moving from treatises and letters to paintings and single-sheet ephemera. Happily, she extends her coverage through the Counter-Reformation developments as well as the influence of the confessional conflicts in the Thirty Years War. Overall it is a wide sweep, but the inclusion of seventeenth-century material is vital to understanding Mary's role in the Catholic "renewal." Heal's orienting introduction presents the current state of early modern Marian studies, followed by an excellent discussion of the alterations in Marian teaching following the Reformation, including connections between Marian devotion and anti-Semitism. The book's central chapters deal with Marian piety in Lutheran Germany—and here Heal handles the nuances deftly—and Mary's status amid what she calls "confessional frictions." In discussing Mary and the Counter-Reformation, Heal reveals a fine eye for the telling detail that illustrates the complexities of popular devotion in a society no longer homogenous, a theme she devotes more time to in the subsequent chapter on Catholic pluralism. Her final chapter deals with the issue of gender, and Heal again exposes the intricacies of her subject by refusing facile conclusions. Overall, this is a stimulating, highly readable, excellently documented work and is likely to remain the standard for some time.

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Sara Beam

Laughing Matters: Farce and the Making of Absolutism in France

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Sara Beam's book attests to the enduring place of absolutism in the historiography of early modern France, demonstrating that this much-debated concept can still invite fresh perspectives and shape new avenues of research. *Laughing Matters* traces the demise of farce in France during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but does so primarily to shed new light on the role that urban elites played in the formation of the absolutist polity. Renaissance farce was political, and so too was the urban elites' tolerant regulation of it. Beam thus argues that the story of how these elites marginalized the insolent political commentary and raucous performance of farce reflects their adoption of a more resolutely royalist identity and political orientation. Beam's argument also challenges Norbert Elias's contention that the civilizing process was initiated by the French monarchy's domestication of the nobility. Urban elites did not stop laughing at the crude jokes of farceurs in

order to ape the civility of Louis XIV's compliant courtiers, for their abandonment of farce was complete before his reign began. Rather than ripple out from the royal court, as Elias would have us believe, key elements of the civilizing process originated among the elites of Paris and leading provincial cities.

Farce flourished amidst the growing population and prosperity of Renaissance cities, as performers profited from increased municipal patronage, a revival of festive traditions, and a proliferation of publication houses. Significantly, these farceurs were free to combine humor with political satire, using their bawdy jokes to mock local magistrates, clergymen, and royal officials. Although wary of farce's potential disruptiveness, elites tolerated and even commissioned farcical theatre because it did not seriously challenge social hierarchies and sources of authority. The farceurs were amateurs who belonged to respectable families of the *couche moyenne*, as well as young men whose rowdy antics were widely accepted in youth rituals such as the charivari. Further, the jokes of these amateur performers were grounded in traditional Christian values and rarely undermined the corporative honour of city magistrates. Politics also help to explain why farce was tolerated in Renaissance cities. Municipal councilors recognized the political value of theatre and occasionally employed farce to serve their political interests. Competing sources of authority within the cities could also weaken efforts to regulate theatre. In Clermont, for instance, the city council and cathedral canons repeatedly clashed over anticlerical performances during the 1490s.

Urban elites presided over the decline of amateur farce, a gradual process initiated during the 1520s and suddenly hastened to completion during the Wars of Religion. Court magistrates endorsed the law clerks' performance of farce until the arrival of Lutheranism in the early 1520s. Fearful of religious strife and violence, the magistrates became more active in regulating the public behaviour of the clerks and in supervising the content of their performances. Meanwhile, municipal councils strove to curtail the performances of college and university students. The students, for their part, were less pliable than the law clerks. As late as 1557, for example, students at the Collège de Guyenne staged a biting satire on Bordeaux city councilors as a riposte to the council's recent edicts against the performance of farce. During the Wars of Religion, however, urban elites shifted from intermittent curtailment to vigorous suppression. This aggressive assault on farce was successful largely because it coincided with a broader transformation of Catholic practice, as bawdy festive traditions gave way to the more austere religious culture of the Counter-Reformation. In Paris, the clerks ceased to perform farce after 1568, and ceded the last remnants of their performance rights during the 1580s. While amateur actors such as the Paris

law clerks disappeared from French stages, they were replaced by professionals, who first gained a footing at the royal court and the Hôtel de Bourgogne in Paris.

After 1600 professional actors and urban elites removed farce from public theatres, while the Jesuits' hold over the kingdom's colleges and universities stripped student theatre of its farcical traditions. Public stages were increasingly dominated by professional actors, socially marginal men whose dependence on royal sanction precluded political criticism. Gros Guillaume and other professional actors continued to perform farce during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, but their jokes no longer carried political overtones. During the 1620s these actors dropped farce entirely in response to the elites' growing demand for the *civilité* of neo-classical performances. This rising demand for civility and refined learning reflects the urban elites' changing social composition, as royal officials eager to cement their place within the monarchy's clientage structure gradually replaced the more independent merchant oligarchs of the Renaissance. Similarly, the transformation of student theatre reflects the growing influence of the Jesuits in French educational institutions. The Jesuits' emphasis on discipline and civility necessitated an eschewal of farce, and a turn toward Christian themes and neo-classical forms.

Sara Beam has made a fine contribution to the scholarly literature on theatre, urban politics, and absolutism in early modern France. My praise for her book is tempered only by one substantial criticism: Beam's discussion of honour as a parameter for the political satire of Renaissance farce is disappointingly underdeveloped. Her evidence here—one long anecdote and two events mentioned in passing—is much too thin given the topic's importance. Further, she retreats from making the sort of careful and extensive analysis of events that might explain why some Renaissance performances elicited outrage and action from ostensibly dishonoured elites, while others apparently did not. Yet, this shortcoming neither undermines the book's main arguments nor compromises its abundant strengths. Specialists should appreciate Beam's skill in weaving together the complex histories of theatre, urban politics, and absolutism, as well as her extensive archival research in Paris, Dijon, Bordeaux, and Toulouse. *Laughing Matters* should also prove accessible to non-specialists. Beam's introduction clearly identifies the book's purpose and main argument, while her narrative is full of colourful anecdotes and largely free of opaque jargon. Although students may find this book slightly expensive, both its content and length are appropriate for senior and graduate-level seminars.

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