

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



**Ford, Philip. The Judgment of Palaemon: The Contest between
Neo-Latin and Vernacular Poetry in Renaissance France**

Myron McShane

Volume 37, numéro 2, printemps 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1090727ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v37i2.21823>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

McShane, M. (2014). Compte rendu de [Ford, Philip. The Judgment of Palaemon: The Contest between Neo-Latin and Vernacular Poetry in Renaissance France]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 37(2), 166–168.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v37i2.21823>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2014

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

Ford, Philip.

The Judgment of Palaemon: The Contest between Neo-Latin and Vernacular Poetry in Renaissance France.

Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts 9. Leiden: Brill, 2013. Pp. xv, 270 + 4 ill, 11 tables. ISBN 978-90-04-24539-6 (hardcover) \$140.

Delight and regret greet the arrival of *The Judgment of Palaemon*. Philip Ford's latest volume happily possesses the same virtues displayed in his previous works on Ronsard, Buchanan, Hardy, and Homer's sixteenth-century French reception. Sadly, however, we will be deprived of future volumes due to the author's premature death. One consolation would be if his literary executors were to arrange to make available any remaining work he had intended to publish.

The book's title refers to the suspended judgment found at the conclusion of Virgil's third *Eclogue*, when the literary arbiter, Palaemon, declines to favour the poetic talents of one shepherd over another. The author employs this image to argue for "the almost symbiotic relationship that existed between humanist Latin and French poetry in Renaissance France." In tackling the interaction between the two languages, Ford develops a rich vein similarly mined in English as far back as the collection of essays edited a generation earlier by Castor and Cave (1984). In so doing, he is able to unite two disciplines which are too often artificially separated. The introduction vigorously challenges preconceived notions of the supposedly artificial status of literary Latin in sixteenth-century France. Instructive tables and a lengthy appendix demonstrate its widespread

use. This informative data can now be supplemented by the bibliographical inventories of works in Latin and the vernacular published in sixteenth-century France by Pettegree et al. (2007 and 2012).

In the six chapters that follow, on Du Bellay, Neo-Catullan style, Epigram, Epitaph, the Latin Ronsard and the Morel Salon, the judicious selection of both the familiar (*La Deffense*) and the lesser-known (Jacques Grenier's translation of Ronsard's "Hymne de Calais, et de Zetes") makes this a work that will appeal to readers ranging from advanced undergraduates to more seasoned scholars. Given that certain discussions reference poetry still in manuscript, the choice to include lengthy French and Latin extracts alongside accompanying translations is especially welcome.

Ford is as comfortable sketching the broad outlines of a topic as he is tracing more specialized matters. He makes particularly good use of Peter Burke's concept of language communities in assessing the international scope of Neo-Latin. On the more technical side, his sensitivity to prosody leads to a detailed analysis of a letter by Jean Salmon Macrin which reveals how carefully the poet read Théodore de Bèze's *Poemata*. Uncharacteristically—for an author who had the prowess to note a modern Greek work in his bibliography on Ronsard's *Hymnes*—references to secondary literature are not as full as they could be. For example, chapter 5 furnishes a stimulating discussion of Ronsard, Du Bellay, and Baiif's French translations of an ode by Jean Dorat in the *tombeau* for Marguerite de Navarre. The analysis would be enhanced by directing readers to the broader context fleshed out in a lengthy article on the *tombeau* by Brenda Hosington (1996). More importantly, Ford's frequent discussions of aspects of literary translation would have profited from employing the still unsurpassed overview on the subject found in Glyn Norton's *The Ideology and Language of Translation in Renaissance France* (1984).

Overall, as the Virgilian title suggests, the author presents a decidedly serene portrait of the co-existence of French and Neo-Latin. Future research might consider the more polemical side of this linguistic contest as evinced by Dorat's "Decanatus," a bitter satire, *inter alia*, on Peter Ramus's preference for instructing in French, or Ronsard's reservations on Latin in the preface to the *Franciade*. There is also the question of whether the nature of Renaissance French literature can be adequately encompassed through a study of linguistic duality. As Ford knew better than virtually anyone, the singular importance of Greek to figures as disparate as Budé, Estienne, and Dorat suggests that a

trilingual framework may yield even more fruitful results than a bilingual one. After all, could one imagine Virgil's *Eclogues* without the underlying presence of Theocritus's *Idylls*?

That said, the present volume is a fitting capstone to the author's distinguished career. Unlike his pioneering mentor, Ian McFarlane, to whom this book is dedicated, Ford was fortunate enough to fully enjoy the marked renewal of Neo-Latin studies throughout Europe: a revival, it should be stressed, that occurred in no small part due to his own prodigious philological labours. Through his incomparable *Mythologicum* (2000)—an expert transcription, translation, and annotation of Dorat's lectures on the *Odyssey*—he provided a permanent gift to *seiziémistes* everywhere. His enduring legacy as a teacher and colleague has been shown by the heartfelt testimonials recently written by, among others, De Smet, Hardie, Kenny, Moriarty, and O'Brien. But a lesser-known aspect of Ford's legacy also merits attention. He played an influential role in institutionalizing the study of Neo-Latin in the English-speaking world through its inclusion in the Cambridge Tripos. An enterprising academic administrator might be inspired to do likewise in North America. The opportunity is waiting to be seized.

MYRON MCSHANE

New York University