on which the volume hinges as a whole. They do so by questioning directly what was political about these poetic works and their numerous re-editions – and, conversely, what was construed by Du Perron and his contemporaries as a-political or »hors du monde« (40).

The volume's formal division into five sections seems somewhat arbitrary, and it may be useful to instead highlight three themes that have received special emphasis from the editors and contributors. These themes include Du Perron's service to the



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French crown, the »combative Catholicism« he championed, and the politics of textual forms. Regarding the fate of the French monarchy in the era of the Wars of Religion, Du Perron's manifold activities offer clues to the immense fragility of the late Valois and early Bourbon dynasties, but also to their grand ambitions and resilience in the face of adversity. Whether as a ghostwriter for Henry III (as discussed by Alexandre Goderniaux), a key collaborator with French ambassadors at the papal court during Henry IV's reign (Jean Sénié, Marie-Cécile Pineau), or a decisive clerical orator at the Estates General of 1614/15 (Greengrass and James Collins), Du Perron wielded rhetoric and diplomacy not so much to shore up royal sovereignty but rather to help create it in the first place – patiently, over many decades, and in spite of setbacks. Indeed, as Greengrass's conclusion aptly foregrounds, Du Perron's biography reveals how this struggle bridged the change of dynasty in 1589, partly because of the long life and afterlife of the anti-royal Catholic League. The chapter co-authored by Greengrass and Collins shows that Du Perron himself did not hesitate to denounce Richerism (an intellectual current that opposed royal, top-down Gallicanism from around 1610 onwards) as a direct product of the regicidal climate that the League had cultivated.

Du Perron's defense of a distinctly royal and episcopal Gallicanism raises two questions that define the volume's second major theme: what kind of Catholicism did he represent more broadly? And how might his vision have enabled him to mediate between French sovereignty and the spiritual authority of the *souverain pontife*, i.e., the pope? As Martyshcheva points out in her chapter on Du Perron as a »conversion expert«, he appears to have believed deeply in the truthfulness and intellectual superiority of Catholic doctrine. He hoped to convert elite Calvinist individuals by engaging them in rigorous debate, but also by integrating them carefully into Catholic social *milieux*. While he often succeeded, his track record and intellectual confidence sometimes led him to overestimate his chances, as in the case of Isaac Casaubon analyzed by Jean-Louis Quantin. Moreover, as Sylvio Hermann de Franceschi demonstrates, Du Perron's efforts to outargue Protestant leaders were intimately tied to an ecclesiological agenda that insisted on exalting the pope's spiritual empire and thus on romanizing early modern Catholicism. Hence, whereas Du Perron's enemies decried him as a sophist and opportunist, for his many admirers he embodied a powerful synergy between the Gallican and the ultramontane spirit of Catholicism in France. Olivier Poncet's insightful chapter implies that this synergy appears oxymoronic in historical hindsight (and perhaps this is one big reason why people in the eighteenth century chose to forget Du Perron?), but also that it greatly helped to restabilize the French monarchy around 1600, not least by providing it with a foothold at the papal court.

Finally, contributions by Dinah Ribard, Nicolas Schapira, and others illuminate the theme of textual and literary forms. In this way, the volume draws on the approach developed since the 1990s by the Groupe de recherches interdisciplinaires sur l'histoire du littéraire



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(GRIHL) at the EHESS. Applying this approach to Du Perron, the people with whom he worked, and his heirs makes it possible to see how they manipulated the differences and transitions between drafts, speeches, manuscripts, circumstantial prints, and monumentalized oeuvres for political and social gain. The volume does not, however, yield much insight into how these micropolitics of orality, writing, and publication did or did not stand out in the context of the period. Did Du Perron innovate in this regard or was he just particularly skilled at doing what any self-respecting member of the Republic of Letters would have done similarly in those decades?

More broadly, just how unique was Du Perron's ability to act as a »passeur«, that is to say, as a cultural broker and somebody who could move easily among the many different social roles available to a man of his talent? For all his exceptionality, might he not also represent a rather typical case of Renaissance »self-fashioning« (280), as Greengrass's conclusion seems to suggest? These lingering questions should not obscure the fact that Martyshcheva and Greengrass have succeeded at editing an unusually coherent conference volume. It offers a very rewarding and polyphonic study of a long-neglected protagonist of France's *première modernité*.



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